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## A Tribute to Shakespeare

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KAREL STĚPANÍK  
A TRIBUTE TO SHAKESPEARE

The Shakespearean studies listed below\* may be regarded as a tribute paid by contemporary English literary history and criticism to the world-wide celebration of the quatercentenary of Shakespeare's birthday. Taken together, these essays — the individual authors of which are each an authority on the subject he has chosen to discuss — constitute a fairly comprehensive and representative work of recent scholarship based on the results of Shakespearean research in the past and informed by current critical opinion. The authors' erudition, however, is implicit rather than explicit in the text of their respective essays which are not intended to provide an exhaustive compendium for Shakespearean students and lecturers but a more or less popular commentary meant to deepen the general public's understanding and to heighten its enjoyment of Shakespeare's art. In spite of this popular aim, the authors by no means resign their critical right and duty to challenge views or interpretations they do not share or to offer and affirm their own solution of the problems of meaning, artistic expression, dramatic effectiveness etc. a modern reader or spectator of Shakespeare's plays and poems is likely to meet with. Thus their brief monographs serve both the scholarly and the critical purpose. The writers do not rest content with the transmission of Shakespearean lore, but add to it from their own resources. It is with these personal contributions that the present review is mainly concerned.

A general introduction to the eight essays dealing with Shakespeare's plays (examining four to five plays of the Shakespearean canon each) is provided by Professor C. S. Sisson's *Shakespeare*. The author is one of the leading authorities on Shakespeare and the Elizabethan theatre and has published many studies of which only a few can be mentioned here: *Le gout publique et le théâtre élisabéthain* (1921), *The Mythical Sorrows of Shakespeare* (1934), *New Readings in Shakespeare* (1955). His one-volume critical edition of Shakespeare (1954) is also to be warmly commended. The present essay, first published in 1955, is a concise but remarkably comprehensive survey of Shakespearean scholarship and criticism since the seventeenth century which, besides, pays due regard to the history of Shakespeare's reputation as poet and "provider of dramatic entertainment" from the 1590's to the 1950's.

The essay is accompanied by a *Select Shakespeare Bibliography* (pp. 36–52) compiled by J. R. Brown which serves as a valuable guide through the literature of the subject. It lists all important editions of Shakespeare's works (from the first Quartos to the latest critical editions), documentary and interpretative biographies, general works on Elizabethan life and thought, special works on the Elizabethan theatre, principal studies dealing with so-called technical criticism (sources, text, etc.), and a great number of critical and interpretative studies from Dryden to the present day. Most of the items are obviously by English or American authors. Among others only a few are mentioned in the text or included in the bibliography (for instance Goethe, A. W. Schlegel, Voltaire, Stendhal, Hugo, Tolstoy, G. Brandes, Jusserand, L. L. Schücking, W. Clemen etc.).

Professor Sisson deals with his subject-matter in four chronological chapters of which the last and longest discussing the development and character of Shakespearean study in the twentieth century is obviously the most interesting. As regards his account of Shakespeare's reputation from the appearance of his first plays and poems until the Restoration (Chapter I) or of the origins and development of Shakespearean scholarship and criticism as well as the growth of his European fame in the eighteenth century (Chapter II) and in the Romantic age and the Victorian era (Chapter III), the present reviewer will probably be excused if he limits himself to a few remarks on those points that, in his opinion, it is worth keeping in mind even in contemporary assessment of Shakespeare. Otherwise, in this "historical" half

of the essay, the author covers well-trodden ground and may only be congratulated on the lucidity and skill with which he has managed to condense so much material into some twelve pages without omitting anything essential.

Professor Sisson's account of the critical opinion about Shakespeare in the seventeenth century finally disposes of the false notion that Shakespeare "was unaware of his literary quality... a notion that for centuries profoundly affected critical interpretation of his writings, and that even today encourages the search for depths of meaning and purpose of which the critic wittingly presumes their writer to have been unconscious" (p. 13). He emphasises, on the other hand, that Shakespeare's reputation "as a poet with literary pretensions both in drama and in non-dramatic poetry" (p. 10) dates from his own life-time and was explicitly recognised not only by Ben Jonson in 1623 but even by John Dryden before the end of the seventeenth century. Dryden moreover, though strongly influenced by French classicist taste and theory which was intrinsically opposed to Shakespeare's "irregular" genius, was able to discern the inherent realism of Shakespeare's art when he declared that his genius lay above all in his truth to nature and his faithful depictions of human passions (p. 15).

In his summary of eighteenth-century contributions to Shakespearean studies Professor Sisson lays particular stress on the invaluable merits of the critical editions of Shakespeare's plays by Pope, Theobald and Johnson who "tidied up Shakespeare's text for modern reading" (p. 16) and prepared the ground for the Romantic transvaluation of literary theory and aesthetic criticism. The author also draws attention to two other fields of later Shakespearean study opened up by eighteenth-century investigators: the scholarly study of Elizabethan drama and stage founded by Edmund Malone and the psychological and interpretative analysis of Shakespeare's dramatic characters and of his poetic imagery, due to the examples of Maurice Morgann and Walter Whiter respectively. Morgann's essay on the character of Falstaff (1777) "opened a long chapter of interpretation, and set the pace for Hazlitt, Coleridge, or Goethe, down to its apotheosis in A. Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904)" and Whiter's *A Specimen of a Commentary* (1794) "anticipated the modern technique of analysis of Shakespeare's imagery and symbolism, even to the 'image cluster'" (p. 17).

Of the Romantic cult of Shakespeare which in its extreme form saw in Shakespeare the embodiment of the genius of poetry itself, Professor Sisson is justly sceptical. But even on his own evidence the accusation of "uncritical enthusiasm" with which he charges Hazlitt (p. 18) could be brought against Coleridge with much greater justification. Indeed, in spite of his enthusiasm for Shakespeare, Hazlitt was the most critical interpreter of his plays of all Romantic writers including Coleridge, Lamb, De Quincey etc. The later nineteenth century is in the author's opinion "perhaps lacking in Shakespeare critics of outstanding quality" (p. 18). Though Shakespeare was still thought of as highly in the Victorian period as he had been in the Romantic age, the spirit of scientific and historical inquiry characteristic of the time made the students of his work try to justify their admiration by scholarly evidence. They "made it their business to return to the pursuit of scholarship and the accumulation of facts. Shakespeare had become a religion and a science, and Shakespeareology a kind of variant of Shakespeareolatry" (p. 19). Among the principal results that have crowned the efforts of Victorian Shakespeareologists the author mentions the Cambridge edition of Shakespeare's works (1863-1866) "which has remained the standard text in general use until today" (ib.), and the first scientific biography of Shakespeare by Sidney Lee (1898) besides some other works [Dowden's *Shakspeare* (1875) and Brandes's *William Shakespeare* (1898)] "which are still a part of orthodox doctrine today" (ib.), though the present century has produced several more reliable and fuller biographies based on newly discovered materials.

The second half of Professor Sisson's essay (pp. 20-34) is devoted to "an account of the present state of thought about Shakespeare" (p. 20) and is divided into three sections: The Approach to Shakespeare; Scholarship, Biography, and Text; Criticism. The authors open this chapter with an assessment of the place of Shakespeare on the living stage, since he believes that "there is a real danger that the enormous flood of bookish writing upon Shakespeare in our time may overwhelm the thought of his continuous function as a provider of dramatic entertainment". But few people, I am afraid, would share this belief in view of the immense popularity of Shakespeare's plays (which, incidentally, is one of the main incentives for that "flood of bookish writing" upon their writer), as well as in view of the comparatively small influence of most of such writing outside the limited circles of academic and literary critics. The author cannot deal with the whole history of Shakespeare production and its problems during the twentieth century. Yet he manages to give their full due at least

to such great actors, producers, playwrights and dramatic critics as Sir Henry Irving, Harley Granville-Barker, William Poel and G. B. Shaw who had contributed to the "renewed triumph of Shakespeare's plays on the stage" at the beginning of the century in spite of the vogue of Ibsen and the problem-play (p. 20).

The author's main concern in this last chapter of his essay, however, is a summary and critical discussion of the achievements of Shakespearean scholarship and criticism in the last fifty years. From his account it is evident that the labours of the scholars have yielded far more satisfactory results than the studies of their colleagues in the field of literary criticism and aesthetic appreciation. This, of course, might have been expected since both the subject-matter and the critical or interpretative and evaluating method are more elusive, less exact and the conclusions can seldom win general acceptance. Literary historians, biographers, philologists and other modern Shakespeareologists, on the other hand, possessed also the advantage of the solid foundations of their special study laid by their 18th and 19th century predecessors. Due to greater facilities of research, to exact scientific methods of collection, observation, analysis and interpretation of factual evidence, and also to fruitful collaboration between individual experts and different branches of study involved in their specific research, contemporary Shakespearean scholars have achieved great advance especially in Shakespeare biography, bibliography, textual study and the study of Shakespeare's language, style and imagery.

As against the pioneering studies of Nicholas Rowe, Edmund Malone, Halliwell-Phillips and Sidney Lee, twentieth century biographers of Shakespeare (J. Quincy Adams, Sir Edmund Chambers, Sir Walter Raleigh, C. W. Wallace, Sir E. M. Thompson, J. L. Hotson, Peter Alexander, Allardyce Nicoll, J. Dover Wilson, Ivor Brown etc.) discovered some new material and elucidated some of the problems in Shakespeare's private and public life. They also encouraged the study of the material and ideological background and dramatic and literary setting in which Shakespeare's plays and poems had been created. Sir E. K. Chambers's great work *Elizabethan Stage* (4 vols., 1923) and the two volumes of *Shakespeare's England* (1916) planned by Sir Walter Raleigh, are still indispensable for any student of Shakespeare's life and work. These and other scholars (particularly J. M. Robertson and R. C. Churchill) have also refuted the absurd claims of the Baconians and other anti-Stratfordians who profess to believe that Shakespeare is not the real author of the plays attributed to him.

Scholarship "in all that concerns the canon, the text, and the publication of Shakespeare's plays took a leap forward with the development of bibliographical studies in the hands of A. W. Pollard, W. W. Greg and R. B. McKerrow" (p. 27) who found many enthusiastic collaborators and followers (e. g. F. P. Wilson and Alice Walker), particularly in critical editorial work. Among modern critical editions of Shakespeare the most valuable are the "New Cambridge" edition (started by J. Dover Wilson and Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch) and the "New Arden" edition which is still under way. But, as Prof. Sisson observes, "we are still far from an accepted Authorized Edition of Shakespeare to succeed the out-dated Cambridge Shakespeare of 1863" (p. 28).

Nearly all the above-mentioned scholars — and many more not included in the text of the essay under review — have also attempted to draw from their investigations certain justifiable inferences concerning the nature and quality of Shakespeare's art. Their intrinsically "historical and realistic" approach to the specific subject of research is, besides, reflected in the numerous studies of Shakespeare's poetic language, style, versification, imagery, dramatic composition and the creative process. In this respect the works of E. E. Stoll, L. L. Schücking, Hardin Craig, E. M. W. Tillyard, Miss M. C. Bradbrook, G. Bullough, G. Rylands, Caroline Spurgeon, W. Clemen, etc. stand in the borderland of literary scholarship and criticism, so that their aesthetic judgements may be confronted with the objective data on which they are based.

Objective functional and historical approach to Shakespeare's writing, however, is by no means the only, or even prevailing attitude in twentieth-century criticism in the West, whether traditional or modernist. Very many recent English and American interpreters of Shakespeare's plays approach them through "imaginative intuition", as the Romantics and their Victorian followers had done. [In his survey of the main trends of modern interpretation Professor Sisson can appeal to C. H. Herford's observation (1906) as valid for the present situation: "The interpretation of Shakespeare has been proverbially a touchstone for men and methods . . . Shakespeare is full of pitfalls for the poet who has nothing but his imaginative intuition, for the 'realist' who has nothing but his practical sagacity, and for the philosophic interpreter who uses only his sympathetic and constructive intellect" (quoted p. 23)].

The imaginative and intuitive critic "trusts to individual perception and interpretation of the processes of artistic creation and of underlying significances" (p. 28), with the result that his judgements are purely subjective impressions or abstract constructions. This subjective interpretation and appreciation of art in general, and of Shakespeare's works in particular, was strongly encouraged, in the author's opinion, "by Bergson's intuitive philosophy and Croce's aesthetic of the poetic life as distinct from the intellectual life and environment" (p. 23). It reached its fullest development in the nineteen-thirties — almost simultaneously with, and as a counterblast to, the spread of its most powerful opponent in the "leftist" poets and Marxist critics whom Professor Sisson entirely neglects in his essay and bibliography — and its immediate roots are seen by the author *inter alia* in Abercrombie's *Plea for the Liberty of Interpreting* (1930) and in the development of a scholarly study of Shakespeare's writing itself [particularly in G. Rylands's *Words and Poetry* (1928) and Caroline Spurgeon's *Shakespeare's Imagery* (1935)]. In 1930 there also appeared the first of G. W. Knight's series of books, *The Wheel of Fire*, with an Introduction by T. S. Eliot. This study of Shakespeare "illustrates the full personal development of the liberty of interpreting resting upon a Crocean (and Eliotian — K. Š.) conception of criticism, and exploits that close analysis of writing which began with I. A. Richards, F. R. Leavis and W. Empson" (p. 31).

Close and highly ingenious studies of Shakespeare's imagery and symbolism written by G. W. Knight, W. Empson, Cleanth Brooks, W. Clemen, L. C. Knights, Roy Walker, R. B. Heilman and other modern critics not mentioned by the author (many of whom belong to the representatives of so-called "New Criticism"), may justly be thought to have "led criticism to transcend all functional and historical considerations". Their claim that through their subjective approach and with the aid of their interpretative technique "the modern reader can reach valid interpretations which are deeper and truer than Shakespeare's planning or thinking of his own work of art" (p. 32) has been refuted by the evidence of their own widely divergent and irrational conclusions. As Shakespearean scholar and critic of the "realist" school, Professor Sisson sees clearly the fundamental errors of the critical principles and methods of both the "new critics" and the various followers of the old-established "psychological" approach to Shakespeare's characters and themes, though his mistrust of Freudian analysis of Shakespeare's plays is even deeper than his criticism of Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy*.

As regards his final opinion, it is summed up in the conclusion which deserves quoting nearly *in extenso*: "We are thus left, at the turn of the half-century, with critical principles and methods that have been widely practised by many gifted readers of Shakespeare, with varying results... The lover of music is accustomed to his personal response to significances arising out of his own experience and emotions, independent even of any authoritative account of the composer's intentions or ideas... The danger of such appreciation lies in the illusion that the significance, valid for one hearer, must have been of the composer's making, conscious or unconscious, and should also be valid for all hearers... The risk is obviously the greater when the work of art... is in the medium of words, language, expressed thought, character, and action. It is easy to slip over the dividing line between meanings for the individual and universal and original meaning, where meanings are deeply felt and experienced. This process has been apparent in imaginative biography in which the plays furnish forth the soul of the poet, and his soul, thus deduced, interprets the plays, in a circular traffic... Above all, the validity of interpretations which confessedly transcend the conscious meanings attributable to the poet, his age, and his medium, must abide judgement of time and submit to the condition guardedly laid down by Eliot in respect of liberty of interpreting. They can be a part of the work of art, he writes, only 'so far as there is some consensus of interpretation among persons apparently qualified to interpret'. ... It is, finally, an essential consideration in competent opinion that Shakespeare's art was designed for the living theatre. This was formerly ground that had to be won, and it may need to be vindicated afresh today. The printed book and midnight oil must not again usurp upon the play and the footlights, in our approach to the greatest of all writers for the stage" (p. 34).

Of the authors of the essays on Shakespeare's individual plays (with which we shall now concern ourselves), it might be said with F. P. Wilson that while they "strive to make themselves Shakespeare's contemporaries", they think it "even more important to make Shakespeare our contemporary, to keep him level with life and with our lives" (quoted by C. J.

Sisson, *op. cit.*, p. 28). On the whole, they all consider the plays historically and critically, paying due attention both to their value as dramatic poetry and their function as stage-plays.

For the sake of clarity it will be preferable to review their studies in the order indicated in the *Bibliography* which follows approximately the chronology of Shakespeare's composition of the plays within the conventional divisions into historical plays, comedies, tragicomedies, tragedies and romances. The essays under review examine, altogether, 36 plays (including *The Two Noble Kinsmen* which is generally not considered as belonging to the received canon); two of the best-known dramas, *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Merchant of Venice*, have been left out. No reasons are given for this curious omission. Generically, the former belongs to the tragedies, the latter to the tragicomedies, and they should have been discussed, in our opinion, by Professor Kenneth Muir and Professor Peter Ure respectively.

The historical plays are examined by two authors, Clifford Leech and L. C. Knights. Professor Leech, head of the Department of English at Durham University, in his essay entitled *Shakespeare: The Chronicles* discusses the three parts of *Henry VI*, the two parts of *Henry IV*, *Henry VIII*, and the comedy *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Professor Knights, of Bristol University, considers in his essay, *Shakespeare: The Histories*, the remaining historical plays, *Richard III*, *King John*, *Richard II*, and *Henry V*. In their subject-matter, Shakespeare's "histories" tell an almost continuous story of England's past from the close of the fourteenth to the middle of the sixteenth centuries; only in *King John* did Shakespeare go as far back as the beginning of the thirteenth century. In date of composition, the histories were all written in the last decade of the sixteenth century, from about 1592 to 1599, since we may presume (on the authority of E. K. Chambers and others) that even the last play of the cycle, *Henry VIII*, is a late revision of Shakespeare's early "chronicle" on the subject, undertaken in 1613 with or without the alleged collaboration of John Fletcher.

Concerning Shakespeare's dramatisation of the historical material, the authors of the two present essays, in complete agreement with modern Shakespearean scholarship, acknowledge the importance of the dramatist's historical sources — the popular Elizabethan chronicles (Hall, Holinshed etc.) and certain pre-Shakespearean historical plays. But on the other hand, they emphasize, quite rightly, Shakespeare's critical and independent treatment of these sources, increasingly evident in all "histories", including *Henry VI*, Shakespeare's first attempt at drama. The author's personal contribution is naturally most obvious in the dramatic structure and poetic expression of the plays; but it is equally clear in their ideological content, in the psychological deepening of the historical protagonists, in the invention of new events and characters, and in frequent imaginative confrontation of the past with the present (or even the ideal future). All these, and many other artistic elements, found as they are in Shakespeare's first creative period, confirm the impression gained from our knowledge of his entire dramatic output, namely that his lasting and universal reputation is essentially due to the humanist realism of his view of man and society.

Shakespeare's historical plays have been extensively studied and, especially in the present century, subjected to keen scrutiny by many critics, among others by a Czech Shakespeareologist, Zdeněk Štříbrný, of Prague University, whose work is the only Marxist study listed in the Select Bibliographies accompanying the Shakespeare essays in the *Writers and Their Work* series. Both Professor Leech and Professor Knights are, therefore, enabled to draw on the results of previous inquiries and to confront their own views and conclusions with those of other Shakespearean critics. Of the numerous authors listed in their bibliography the following are explicitly referred to in the texts of the two essays under review: P. Alexander, Andrew Cairncross, E. M. W. Tillyard, J. Dover Wilson, H. Jenkins, J. Spedding (in Clifford Leech's essay); Tillyard, Wilson, L. B. Wright, Lily Campbell, A. P. Rossiter, John Griffiths, J. W. Allen, Winthrop S. Hudson, R. G. Moulton, Christopher Morris, R. W. Chambers, D. A. Traversi, Grace Stuart, George Steiner, J. F. Danby, B. Stirling, P. Ure, C. Goddard, T. Spencer (in L. C. Knights's essay).

Professor Clifford Leech's essay, *Shakespeare: The Chronicles*, is concerned (to quote the author, pp. 11—12) "with Shakespeare's 'open-textured' historical writing, the kind of drama in which there is not a persistent consciousness of an ineluctable march of events... which incorporates some incidents almost haphazardly", and "can make use of fictitious characters along with historical ones, and these creatures of the imagination can take on a life of their own, can be felt as having an existence outside the historical frame. Shakespeare... could even transport his Sir John Falstaff from the reign of Henry IV to his own times and put

him in a play set in Elizabethan Windsor. The fact that the present essay will include a brief comment on *The Merry Wives of Windsor* will underline the 'open-textured' character of the historical writing" in the group of plays considered by the author. The division between "chronicles" and "histories" is nevertheless arbitrary, as the author explicitly admits (p. 11), and it is, finally, almost entirely formal, because the existing distinction between the historical plays examined by him and those considered by Professor Knights is, by his own definition, mainly concerned with the construction of the plays in question. And the inclusion of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is fully justified by no considerations, either generic or constructional.

If one cannot but harbour certain doubts concerning the advisability of dividing Shakespeare's historical plays into "chronicles" and "histories", or of including a comment on *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in an essay on Shakespeare's "chronicles", one is quite prepared to believe that the responsibility for this rests with the general editorial plan of the Shakespeare series, as it certainly does in the case of the unpardonable omission of *The Merchant of Venice* and *Romeo and Juliet*, mentioned before. Apart from this, however, Professor Leech's introductory chapter to his essay, dealing with *History for the Elizabethans*, leaves nothing to desire for any objective critic. One general item of methodical interest deserves particular attention, as it is amply illustrated and corroborated by the author's detailed analyses of the three "chronicles", *Henry VI*, *Henry IV*, and *Henry VIII*.

It discusses Shakespeare's attitude to the sources of his plays and to Elizabethan ruling class ideology. The obvious dependence of the "chronicles" on sixteenth-century historiographers and political thinkers is, in the author's opinion, the reason why "the assumption is often made that these plays are merely a dramatic exposition of the chroniclers' ideas, that, however much the didacticism may be enlivened by the judicious employment of stirring incident and characterisation and comic admixture, the writer's dominating purpose is to urge a political lesson on the dangers of civil dissension and the glories of national well-being" (p. 8). "But such an assumption is hardly compatible with a recognition of Shakespeare's status as a poet. Whatever a major poet's intellectual starting-point may be . . . he will be characterised ultimately by his power to enter into an experience that he has directly known or deeply imagined, and by his ability to relate that experience to the sum total of the human story . . . What, in fact, impresses us most in Shakespeare's history plays, and what makes them much more than merely approximately accurate records of past events, is the presentation within them of struggling and suffering humanity" (p. 9). This needs no comment, unless we should like to point out that Professor Knights, writing on Shakespeare's "histories", fully shares his colleague's opinion on the subject of the necessary mutual relation between the poet's acquired knowledge and his direct experience of life.

Professor Leech's account of the "chronicles" is characterised by lucid exposition and interpretation of the salient points involved in the numerous problems of these plays. *Henry VI* — which must still be regarded as not wholly Shakespeare's — comes nearest to his conception of a chronicle play. It lacks not only unities of time and place, but also the essential dramatic unity of action, particularly in its first part. But parts II and III manage to tell a continuous story and illustrate quite clearly the central theme in which the dramatist "has wanted to bring home to his audience the sense of a civil war ranging destructively over the country" (p. 16). The author draws our attention especially to Shakespeare's presentation of the rôle played by the common people in "the nobles' quarrel about the royal title" (p. 17), partly in the grotesque quarrel and combat between the armourer Horner and his man Peter, and more fully in the scenes showing Jack Cade's rebellion. The latter episode reflects not only the dramatist's belief in the necessity of order and the heinousness of rebellion (which he shared with most of his contemporaries), but also his awareness of the real causes of the misery among the masses of English population and his sympathy with their suffering. Moreover, in his picture of Jack Cade's futile revolt, he clearly pointed out the dangers of ignorant delusions concerning the end and means of social revolutions, which makes the ambitious leader of the rebellion the dupe and, finally, the victim of the cunning York. To quote the author: "The small revolt of ignorant men is a prelude and a mirror for the larger and much crueller contest between their superiors in the realm. With this in mind, we shall not see Shakespeare here as primarily concerned with the mob's folly and barbarity: rather, he recognises the nature of an armed mob, but sees in it an image of what civilised men can be when their weapons too are out" (p. 18). The civil War of the Roses, which soon after breaks out, brings chaos into the lives of all people, and King Henry's envy for the peaceful and happy life of "a homely swain" (in the well-known passage, *Henry VI, Part 2*, v. 21—40) "has no basis in fact" (p. 20).

The two parts of *Henry IV* give a more homogeneous impression than the three parts of *Henry VI*. But we must grant to Professor Leech that they still differ sufficiently, in their construction, from the "histories" to be ranked as "chronicle". Regarding the current controversy concerning the composition of the two parts of the play, the author is inclined to accept as most probable the theory that Shakespeare "developed the notion of a Second Part while he was writing Part I" (p. 23). But the fact which any critic must consider is the great difference between the two parts, and the author is at pains to bring this difference into relief and explain it in a detailed analysis of the play's motives, characters, both historical and fictitious, and the means by which the dramatist tried to convey to his audience his poetic vision of the subject. Among the principal characters of *Henry IV*, both the poet and his interpreter concentrate their attention on Prince Hal, the historical hero of the play, and Sir John Falstaff — Shakespeare's "most famous comic character" (p. 24). And it is certainly due to Falstaff and his comic as well as critical function in the play that *Henry IV* takes a high rank in the work of Shakespeare's middle years. As there is nothing in Professor Leech's masterly exposition and appreciation of the play to which the reviewer could add anything in the way of commentary, the reader might prefer to hear the author's own concluding words on the play: "The First Part (of *Henry IV*) is Shakespeare's most successful blend of chronicle and comedy, and at the same time is rich in its suggestion of complexity in human relationships, both the relationship of man to man and the relationship of ruler to subject. Part II has some of the characteristics of the later 'dark comedies', notably *Troilus and Cressida*. Though less directly satirical than that play, its questionings are more prominent and more searching than the corresponding elements in Part I. And, like so much of the major writing of the Elisabethans, it is preoccupied with Mutability, with the ruins of time" (p. 31).

*The Merry Wives of Windsor*, as we have seen, is commented upon in Professor Leech's essay only because Falstaff is its principal comic character. Though the author admits its immense popularity with the theatre-going public, his critical opinion of its value as work of art is rather low; he thinks that it is a "citizen-comedy of no high rank" (p. 33). This opinion, however, is not shared by most other contemporary critics. E. K. Chambers, for instance, to quote but one of them, regards it as an excellent example of a dramatised fabliau, a farce in the modern sense, characterised by a realistic portraiture of contemporary types, admirably constructed, and markedly better than either part of *Henry IV*, wherein Shakespeare probably reaches his low-water mark as a dramatic artist".

The last play examined by Professor Leech is *Henry VIII*. The author defines it as a "chronicle" because its construction brings it closer to *Henry VI* and *Henry IV* than to the other historical plays, its action is not sufficiently integrated and it approaches "the manner of an historical pageant rather than a sequence of events governed by a cause-effect relation" (p. 11). As regards Shakespeare's authorship of the play, there is still disagreement about it. In Shakespeare's time, and indeed until 1850, the play was regarded as wholly Shakespeare's. But since James Spedding put forward the view that Shakespeare here worked with Fletcher, many scholars have adopted this suggestion, though the opposite view has, in the author's opinion, "at least as strong support" at present (p. 33). The author himself is inclined to agree with Spedding, since Fletcher's hand in the play might explain some structural as well as compositional features, such as the presence of adroit juxtaposition of contradictory images and the "changing of viewpoint" which is a common phenomenon of Fletcher's writing, but not of Shakespeare's (see p. 34). Among other things, the author finds that the play "has no political lesson to offer", in which it differs remarkably from Shakespeare's previous history plays (p. 39). Granted he is right, might not this "dispassionate" observation of "the flux of time" be explained by Shakespeare's cautious avoidance of any harsher criticism of Henry VIII which might give offence to his daughter Elizabeth I, the more so if, as E. K. Chambers presumes, the original Shakespearean version of the play was written during her reign? Nor would Fletcher, in 1613, dare to attack more openly a king when the then reigning monarch, James I, was a strong defender of the "divine right" of kings. Similar considerations might have led Shakespeare to insert in his play Cranmer's Utopian prophecy about the coming glories — "glories which the first spectators had themselves lived through and whose imperfections were not to be wholly banished from their minds" (p. 38). Such opportunistic suspension of criticism is incompatible with Shakespeare's mature vision of life and strengthens the belief in Fletcher's alleged collaboration with the old dramatist even more strongly.



Professor L. C. Knights in his essay on Shakespeare's historical plays discusses *Richard III*, *King John*, *Richard II* and *Henry V* primarily as political plays. He argues that in order to understand, enjoy and to profit from them, the student needs not only an interest in men and affairs, a lively feeling for literature and a capacity for responding to each play as a work of art, but also some knowledge of the historical events and political ideas to which the dramatist obviously refers. His introductory chapter is therefore devoted to a discussion of the historical and political background of Shakespeare's histories. Most of the ground he covers coincides, naturally, with Professor Lecch's general introduction to the "chronicles" and he arrives at similar conclusions. Our remarks can therefore be limited to those generalisations which the author stresses himself. In the first place, Shakespeare's historical plays reflect the official Tudor ideas of history and political theory, but Shakespeare does not accept them uncritically. On the contrary, "in almost all his plays he combined in a remarkable way a sense of tradition — the ability to assimilate and learn from the past — and the freshness and independence of one who sees and thinks for himself; even when he seems to put most emphasis on traditional and received ideas he has a way of subjecting those ideas to the keenest scrutiny" (p. 8).

The second point the author emphasises as essential is the fact that Shakespeare's criticism of traditional and received ideas is primarily moral. He uses "historical material as a means of exploring fundamental principles of man's life in a political society" (p. 12), so that his plays are "moral histories" rather than "period pieces" giving a dramatic reconstruction of the past (see p. 11). The strictest principles of state and government, in Tudor times, concerned the necessity for authority, order and degree, serving the interest of absolutist monarchy and its main pillars, the aristocracy and the church. They implied obedience in the subject as the highest civil and religious virtue, and regarded rebellion against authority as the worst crime. But we should not forget, as the author reminds us, that "absolutist propaganda at no time did have an entirely free field, and beside the idea of royal supremacy there was the idea of moral responsibility of the ruler, and even the idea of the ruler as the representative of the commonwealth" (p. 13); so that Tudor thought on social and political matters was not entirely homogeneous, but there was "sufficient diversity, indeed contradiction, to incite thoughtful people (like Shakespeare) to thinking" (p. 14). Shakespeare was, like most of his educated contemporaries, well aware of the official doctrines, but he could support his criticism of this ideology (inspired by his knowledge of life among all classes of people, including the highest and the lowest) by the views of many humanistic thinkers and writers of the past and present. Though there are passages in his work testifying to his horror of anarchy and respect for order, order "dependent on absolute rule and unargued acceptance of the powers that be was not for Shakespeare a simple and unquestioned value. What he gained from the historical writing and the political assumptions of his time, though not from these alone, was a conviction that politics and morals cannot be separated without falsification and disaster. That conviction lasted him a lifetime" (p. 15). The author is convinced that the historical plays examined in his essay "show Shakespeare developing a view of history, of politics and public life, more searching than anything in his sources" (p. 16).

One more generalisation of the author's preliminary discourse deserves attention as illustrating his critical and methodological presuppositions. "To call Shakespeare's Histories 'political' plays (he writes) is simply one way of indicating that they deal with such matters as the nature of power — and the conflict of powers — within a constituted society, and with the relation of political exigencies to the personal life of those caught up in them... To say this... merely suggests the nature of the interest we bring to bear... But there is one preliminary generalization that may be made. Shakespeare's early plays show an increasingly subtle relation between observation and... inwardness. It is observation that strips off pretence, shows us how the world goes, points a useful moral. But at its furthest reach it can do no more than offer a truth that we acknowledge about other people — the Bastard's 'Commodity, the bias of the world'... Inwardness on the other hand is not only the probing of character and motive, it involves the observer: some revelation of what is usually concealed prompts not only dramatic sympathy but a sense that something potential in the spectator is being touched on" (pp. 16—17).

In his ensuing critical scrutiny of the "histories", the author reveals both their common appeal as Moral Histories (the term coined by Rossiter) of a more advanced type, and as works of art. He discusses them as direct reflections of contemporary social and political ideas and as expressions of Shakespeare's critique of those ideas from the humanistic, moral point of view. He considers their dramatic construction and technique as plays written for

the Elizabethan popular theatre, exploiting the public interest in the past and future of the new-born English nation and conforming to the theatrical conventions of the time. And, last not least, he assesses their achievement as dramatic poetry "pointing towards Shakespeare's later masterpieces" (p. 17).

*Richard III* is thus seen as "an elaborately formal dramatisation of power-seeking in a corrupt world" and "a contrivance of great ingenuity" (ib.), in which "the grossness of the age" is both presented and judged by clear moral standards, for Shakespeare had already at command many varied means of awakening the spectators' moral imagination, ranging from explicit critical commentary and religious reference to effective symbolic imagery and rhetoric or idiomatic language. Within the strict limitations of space at his disposal, the author finds room for pertinent quotations to illustrate and support his interpretation of all the salient issues, but he naturally gives greatest attention to Shakespeare's presentation of King Richard himself, whose energy in playing his part as "forthright wooer, plain blunt man, reluctant king, satirical commentator on the world's affairs and Machiavellian schemer — makes him into a commanding figure" (p. 23). Professor Knights, indeed, is one of those modern scholars who have "recognized in Richard III a complex and contradicting character, influenced both by inner tensions and by mighty outer pressures of Time" (Štříbrný, *Shakespeareovy historické hry*, Praha 1959, p. 264). Shakespeare's artistic success in giving the traditional conception of the villain-hero not only psychological verisimilitude but also aesthetic truthfulness is certainly a proof of his growing understanding of human nature and a forecast of the coming achievements in *Macbeth* and the other great tragedies. The author's commentary is most convincing when he interprets Shakespeare's psychological realism in character-delineation which makes the audience respond to nearly all the *dramatis personae* in the play as if they were real persons with whom the spectators can almost identify themselves (cf. pp. 23—25).

If *Richard III* is governed by what the author calls "inwardness" (which is very much like what Keats called Shakespeare's "negative capability"), *King John*, on the other hand, is governed mainly by "observation" (p. 27). And this is only another way of saying that as a work of art it is not entirely successful. In the presentation of the public world and of the struggle for political power, *King John* resembles *Richard III*. The same principles of Machiavellian statecraft, of power-seeking and of self-interest, in this play, rule the world of international power politics that ruled "the manoeuvring for power within one country in *Richard III*" (p. 27). They are again the main target of Shakespeare's moral critique, but the character and tragic fate of the king fails to command our interest, or even our sympathy, though John is made to express Shakespeare's own sincerely patriotic love of his country. Of the other characters in the play, the most life-like is that of the Bastard, "an outsider in the society in which he finds himself", who is made the mouthpiece of Shakespeare's critique of the "mad world" and "mad kings" in his speech on "commodity" or self-interest.

*Richard II* presents, in the author's opinion, "a political fable of permanent interest: for what it shows is how power . . . must necessarily fill a vacuum caused by the withdrawal of power" (p. 31). Shakespeare's attention is concentrated on the figure of King Richard and makes the political interest of the play inseparable from, and "indeed dependent on the psychological interest" (p. 32). The author sees the principal weakness of Richard II in his self-deceitfulness that renders him unable to understand his own nature and come to terms with reality, until it is too late, so that he pays for his lack of knowledge of the world and of self-knowledge with the loss of the throne and life. Richard, the ineffectual dreamer and egotist, is contrasted with the efficient "crown-grasper" Bolingbroke, and Shakespeare's sympathies are divided between the two; but history and Shakespeare's own common sense force us to admit the final justice of a capable man replacing a weak dreamer in the office of such responsibility as that of a king. Therefore the author, quoting Traversi's suggestion, concludes: "The world of the unsuccessful egotist has collapsed; the nature of the world constructed by the realist politician, Henry IV, will be shown in the plays that bear his name" (p. 39).

Shakespeare's studies in kingship — as the histories considered by Professor Knights might be defined — culminate in *Henry V*. After three concretely individualised portraits of the type of a bad king (in *King John*, *Richard II* and *Richard III*), the dramatist gives us, in this play, his portrait of the ideal ruler, "a national hero receiving full glorification from the national poet", to quote Štříbrný. But objective and careful examination of the play clearly reveals the fact that Shakespeare's attitude to Henry is by no means simple or uncritical. And so is his moral judgement of the wars of aggression against France which Henry started on the advice of his dying father, Henry IV, to divert the attention of his

subjects from internal to "foreign quarrels". The author points out that in some, at least, of Henry's speeches, and in many realistic "close-ups" in the course of the play's action, we observe an unmistakable note of qualifying or even deflationary irony implying adverse criticism of the "policy" of the warrior-king; and, in other scenes and passages referring more directly to the war and the part played in it by the soldiers, there is no doubt about Shakespeare's indictment of the brutality and destructiveness of war in general. In Burgundy's plea for peace, which, to quote the author, "in its ease and complexity reminds us that Shakespeare is now reaching the height of his powers . . . Shakespeare offers a positive ideal of civilization that is no mere abstraction but that brings with in the felt presence of the lived activities in which the ideal may be embodied" (p. 44).

Professor Knights's essay, in general, offers very little for a reviewer to disagree with. And no one would certainly object to the truth of his conclusion that "what gives Shakespeare's political plays their distinctive quality is the fact that they are part of the same continuous, and continually deepening, exploration of the nature of man that includes the great tragedies" (p. 47). To conclude this review of Shakespeare's histories as considered in the two essays by Professor Leech and Professor Knights, we may quote the last paragraph of Z. Stříbrný's work: "The welfare of the whole English nation is the highest consideration of Shakespeare in the historical plays. All contradictions of individual and national life are overcome in the poet's hopeful vision, 'if England to itself do rest but true'. This implies the discarding not only of the old baronial strife but also of the new Machiavellian tendencies aiming at 'commodity'. And, above all, it implies the final triumph of both the humanistic and popular ideals of justice and happiness for all" (op. cit. 269).

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Shakespeare's comedies, including those which are sometimes classified as tragicomedies and romances, are discussed in four essays of the series under review, written respectively by D. Traversi, G. K. Hunter, P. Ure and F. Kermode. One of them, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, is examined by C. Leech with the "chronicles", while another, *The Merchant of Venice*, is not included in the series. This review will first deal with the two essays on early and late comedies contributed by Professor Derek Traversi and Dr. G. K. Hunter.

Derek Traversi's study, *Shakespeare: The Early Comedies*, discusses four plays: *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *Love's Labour's Lost*. The author — who is well known for his books on Shakespeare (*An Approach to Shakespeare*, 1956, *Shakespeare from Richard II to Henry V*, 1958) — in his approach to the subject combines a close analysis of Shakespeare's dramatic composition and style, always with careful distinction between the conventional and original elements (which enables him to determine Shakespeare's personal artistic contribution to the form of his plays), with objective interpretation of the complex meaning of each play [which is sought especially in its "human content", that is to say, in its "bearing on human values, on life as lived by the individual and in society" (p. 8)]. This way of study, he believes, may contribute to a more illuminating and complete understanding of Shakespeare's developing art as dramatist.

The four comedies are considered in their presumed chronological order. The author's opinions and remarks on the formal aspects of the comedies, e. g. on the young dramatist's considerable skill in plot construction, especially in the two farcical comedies, *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Taming of the Shrew*, on his great command of expression, both ornate and familiar, or on his effective use of verse and prose as a means of characterisation and emotional colouring, etc., are both just and interesting, besides their function as aids and illustrations of his interpretation of the content; but these elements of Shakespeare's art have been fully explored by many Shakespearean students and as *loci communes* of Shakespearean scholarship they need not detain us.

What most favourably distinguishes Professor Traversi's investigation of dramatic structure and verbal expression from strictly formal scrutiny is just the meticulous attention he pays to the particular and universal meaning of the form, i. e. to the realisation, through formal elements, of Shakespeare's immediate comic intention as well as to the dramatist's considered view of private and public human relationships. In this way the author arrives at valid or, at least, plausible conclusions concerning Shakespeare's continuous artistic development as playwright and his maturing vision of life as poet. These conclusions form his most important contribution to a better understanding of Shakespeare's early and later comedies.

In *The Comedy of Errors*, a realistic comedy of love and jealousy, containing many farcical episodes and characters, the dramatist's serious and humane conception of the main

theme is to be found in the play's implicit criticism of life. By drawing our attention to Shakespeare's psychologically plausible presentation of the female characters (particularly those of Adriana and Luciana), to his emphasis upon „mutual trust as an essential element in the marriage relationship” (p. 12), or to his overcoming of the cynical attitude to women, love and marriage (which is characteristic of the Roman comedies of Plautus from which he derived his plot), etc., the author corroborates his view that in this play “we may reasonably find an attitude to his comic material which anticipates Shakespeare's mature presentation of human relationships” (p. 14).

A similarly humane basic attitude to love and marriage is also revealed in Shakespeare's popular realistic farce, *The Taming of the Shrew*. Here the critic finds the first example of Shakespeare's conception of comedy as “a play composed of different and interlocking actions concentrated upon a central theme” (p. 15). The play consists of three strands — the Induction, the main plot (which gives the play its title and centres about the characters of Petruchio and Katherine, the shrew) and the secondary plot (about Bianca and her lovers) — and its main theme, the duel of sex, can be fully comprehended only by taking account of all these different strands. That is exactly what Professor Traversi does in his interpretation.

His final opinion is that the taming of Katherine by Petruchio, brutal and barbarous as it will seem to most modern spectators and readers, is actually intended by Shakespeare to be understood as an “educational process” aiming at “teaching her to feel... to develop in the direction of feeling and humanity, as she does in fact develop in the course of the play” (cf. p. 20). The farce, in its entirety, is thus interpreted as Shakespeare's defence of the realistic, “natural”, view of marriage, and his critique of the unreal, idealistic conception of love and marriage, presented mainly in the relation between Bianca and Lucentio. Shakespeare, in the author's opinion, wanted to convey to his audience a moral lesson, which Professor Traversi sums up as follows: “Kate... admits (that) it is in the nature of things, which society ignores or distorts at its peril, that the wife is bound to stand to her husband as the true subject to his prince. The family requires the one relationship no less than the proper ordering of the state the other. The stress is laid, as it will be so often in Shakespeare's later and more developed plays, on the right ordering of things according to 'nature', and what Kate has learnt in the course of her knockabout tribulations is precisely neither more nor less than to be 'natural'” (p. 22).

Yet, in spite of the author's ingenious and painstaking marshalling of all available evidence for his case, this conclusion fails to convince us completely, since we accept it in the light of what we know of Shakespeare's views on the questions of love and marriage etc. from his later plays, rather than from our response to the *Taming of the Shrew*. If it happened to be an anonymous play, would we accept Professor Traversi's submitted interpretation of its meaning as more than plausible?

*The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is also a love comedy to which our response is divided. It contains some beautiful poetic passages and pieces of truthful observation. But, as Professor Traversi puts it, it also “has some claim to be considered Shakespeare's most tedious play” (p. 22). Therefore he concentrates more on assessing its place in the general development of Shakespeare's approach to his comic material, on its anticipation of later and more mature comedies, than on its character as a work of art. Thus he finds it is Shakespeare's first effort to see how far romantic themes and conventions could be used as a reflection of real life (cf. p. 22). He also finds that the two principal female characters in the play, Silvia and Julia, anticipate the heroines of later comedies in opposing “to corrupt convention their own firm and clear-eyed view of reality” (p. 27). And he sums up his findings in this respect as follows: “*The Two Gentlemen of Verona*... needs to be seen... as an early experiment in the use of convention for positive ends. As such it points to later and more successful developments. Many devices used in later comedies... appear here for the first time. We must see in them... a first essay in the more meaningful patternings of the later comedies. In these, conventions not altogether dissimilar, though immensely deepened and developed, become instruments for the exploration of human relationships, more especially in love, and for the expression of a true attitude to love itself: an attitude in which poetry and realism, romance and comedy, are variously combined. ... This early piece... ends, like its greater successors, with a reconciliation of conflicting opposites, the uniting of its lovers and the return of its outlaws to civilized and social living... a reconciliation... which has possibilities of development once the dramatic, poetic, and human contents of the action have been simultaneously expanded” (pp. 28—9 *passim*).

While the central theme of the last comedy was the difference between appearance and

reality, and its criticism aimed at the idealistic, romantic attitude to love, the subject of another love comedy, *Love's Labour's Lost*, is the criticism of artifice, indicted as false from the same position of reality or "nature". Paradoxically, the play itself contains a strong element of artificiality, in its structure, characters and expression, from which we are forced to infer that the dramatist was aware that in his exposure of artifice in life he was criticising also the very conventions that he and other writers of plays and poetry exploited in art. Still, the main target of his critique is the irresponsible and futile attempt to escape from reality, as shown in the foolish and short-lived withdrawal of Navarre and his companions "from the claims and distractions of social living" (p. 30). This escapism is criticised by the dramatist "from a variety of viewpoints" whose sum "is the essence of the play" (p. 31). Of Traversi's most important critical observations we should mention at least his estimate of the central character of Biron as "the first of a long series of Shakespeare's characters who express themselves in detachment on the life which goes on around them even as they participate, but still with a notably dispassionate attitude, in the course which it is taking; Falstaff is the last and greatest example of this type of comic character, but Biron stands on the early stages of the road which led to that immense achievement" (p. 31). It is Biron who defends his adverse judgement of the "academicians" by reference to "nature". And in his "apotheosis of love", quoted by the author (p. 35) we may read the dramatist's own affirmation of love "as the source of life, of enhanced vitality" (p. 36).

Professor Traversi's conclusion, derived from the result of his critical assessment of the early plays, might be quoted with full approval. "All the plays we have been considering" (he writes) "are, considered from one standpoint, preparatory stages which will enable Shakespeare in his later and greater comedies . . . to achieve the final aim of his comic genius, the marriage of convention and real life at which he consistently aimed. Rosalind, in *As You Like It*, and Viola, in *Twelfth Night*, are still conventional beings, in so far as their situations are concerned; but real life is implied in their every utterance. Beatrice and Benedick, in *Much Ado About Nothing*, are still characters who move in what we might call . . . a slap-stick situation; but the real theme with which they are concerned, through and beyond this situation, is the serious one of the proper relationship between men and women and the assumption of that relationship into society through a realistic and fruitful attitude to marriage . . . conceived as positive, life-enhancing, and socially central" (p. 39).

This conclusion may also serve as introduction to our examination of the essay, *Shakespeare: The Late Comedies*, written by G. K. Hunter, in which the author considers *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*. Dr. Hunter's critical aim is to define "the particular kind of excellence" in the three last-named comedies, and he finds that "the common element in the different achievements is the power to realize love as a force making for proper happiness and reconciliation over a wide area of human experience, and as a spectrum which shows sanity and eccentricity in their social setting" (p. 7). "In these comedies," he continues, "we share a sense of the absurdity of love with characters who know their own absurdity, and whose success we desire. The ideal of social balance and reconciliation is realized here in the power to live with one's own absurdity, with ease and confidence" (pp. 7-8).

Dr. Hunter's essay opens with his assessment of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, "a great comic drama, but of a very different kind, and of a distinct date" (p. 7), being like the early comedies and unlike the later ones "in seeking to reconcile, without judging, the comparative merits of the different worlds it shows . . . it is best seen, in fact, as a lyric divertissement, or a suite of dances — gay, sober, stately, absurd" (p. 8). This description of the play, or rather of the impression of the play on the critic's mind, is subsequently illustrated and supported by a detailed interpretation of the themes, characters, patterns and other more or less conventional formal elements of the play, which no doubt poses more problems than are generally acknowledged by the critics. To enter upon a full discussion of all the points made by Dr. Hunter in his analysis would, obviously, entail giving the review more time and space than we can afford, even at the cost of not doing full justice to his critical achievement. After a careful perusal of his essay we are, however, still in doubt about the objective validity of the above quoted description. Our own impression of the play leads us rather to the conclusion that the real concern of Shakespeare in this comedy, as in all his plays, was with the real, human content of the formal pattern he used, not with the pattern as such. As any artist he naturally gave all attention and care he could to the form embodying

his ideas, even to the "pattern of attitudes" which Dr. Hunter studies with such intensity, but neither in this particular play, nor in his earlier and later attempts at a comic presentation of life did he abandon his implicit conception of comedy as a criticism of life. Therefore it is hard to see why "the problem posed between moonlight or dream, on the one hand, and daylight or reality on the other" should be "one whose usefulness is disrupted by too vigorous an attempt to judge the different levels" (p. 19). And we cannot accept as more than partially true the author's assumption that *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a "suite of dances", however aptly it may suit the character of Shakespeare's formal presentation of the young lovers' typical vagaries. In Dr. Hunter's appreciation of this comedy, however, there are many other notable critical *aperçus* with which we are in full agreement, though we can give just one piece of generally valid critical observation concerning Shakespeare's "clowns, citizens and rustics". The author writes: "Here among the muddled roots of humanity it is dangerous to laugh too loud, for Shakespeare makes it clear that it is *ourselves* we are laughing at" (p. 20).

If it may be allowed that Dr. Hunter's impression of Shakespeare's apparent suspension of a critical attitude to life, in the play just discussed, is not entirely unwarranted, in the later comedies the dramatist's critique of man and society is clearly predominant. In *Much Ado About Nothing*, "commonly remembered as a comedy of wit, focussed on Beatrice and Benedick" (p. 20) Shakespeare clearly judges from his ethical and social point of view not only the villain of the play, Don Pedro, but all the characters, including the protagonists, Benedick, Beatrice, Claudio and Hero, and their way of life. This critical attitude commands our attention and conveys the underlying seriousness of the play as is clearly perceived and expressed in Dr. Hunter's sensitive analysis and interpretation of both the comic and the grave elements of the play, when he says, for example, that the comedy "is more bitter than is usually allowed; the world of Messina buys its elegance dearly; it is a world where wit is a weapon for the strong, where the comic vision of happiness is available only to those with enough poise to remain balanced and adaptive throughout conflict and deception" (p. 31).

As *You Like It* is regarded by the author as of all Shakespeare's comedies "the most completely centred on the vision of the happiness that is available in this world through personally satisfying, humanely poised and socially acceptable love" (p. 32). Again, the world presented in this comedy is not exempt from vice, folly and unhappiness. And even the idealised retreat of the Forest of Arden cannot be regarded as an earthly paradise, for it contains such eccentric and socially unbalanced figures as Jacques and Phoebe. "The point is", to quote the author, "not that folly and vice do not exist in the comic world, but that the central figures, Rosalind, Celia and Orlando, can face the reality of vice and yet escape contamination, can face the deviations of folly and yet, through self-knowledge and self-discipline, dismiss them with an effortless superiority" (p. 32). Shakespeare's objectively realistic and sensitively critical view of life is reflected in his mature conception of love as both wonderful and slightly absurd. But, in Orlando and Rosalind, the absurdity of their behaviour as lovers is never satirised, for love is a socially positive and morally healthy emotion in its essence. On the other hand, eccentric melancholy is subjected to both ridicule and contempt. Dr. Hunter's understanding appreciation of this comedy is summarised in his judgement that the central achievement of the play is "the achievement of a point of view in which love is known for an absurdity, and yet retained with laughing urbanity at the centre of human experience" (p. 38).

The author's account of *Twelfth Night*, though less preoccupied with the formal pattern and dramatic expression than his analysis of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, indeed, its balanced attention to formal elements and their meaningful content is remarkably sustained throughout, still suffers from a different kind of defect in its critical approach to the subject. It pays overmuch attention to non-essential problems and marginal details (such as the distinction between the clowns in *As You Like It* and *Twelfth Night*, Touchstone and Feste), in the interpretation of which subjective impression must needs play a decisive part, and, in consequence, it sometimes fails to communicate with sufficient clarity the author's objectively valid assessment of the play as an aesthetic unity of content and form. The exposition, moreover, suffers from over-condensation of thought and expression. To give a just précis of its argument would transcend the limits of this review so that we can only quote one characteristic contribution of the many with which we are in full agreement. It is concerned with the controversial issue of the social determination of Shakespeare's denouement of the plot. "The new pattern at the end" (of the play), says the author, "is seen not only as personally satisfying (for the major characters), but also as socially desirable, certain

pretenders to civility (notably Malvolio and Sir Andrew) being rejected from the pattern... in which the others express their own superior natures. It is true that there is a degree of 'Jonsonian' social realism in the play's image of an effete aristocracy threatened by a determined upstart (i. e. Malvolio); ... and the marriage of Sir Toby and Maria is more a piece of social justice than a contribution to the final dance of reconciliation. But this dance itself is not to be explained in social terms; the principal emotion involved in the denouement is the sense of release from the complexity and isolation of outer disguise or inner obsession; and this is a personal and individual matter, to which society is merely accessory" ... (p. 47).

Shakespeare's plays, *Troilus and Cressida*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure* and *Timon of Athens*, are considered in Peter Ure's essay, *Shakespeare: The Problem Plays*. The author is Professor of English at King's College, in the University of Durham, and has published and edited a great deal in the field of modern as well as classical English literature.

The title of his present essay raises an important, but controversial issue, since both the practical usefulness and the theoretical justification of the term "problem plays" is itself problematical, no matter which particular group of Shakespeare's plays it is applied to. Indeed, it has been arbitrarily used since F. S. Boas first applied it, in 1896, to the three first titles discussed in the essay under review, and to *Hamlet*, and since a number of later critics (W. W. Lawrence, Tillyard, Schanzer, etc.) have applied the term in their studies to the same or other plays of the Shakespearean canon. Professor Ure, feeling committed to justify his own acceptance of the label, tries to indicate the common features of the plays he is considering as belonging in this category, and finds them in "the probing of character under the test of situations which raise conflicting interpretations; the replacement of the strain of occasional melancholy which is found even in Shakespeare's most festive comedies by an urgently satirical and disfiguring temper; a willingness even in comedy to draw near to pain and death; a curious interweaving of romantic and even fantastic tales with realistic characterization, which itself sometimes moves towards allegory and symbol..." (p. 7). But we certainly find these characteristics also in many other comedies and tragedies of the dramatist, so that their value as criteria of discrimination and classification is doubtful. The author himself seems to be aware of this since, after all, he finds that the "first and most vital problem" for all readers of these plays is "that their language is often extremely hard to construe" (p. 8). But even this feature is not common to all the plays, for it hardly applies to *All's Well*, as has been pointed out by a German reviewer, G. Kirchner.

Before discussing the author's view of the individual plays and their „problems" we have to note his caution concerning their interpretation in general. In the *Conclusion* he writes that "it is easy to read into these plays what we wish to find there, and to substitute our more commonplace symmetries for Shakespeare's subtler ones. It is also easy to accuse Shakespeare of partial failure, perhaps because there is a genuine element of miscalculation, perhaps because we cannot read his clues" (p. 52). This admission implies both a deep respect for Shakespeare's achievement and a clear perception of the problems of interpretation and assessment involved in any kind of unprejudiced approach to his dramatic poetry. This attitude to his critical task is sympathetically reflected also in the author's clear and full exposition of what is actually happening in the plays, a feature of his essay which is particularly welcome, since two, or perhaps three of the plays he considers are comparatively little known to the general theatre-going or reading public. Also his attention to Shakespeare's literary sources is in this case most commendable.

In his account of the tragicomedy *All's Well That Ends Well*, the author sees the chief problem of the play (whose plot is derived from a story in Boccaccio's *Decamerone*) as that of "reconciling much gracious calm and ageing wisdom in the persons of Bertram's mother... the old lord Lafew, and the King of France... with much unheven acerbity and youthful drive in the persons of Helena and Bertram" (p. 8). Helena, who is a typical Shakespearean heroine of the later comedies and romances, is presented by Shakespeare as a "wonder-working heroine" and a lovable woman in the first half of the play, but the "great puzzle" of the play is that in the later Acts she is "transformed into a business-woman" (p. 15), whereas Bertram, the man whom she marries against his will, is relatively sympathetic in the first part, but develops in the course of the story into a man of "such a reality of stubbornly consistent shabbiness... that what is worrying is not Helena's fate at his hands but the thought that two characters from two quite disparate kinds of fiction are pretending

to belong to the same world" (p. 18). That, in the author's view, is chiefly why we find the happy, conventional, ending of the story "somewhat less than satisfying" (ib.).

The second "problem play", *Measure for Measure*, is one of those plays of Shakespeare's that have given rise to a great deal of criticism which "is far from speaking with a single voice" (p. 20). A comparison of the play with its literary source shows clearly Shakespeare's mature powers which transformed a barbarous and shallow story into a moving drama, ending in the final reconciliation only by the providential intervention of the Duke, who, unlike the other characters who are realistic portraits of men and women, good or bad, has a "duplicate character", as a real person and as a "symbolic controlling power" (p. 29). The chief problems of the play are seen in the conflicts and interrelations between good and evil, law and justice, mercy and justice etc., all presented in finely drawn and concretely presented characters and situations.

*Troilus and Cressida*, called by W. Greg "a play of puzzles" and now generally classified as a "tragical satire" (p. 33) weaves its two main themes, war and love, into a deliberate and elaborate pattern. Professor Alexander's theory that Shakespeare specially wrote this play for an Inns of Court audience, is generally approved as most plausible, for the numerous staged debates on themes of war, honour, political and other questions, in their diction and specific abstract interest might best appeal to lawyers and students of law. Shakespeare gives a balanced attention to both his themes, but his judgement of the war between Greeks and Trojans is true to legendary sources only in outline and is strongly coloured by sardonic irony. On the whole it would seem that he favours the Trojans. The death of Hector, murdered by a troop of soldiers while unarmed himself, is a proof of this bias, for it is not found in any of Shakespeare's known sources. Of the author's many apt remarks and plausible suggestions concerning the dramatist's intention and his art in the presentation of ideas and emotions, one may be selected for special quotation. It concerns the conception of honour. Ulysses defends the notion that "honour is what is given to you by other people and is therefore ruled by time and chance" whereas the idealistic Troilus's notion of honour is that it "resides in a man's not ratting on his own choice" and that "time and fortune cannot modify original virtue" (pp. 40-41 *passim*). In his idealistic absoluteness Troilus is shown by Shakespeare as a man true to himself in love and war which is both his glory and his fault, and in which he very closely resembles Othello and "is a tragic hero" (p. 41). The author's final assessment of the play is also worth quoting. Shakespeare "was not content to accept the tale of Troy only as a sardonic amusement, a way of cutting ancient heroes down to size. In the heart of all its... diminishing commentary and its squalid opportunism... lies what was in such a context the most difficult... artefact of all: the simply constant Troilus, who might have well borrowed Parolles's astounding line: 'Simply the thing I am shall make me live'" (p. 43).

The last problem play, *Timon of Athens*, is a short play which probably "represents an incomplete draft. It was never performed in Shakespeare's time" (p. 44). The main interest of the play is the character of Timon, a rich, happy and generous man who, having lost his fortune, loses his "friends", and turns into a hater of men, mankind and the whole cosmic order. The author notes that there have been very conflicting interpretations of the central personage and he believes that the cause of this latitude of interpretation "may partly be due to Timon's not being very strongly individuated, despite all that he is given to say". His own view of the play is in accordance with those who maintain "that Shakespeare probably set out to create a tragic hero having something in common with Lear and Othello, and that he failed to do so partly because he had not chosen a story and theme capable of sustaining him" (p. 45). We should think this explanation to be very near the truth, for the play, as it is, and the meagre material on which it draws, are very thin indeed. Timon is presented not only through his own actions and speeches, but also indirectly through the commentaries of other characters in the play, Apemantus, the Stoic philosopher, and the faithful steward Flavius, who remains faithful to Timon even when his master is deserted by all. Still the loss of his riches and "friends" cannot be seen as sufficient to cause such absolute misanthropy as drives Timon to live in the wilderness for the rest of his days, unless we have to regard his misanthropy as a mental disease. His situation (in the last two Acts), as the author observes, "is very like Lear's. But... the difference between Lear and Timon (here the author quotes J. C. Maxwell) is that Lear in affliction comes to see as he never did before; Timon does not undergo the ultimate ordeal of madness and the utmost he attains is to see through particular shams and injustices" (p. 50). What Alcibiades, after Timon's death, says and does in Athens, "makes it clear enough that Timon's misanthropy is no statement of the poet's own judgement on the world. The state can still be



purged of breathless wrong and pury insolence; there is still left the faithful steward; and even if men forbid themselves tenderness, then Nature herself will supply the recompense" (p. 52).

There is much truth also in what the author says on the considered plays as "experiments", in his *Conclusion*: "As Shakespeare's experiments the plays, *Timon of Athens* and *All's Well*, are of course more instructive than the successes of lesser men, especially since he was at the height of his poetic powers when he wrote them. The powers and the experimentation are both seen in the other two plays. *Measure for Measure* . . . is one of the most subtle and testing expressions of his genius. *Troilus and Cressida* is a play which has no real counterpart elsewhere in his work . . . and achieves a success which can be described as brilliant . . . in its rhetoric, in its flashing and blazing contrasts of character and of subject, and in its glittering design" (p. 52).

A problem — not essentially different from that which the authors of the essays on Shakespeare's "chronicles" and "problem plays" had to face when they tried to determine the distinct character of the plays they were examining — also confronts Professor Kenneth Muir, of Liverpool University, in his essay, *Shakespeare: The Great Tragedies*, in which he considers *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and *Macbeth*. The subject, naturally, raises the issue of the general character of Shakespearean tragedy, a formula that could be applied to all the tragedies, or even to the four greatest that are discussed in this essay.

Professor Muir is rather sceptical about various conceptions advanced by numerous scholars, critics and writers since the eighteenth century. His scepticism is confirmed by his own objective study of the four great tragedies. Since, however, we cannot discuss the results of his investigation as fully as they deserve, we will, at least, give more attention to what he has to say about the problem of Shakespearean tragedy in his concluding chapter. Having pointed out the "difficult task" which "those critics who have evolved a theory of Shakespearean tragedy have had trying to make all the plays fit the theory" (p. 37), he stresses the point that the differences between the tragedies are more important than the resemblances, and some general descriptions based upon actual points of resemblance, found in nearly all tragedies, "hardly differentiate Shakespeare's tragedies from others of the Renaissance" (ib.).

The following passage is also worth quoting in full, since it serves as a brief summary of the author's chapters dealing with the four tragedies individually: "Indeed", he writes, "Shakespeare's tragedies differ from each other almost as much as they do from those of other dramatists. *Hamlet* is in some ways closer to *The Spanish Tragedy* than it is to *King Lear*. The structure varies from play to play; the elaborate duplication of plots in *King Lear* is quite different from the character contrast in *Hamlet*; and *Othello* and *Macbeth*, though both possess unity of action, could hardly be more different. Each play of Shakespeare's was an experiment, and each was designed to bring out the full significance of the theme. The atmosphere of *Hamlet*, a miasma that emanates from the rottenness of the state of Denmark; the claustrophobic atmosphere of *Othello* which is as necessary as the swiftness of the action for a play dealing with jealousy; the storm in *King Lear* which reflects both the madness of the protagonist and the breakdown of the moral order; and the blood and darkness in which *Macbeth* is steeped: all these are indicative of the care with which Shakespeare was continually re-creating his dramatic methods, even though in all these plays we find the recurrence of certain themes — the contrast, for example, between appearance and reality, and what may be called the nature of nature. But the characteristic means of expression vary from play to play. *Othello* is steeped in irony, and there is very little in *King Lear*. The dominating figure in *Macbeth* is antithesis; in *Hamlet* it is, perhaps, the rhetorical question" (pp. 37–38).

This summary indicates very fairly the wide range of the author's critical interest in Shakespeare's great tragedies as embodiments of the dramatist's ripe wisdom, his profound vision of humanity in its glory and suffering, and his mature command of all dramatic and poetic means of expression. If Shakespeare had any general theory of tragedy, the author concludes, "we may suspect that he would have agreed with his contemporaries that it had a didactic function . . . to hold the mirror up to nature, to present particular examples of disaster, caused partly by human error and evil, and, by stripping them of accidentals, to offer both a mirror for magistrates and a commentary on human existence, in all its terror and in all its glory" (p. 38).

One more question of general interest and controversial character is lightly touched upon by the author at the beginning of his essay: the cause of what is called Shakespeare's "tragic period" (1601—1608). The author rejects the view that Shakespeare's tragic period was caused by tragic events in his own life (which has no support in contemporary evidence), and also (with much less right) the surmise "that it was a reflection of the disenchantment of the Elizabethans or of the Jacobeans" (p. 7). Instead he suggests that it is due simply to the fact that "all great poets have possessed a tragic sense of life" and "Shakespeare turned to tragedy partly because he had completed his cycle of English Histories . . . partly because he had perfected his comedy in *Twelfth Night* . . . and partly because he felt at the height of his powers and could display them and his deepened understanding of human life only in tragedies" (ibidem). This is the only rather disappointing point in his essay.

Just before the beginning, and in the last two years of his "tragic period", Shakespeare wrote three of his four tragedies deriving their subject-matter from Roman history, *Julius Caesar* (ca. 1600), *Antony and Cleopatra* (about 1607) and *Coriolanus* (about 1608). The fourth Roman play, *Titus Andronicus*, was first published, without his name, in 1594, and is now almost generally regarded to be wholly his. These tragedies are considered in the present series under the title *Shakespeare: The Roman Plays* by T. J. B. Spencer, Professor of English Language and Literature and Director of the Shakespeare Institute in the University of Birmingham, the author of *The Tyranny of Shakespeare* (1959) and many other scholarly studies.

In his essay, Professor Spencer points out the great popularity of plays on Roman historical subjects between 1594 and 1642 and stresses the fact that "when Shakespeare turned from English history to Roman history as the subject of plays, he was touching upon grave and provocative problems of political morality, already much discussed" (p. 9). This partly explains the great success of his *Titus Andronicus* on Elizabethan stage (though one or two recent productions of the play "have shown that it is in parts very moving", p. 14); but its popularity in Shakespeare's time was doubtless also due to the more sensational elements of the typical "revenge tragedy" type of drama, in which it resembles not only Kyd's *Spanish Tragedy* but also Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. As regards its meaning, it presents no serious difficulties, except for the picture it presents of the ancient Roman world which is "much confused . . . by the standards of Shakespeare's later Roman plays" (p. 12).

In these later plays, Shakespeare's reading of Plutarch (in North's translation) appears as a potent influence on the dramatist's conception of historical characters and even on his language, as the author convincingly demonstrates in his original contribution on the subject (Chapter III).

In spite of their literary derivation from the broadly identical historical matter, the plays do not form "a homogenous group as works of art". This is shown in the detailed discussion of the plays, from which we can select only a few observations and conclusions of more general interest. In *Julius Caesar* many critics have felt "the difficulty of interpreting the author's attitude to the two principal characters in the play", Caesar and Brutus (p. 19). Professor Spencer suggests that contradictory opinions regarding Shakespeare's conceptions of the two protagonists may be reconciled if we take into account both Shakespeare's literary sources and the difference in the historical and political views of the age of Shakespeare and our own times. His own interpretation of Caesar's character is that Shakespeare intended "the Dictator to be a genuine specimen of Roman magnanimitas" (p. 22); and he suggests that the dramatist may have drawn this idea from Montaigne's essay "Of the Roman Greatness" (cf. pp. 23 ff.). As regards Shakespeare's presentation of Brutus, the political idealist who murdered the tyrant though he was his best friend, Professor Spencer finds that Shakespeare "gives many indications of Brutus's weakness", and he sees him as "an imperfect politician in the Elizabethan sense of that word" (p. 25).

*Antony and Cleopatra*, which is a sequel to *Julius Caesar* historically, is not so dramatically (p. 29). The author sees "the striking achievement in the play, which gives it its rare, perhaps unique, quality" in the "revelation of the individual importance or self-absorption of the two main characters, within the felt environment of the grandeur that was Rome" (p. 30). His commentary on this well-known tragedy, in which the "real subject is the conflict in Antony, who is repeatedly confronted with a choice between his love for Cleopatra and his loyalty to the political and moral dignity of Rome" (p. 30), is a good example of his sensitive appreciation of Shakespeare's poetic genius and dramatic skill.

The last Roman play, *Coriolanus*, according to the author's impression, was written "more than any other of Shakespeare's great plays by a process of literary imagining; we can feel him at work, as a man of letters, in the composition of the play... he seems to be taking care to get things historically correct, to preserve Roman manners and customs and allusions" (p. 39). Professor Spencer sees "the principal difficulty of criticism of the play in that our reactions to the hero are different from those we are accustomed to in Shakespeare's other tragedies. *Coriolanus* is not a sympathetic character — in the theatrical sense — whereas Shakespeare's other tragic heroes are sympathetic characters in that sense" even when they are evil men or villains, like *Macbeth* or *Richard III* (p. 41).

The author's interpretation of Shakespeare's attitude to the common people — the plebeians — in this tragedy is worth attention as it throws some light on the controversial issue of Shakespeare's personal political persuasion. "It may be granted", he writes, "that Shakespeare, like any respectable landowner and well-established citizen, shared an aversion to the mob as a political force... It can nevertheless be asserted, without paradox, that there are many elements in the representation of the mob which are not unflattering, not offensive... the audience is left with the impression that the plebeians are superior (to the patricians), in some respects at least" (p. 44). And after quoting from the play to support this opinion, he continues: "A careful balance is presumed between the virtues and vices of the different political forces. The people are not curs... that *Coriolanus* calls them, though they are often uncomprehending, easily deceived, and easily aroused. The tribunes are not merely comic or merely despicable figures... but are, it must be admitted, competent in their management of affairs, and they make shrewd judgements of the dangerous man (*Coriolanus*) who is their opponent" (p. 45). On the question concerning Shakespeare's own politics, he says: "If political views are to be discerned in *Coriolanus* they are shrewd and disillusioned ones. Yet this play is generally an excuse for trying to extract a notion of Shakespeare's politics. It is obvious that it is not primarily an expression of his 'sympathy with the oppressed masses', nor of his 'contempt for the common people'" (p. 46).



The plays produced by Shakespeare in the last period of his literary career — with the exception of the chronicle play *Henry VIII* (treated in the present series by Professor Clifford Leech) — are discussed by Frank Kermode, Professor of English Literature in the University of Manchester. In his essay entitled *Shakespeare: The Final Plays*, the author considers five tragicomedies: *Pericles* (1607, first published in a quarto edition in 1609, but not included in the First Folio), *Cymbeline* (1609), *The Winter's Tale* (1610), *The Tempest* (1611; the last three plays were all first printed in the First Folio), and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (1612), first published in 1634 and ascribed by the publisher to Fletcher and Shakespeare. Though Kermode's critical interest is concentrated on the four tragi-comic Romances which are almost unanimously accepted as an integral part of the Shakespearean Canon, he devotes at least a brief chapter (pp. 50—52) to *The Two Noble Kinsmen* because he believes that Shakespeare "probably wrote a great deal of the play" though "he had nothing to do with its plot" for which John Fletcher is entirely responsible.

The problems of Shakespeare's authorship are not the main business of Professor Kermode's essay. Since, however, the two doubtful plays, *Pericles* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, cannot be properly understood and assessed before Shakespeare's share in their creation has been established — and since this issue still remains open — the author has to deal with the available external and internal evidence for Shakespeare's alleged contribution to the plays in question, and he has to draw his own conclusions from it as a sort of working hypothesis. His view of Shakespeare's part in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* has been quoted. As regards *Pericles* — the only extant version of which is undoubtedly a corrupt report of the original — Professor Kermode largely accepts the theory advanced by Kenneth Muir in *Shakespeare as Collaborator* (1960). He sums up this theory as follows: "Shakespeare revised an old play; Wilkins used Shakespeare's version and perhaps in places the old play also; the piratical publisher of the Quarto used a reported text and perhaps glanced at Wilkins" (p. 14). His own conclusion, shared by most modern Shakespearean scholars, is that Shakespeare's interest in *Pericles* "begins, substantially, with the third act" but that the dramatist who wrote the first two acts, i. e. the non-Shakespearean part of the play, is so far unidentifiable.

Professor Kermode strongly supports the arguments for Shakespeare's responsibility of the greater part of *Pericles* by a subtle analysis of the play (pp. 12—19) which he regards as the prototype of the Romances in the treatment of their theme "of sundering and reunion,

the suffering king and the princess of magic virtue" (p. 18). He finds in this first example of the new, romantic kind of tragicomedy those general features which the four Romances considered in his essay have in common: "a new disregard for psychological and narrative plausibility, a metrical freedom which goes far beyond anything in earlier plays" (p. 7), and many more characteristics which have given rise to all sorts of different explanations.

A brief summary of the resemblances in subject-matter and theme as well as their dramatic presentation and artistic realisation (which distinguish Shakespeare's Romances from any other group of his tragedies and comedies), and a fruitful discussion of historical, psychological, philosophical and aesthetic explanations or interpretations of the Romances offered by previous scholars and critics, form the main subject of the first, introductory chapter of the present essay (pp. 7-12). On the whole, the author does not seem to think too much of psychological explanations or allegorical interpretations of the specific character of the Romances, though he admits that there is a grain of truth in the view that Shakespeare in these plays "was examining his medium in an unusually detached, experimental way" (p. 8), and that the Romances, particularly *The Tempest*, encourage allegorical interpretations. Much interpretation of this kind, however, "will be condemned as both wanton and limiting. There is probably more staying power in less ambitious, more empirical approaches, like E. M. W. Tillyard's theory that Shakespeare was working out a development of tragedy into a scheme of prosperity, destruction, and reconciliation; this partly accounts for the tragicomic aspect of the plays, and for their general similarity, without demanding of the reader the suspension of his common sense" (p. 9).

Explicit preference of empirical to speculative approaches induces Professor Kermode to discuss more fully, and take a more favourable view of, those theories which explain the creation and specific character of the Romances by Shakespeare's response to the revival of public interest in dramatised romance. In evidence of this interest the revival in 1610, by Shakespeare's company, of the popular romance play *Mucedorus* is cited, and it is further pointed out that *Pericles* at least has something in common with that old play — one of the Shakespeare apocrypha — which since its first edition in 1598 was, according to W. W. Greg, reprinted at least sixteen times between 1606 and 1668. Another relevant argument in favour of this theory is that, from about 1609, Shakespeare's company was beginning to play at the Blackfriars, an indoor theatre capable to produce plays and entertainments with more elaborate scenic and musical effects (such as *The Tempest*, for example), and thus was better suited for the staging of Shakespeare's romance plays than the open Globe theatre (though we have evidence that all his Romances have also been performed at the Globe).

In view of these facts, Professor Kermode has to admit the possibility at least that the Romances "were written, as earlier plays of Shakespeare had been, in response to a specific public demand" (p. 9). In the concluding statement of his discussion of G. E. Bentley's and other critics' theories, he modifies his admission rather substantially, and writes: "Of course, all this is conjecture, and even if it were true it would not rule out explanations of quite other kinds" (p. 10). His critical caution, justified as it may be in the case of minor hypothetical details, by no means invalidates the commonplace of Shakespearean scholarship — acknowledged by the author himself — that the objective immediate reason for Shakespeare's dramatic writing, including the Romances, was his desire to serve the interests of his Company and to meet the demands of its audience.

The main reason for the guarded formulation quoted above is revealed in Professor Kermode's statement of his own theory which is largely in agreement with the views and conjectures of Tillyard, Pettet, Danby, and Edwards (cited in the *Select Bibliography*, p. 55) wherein he declares: "I believe the most profitable explanation is that which postulates a revival of theatrical interest in romance, and seeks the reason for it not so much in the older drama as in the great heroic romances of the period, Sidney's *Arcadia* and Spenser's *Faerie Queene*" (p. 10). I am afraid that, apart from the legitimate assumption of a revival — though survival might perhaps be nearer the historical truth — of the theatrical interest in romance (for which there exists objective evidence in a number of Elizabethan and Jacobean romance plays), this belief is pure conjecture. Although the comparative study of Shakespeare's Romances and Spenser's *Faerie Queene* undertaken by several recent commentators of Shakespeare's last plays has revealed a sort of analogy between Shakespeare's and Spenser's treatment of romance to support their claim that *The Faerie Queene* may have been one of Shakespeare's sources, it has failed to produce conclusive evidence that the reason for the postulated revival of interest in dramatised romance is to be found in Sidney's and Spenser's epics rather than in the older drama.

Professor Kermode attempts to substantiate his belief by arguments which stress the

general similarities between Shakespeare's and Spenser's creative treatment of the traditional romance elements, such as their themes, plots, characters, etc. implying, but not explicitly affirming that Shakespeare's artistic method may have been influenced by Spenser's; in his analysis and interpretation of Shakespeare's Romances, he further argues his theory by instances of alleged parallels between Shakespeare's and Spenser's motives or characters which, again, purport to demonstrate that *The Faerie Queene* should be regarded as an additional, hitherto neglected, source of Shakespeare's romance plays. Taken all together, his arguments may be granted to have established the possibility, though by no means the certainty, of Shakespeare's acquaintance with Spenser's masterpiece and of his indebtedness to that great poem. Professor Kermode himself refuses to commit himself to a more precise and definitive conclusion in this matter, for he is well aware that all the Romances "impose upon the commentator limitations so severe that no reading, perhaps, will ever find general acceptance" (p. 53).

In view of the commendably self-critical conclusion of his essay, it is not necessary to discuss at length Professor Kermode's tentative solutions of the numerous controversial issues raised by Shakespeare's last tragicomedies. Since, however, the object of the present review is to draw the reader's attention to the author's personal contribution to contemporary interpretation of the Romances, some of his observations and suggestions will have to be considered.

One of the most important of these is the observation that Shakespeare, like Sidney and Spenser, blended "the improbabilities of his romance plots" with serious and profound philosophical, ethical and political intentions (cf. p. 10); and it is inferred that in this method Shakespeare was probably inspired by those two poets. Concerning *Pericles*, for example, the author arrives at the conclusion that this archetype of Shakespeare's romance plays "is, above all, the work of a great dramatist who had been much moved by a great poet", that is to say, by Spenser (p. 19). This suggestion, closely and ingeniously argued as it is, may be objected to on the general grounds that Shakespeare had employed the creative method characteristic of his treatment of romance plots and characters in most of his plays, even in some historical or imaginative tragedies and comedies produced before he could read *The Faerie Queene*. Moreover, the stories, romances and fairy tales which supplied him with the plots and themes of *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* (it is significant that not a single plot of the Romances or any other play of his is taken from Sidney or Spenser), contained also more than the germs of those ethical and philosophical ideas or sentiments with which Shakespeare thought fit to endow them.

It seems much more likely that it was those old stories, not Sidney's and Spenser's heroic romances, that are mainly responsible for the typical features of Shakespeare's Romances: the reduced realism of psychological characterisation, the intervention of supernatural beings and forces in the action, the providential role played by natural elements, and finally the inevitable triumph of justice and achievement of happiness for those who have deserved it.

The detailed scrutiny to which Professor Kermode subjected the content and form of the four romance plays (pp. 12—49) demonstrates indeed that Shakespeare kept as closely to the themes, plots and characters of his known sources as the dramatic mode of expression and the theatrical conventions and facilities allowed him. As an accomplished master of his art he skilfully avoided those features of romance that could not be represented on the stage and those covert meanings that could be made explicit to his public. As a result, his dramatised romances are clearly distinct from the other plays of the canon both as theatrical entertainments and as dramatic poetry.

The romance themes necessitated a suitable adaptation of his creative method, often even invention of novel means of dramatic expression, while exploiting to the full the actual theatrical means at his disposal. It is not surprising, therefore, that many recent commentators underline the element of experimentation which is undoubtedly present in this group of tragicomedies. This element is evident in the formal structure which follows a different scheme in each of the four plays, and more strikingly still in the presentation of the themes through a subtle organisation and ingenious development of the plot.

We need not accept Professor Kermode's suggestion that "the mood of all these plays is not that of some improbable old man who wants to make everybody happy, but rather that of the *Cantos of Mutability*" (p. 11), i. e. a dialectical conception of evolution which regards change as a law of nature through which things may reach a more perfect state of being; but we may certainly agree with his deduction that "a dramatist meditating these romances in terms of his own medium might well decide that the dramaturgical weight must fall not so much upon that part of the story which describes the sudden change of

some royal fortune . . . as upon the recognition, the moment of restoration and reconciliation" (ib.). For this is what actually happens in Shakespeares's Romances where the presentation of the denouement occupies the stage for a much longer period of time than in most of his earlier dramas. The assumption that Shakespeare's pronounced attention to the moment of recognition is due to his acceptance of Spenser's idealistic view of the world's mutability (quoted above) is, however, as little convincing as Professor Kermode's entire plea for Spenserian inspiration of the theatrical interest in romance in Shakespeare's last period. For Shakespeare may have easily reached a similar belief either from most of his romance sources or from living experience. He may even have shared, as he certainly knew, the wide-spread humanistic belief in the coming of universal harmony and happiness for humanity, a belief in "the brave new world" described in Gonsalo's picture of a Utopian commonwealth in *The Tempest*. But here we certainly move in the realm of speculation rather than the world of facts. And the lack of factual information about Shakespeare's private life and personal beliefs might perhaps incline us to the heretical opinion that as a dramatist Shakespeare, at least in his romance plays, may have been "more interested in the shapes of certain ideas than whether he believed in them" (to quote a reported statement of Samuel Beckett concerning his play "Waiting for Godot").

The method which Shakespeare employed in the dramatisation of non-dramatic literary sources implied, among other things, a severely restricted use of allegory and parable which are so conspicuous in epic romances, especially in *The Faerie Queene*. The resulting essential difference between his treatment of romance and Spenser's elaborate allegorical method is duly noted by Kermode, though it speaks rather against than for his favourite theory. In the chapter discussing *Pericles* he writes: "In the hands of Sidney and Spenser romance was a very flexible . . . mode of ethical allegory. Spenser . . . diversifies a master-allegory with subtle and even opportunistic figurations of a lesser kind. In Shakespeare there is a good deal of this kind of thing, but his master-themes are invariably explicit and not figurative. He writes for the stage . . . The playwright cannot afford to neglect what Professor Danby calls 'the creaturely and existential' . . . In *Pericles* there is . . . a strong element of parable. But it is wrong to impose detailed allegorical readings on the play. In the end, the theatre explains it; it is an act of concentration on the laws of comic form, a huge, perhaps inordinate, development of the comic recognition . . . the work of a great dramatist who had been much moved by a great poet, and who — not without a certain pride in easy mastery — wanted to do a new thing in the making of comedy" (pp. 18—19, *passim*).

The last few lines of the passage just quoted strike the key-note of the author's personal interpretation of Shakespeare's Romances. On his own admission, his essay does little more than develop a remark of Northrop Frye that the spirit of reconciliation is to be ascribed to Shakespeare's impersonal concentration on the laws of comic form (cf. p. 12). In other words, Professor Kermode is pre-eminently concerned with the formal aspects of the question "why the plays are as they are" (p. 53) and, within the limits his approach imposes upon such an inquiry, the suggested explanation is a valuable contribution to our understanding of Shakespeare's dramatic art and method. Of the objective factors which had determined the dramatist's choice of subject-matter as well as the specific ideological and emotional content of his romance plays, he discusses, above all, those which are to be found in Shakespeare's literary sources, attributing, as we have seen, a particularly potent role to Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. He is rather sceptical about biographical and allegorical interpretations, because they are too speculative or undemonstrable. His running commentary on the plays he studies does not fail to consider other explanations which attempt to discover the roots and relations of the plays in the widest possible historical context and he occasionally refers the reader to other Shakespearean scholars and critics whose works are cited in the *Bibliography*. But the brevity and nature of his essay does not allow him to deal with his subject more exhaustively than he has done.

The last essay of the series under review is devoted to Shakespeare's non-dramatic poetry and bears the title *Shakespeare: The Poems*. Its author, F. T. Prince, is Professor of English in the University of Southampton. He has edited the New Arden text of the *Poems* (1960) and in the present critical essay he considers the two narrative poems, *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594), the *Sonnets* and *A Lover's Complaint* (1609), and the allegorical love poem *The Phoenix and Turtle* (first printed with *Loves Martyr* by Robert Chester in 1601). The dates are those of first editions. Later facsimiles and critical editions

as well as most important critical studies are cited in *Select Bibliography* (pp. 48—54) and a facsimile of the dedication of 1609 edition of the *Sonnets* is reproduced as frontispiece.

Biographical evidence shows that "all that we have of Shakespeare's non-dramatic poetry is printed within the twenty years when he was active as a dramatist, and there is no evidence that any of it was written before, say, 1592" (p. 7), because in the summer of that year the London theatres were closed by an outbreak of the plague, and the young actor-dramatist probably wrote and dedicated his first two poems to the young Earl of Southampton in the hope of winning his patronage. In this it is now generally believed he was not disappointed. Not so general, however, is the assumption that Shakespeare's sonnets were also the poetic fruits of Shakespeare's passionate friendship with the same nobleman; and Professor Prince is one of those critics who do not doubt, indeed, that the sonnets record Shakespeare's real experiences and emotions, but refuse to commit themselves to any definite conjecture as to the historical identity of Shakespeare's beloved young friend, or his mistress, or the rival poet, the three characters whose complex relations with the poet are the subject of the whole work.

The author's approach to the "riddle of the Shakespeare's Sonnets" is best summed up in his own words: "The method I have used in reading the Sonnets is to take them at their face value: to assume that they mean what they say, that Shakespeare is writing of his own emotions and experiences. I am quite aware that the truth of this assumption is not measurable, verifiable by experiment, or demonstrable by abstract reasoning; but I do not propose to repeat that point at every juncture, because it seems to me quite unimportant. The interpretation of works of art can never be a matter of rational or scientific demonstration, however much knowledge or method we may need on our way; to arrive at some understanding we need rather to draw upon the whole of our being, and have a feeling for reality which cannot be taken for granted" (p. 22).

Rejection of the hypothesis that Shakespeare's sonnets are purely literary exercises in the current poetic fashion without reference to real persons or events does not imply any neglect, on the author's part, of the aesthetic qualities and formal characteristics of the poems as works of art. "The historical facts about the *Sonnets* and the content of personal relationship" (p. 34) are discussed by Professor Prince more fully than similar aspects of the narrative poems or the two doubtful lyrics, because historical and biographical approach to the *Sonnets* is "essential to our comprehension" of them, whereas Shakespeare's other poems are more impersonal, reflecting Shakespeare's private experiences or emotions less directly.

In both the historical interpretation of the contents of the *Sonnets* (pp. 17—31) and the critical analysis and assessment of their artistic form (pp. 32—42), the author proceeds from a number of ascertained facts and from some assumptions drawn from external evidence by himself, as well as by previous students of the *Sonnets*. Our review can only comment those of his conclusions which are most pertinent to his reading of Shakespeare's unique confession.

Though they appeared in print as late as 1609, all or most of the sonnets belong to the 1590's; Francis Meres mentions their circulation in manuscript in 1598, and general affinity as well as many detailed resemblances between the sonnets and Shakespeare's narrative poems and plays written in the period before 1598 (particularly *Romeo and Juliet*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *King John*, *Richard II*) tend to confirm the view that the events they record and the composition of the sonnets themselves occurred a long time before the publication of the Quarto edition by Thomas Thorpe. We might suggest that this late publication might be regarded as additional proof of the genuineness of the sonnets' autobiographical record; after a lapse of ten or more years, most readers were not likely to guess the identity of the poet's young friend or of his mistress which Shakespeare had taken especial care not to reveal in the poems themselves. Even the promising clue to his friend's name in the initials "Mr. W. H." (to whom the *Sonnets* are dedicated by the publisher) and in some sonnets which suggest their reading as "William Hughes" arouse suspicion that the poet deliberately intended to mislead the vulgar curiosity of his contemporaries rather than to assist his future biographers. Professor Prince, who closely, and on the whole convincingly, refutes the claims of Lord Southampton, Lord Pembroke, etc. to be accepted as Shakespeare's friend, takes the clue seriously, but even he has to admit that so far no historical person of that name has been discovered who would suit Shakespeare's description of the young man to whom most of the sonnets are addressed. Equally unsuccessful have been attempts to reveal the identity of the poet's mistress to whom the shorter second series of the *Sonnets* is devoted.

Thomas Thorpe may or may not have been in the secret. There is certainly no evidence that his edition was pirated or that Shakespeare has not approved its publication. And this

leads Professor Prince to the justifiable conclusion that the text of the Quarto is authentic, that the division of the sonnets into two series (1—126 and 127—155), addressed to Shakespeare's friend and to his mistress respectively, as well as their order within the two series, is the author's responsibility and therefore no attempt at a different arrangement can be excused. There are, indeed, few points in his sensitive and scholarly explication of the *Sonnets* as a whole, or as individual poems, with which one might be inclined to disagree on principle.

The peculiarly warm and passionate expression of Shakespeare's feelings for his handsome and accomplished young friend throws some suspicion on the true character of their relationship. There have even been interpreters who believed that Shakespeare's love of his anonymous friend was homosexual. Professor Prince refutes this accusation as entirely false and explicitly denied by the poet himself (p. 22); and by contrasting Shakespeare's love sonnets addressed to his friend with those inspired by his passion for the dark lady he convincingly demonstrates that if there was anything "abnormal" about his relationship with the young man, it was only the rare fact of "ideal", "passionate", friendship, typical of young men, surviving or appearing in the more mature age (cf. p. 23). Finding the key to the *Sonnets* as love-poems in the opposition between physical and non-physical love (most directly and concisely stated in No. 144, p. 26), he successfully clears the poet from the insinuation of moral or sexual perversity.

In his perceptive interpretation of the poetic qualities of the sonnets the author is strongly impressed by Shakespeare's enjoyment of the beauty of pure love, enjoyment which is "fused with the poet's corresponding delight in his creative power... Shakespeare must have lived through his art, and probably never felt more himself than in its exercise. It is no derogation from his sincerity to say that he constantly endeavours, and delights, to say the perfect thing: perfect both in its form and in its appropriateness" (p. 33). Like most modern critics, our author gives more credit to Shakespeare's conscious art than to his natural genius. In this, not in the final high opinion of the greatness of Shakespeare's sonnets, he differs from the Romantic worshippers of Shakespeare (with the exception of Hazlitt, of course). A brief review cannot follow the author's appreciation of so complex a work as the *Sonnets* in detail. His final critical judgment of its immortal value is, however, beyond discussion. "Like all great poetry," he writes, "the *Sonnets* strive towards order and mastery of life; but the poet is impelled towards that reality and sanity by powerful forces of disorder within himself" (illustrated especially in the record of Shakespeare's relationship with his mistress). "Nowadays we take it for granted that in the plays Shakespeare stubbornly seeks some sovereign vision, or delicate point of balance. The *Sonnets* tell us more directly of the depths of violent emotion and conflict, on which he drew for the shaping and reshaping of his dramas" (pp. 41—42).

To pass from the *Sonnets* to Shakespeare's other poems, whether earlier or (probably) later, must obviously appear as an anticlimax. Professor Prince partly escapes it by considering the poems in their supposed chronological order. But in the relative space he allots them in his essay, their lesser importance and slighter artistic value is clearly indicated. None of them cannot but compare unfavourably with Shakespeare's lyric masterpiece in depth of genuine feeling or the inevitability of its concrete expression.

The two narrative poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, considered in the first two chapters of the essay under review (pp. 7—17), may have been written for material "gain" rather than poetic "glory", but their merits as well as defects testify to Shakespeare's deliberate endeavour to endow them with all the beauty and wit of which he was capable. As a result, they are a great deal more "literary" than the *Sonnets*. The fables are drawn from well-known classical myths or legends, the theme of sensuously passionate love causing both pleasure and pain is a commonplace in Renaissance secular poetry, the form and style, the rhetoric and imagery, the digressions, moral discussions, verbal paintings and conceits had all been tried before by other Elizabethans. The element of conformity to approved poetic conventions and models looms large in these first-fruits of young Shakespeare's non-dramatic poetry, and has naturally provoked more or less severe adverse criticism.

An early example of such criticism in its most extreme form is Hazlitt's judgment of *Venus and Lucrece* (in his *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, 1817). "It has been the fashion of late," he says, "to cry up our author's poems, as equal to his plays: this is the desperate cant of modern criticism... The two poems of *Venus and Adonis* and of *Tarquin and Lucrece* appear to us like a couple of ice-houses. They are about as hard, as glittering, and as cold. The author seems all the time to be thinking of his verses, and not of his subject, — not



of what his characters would feel, but of what he shall say; and as it must happen in all such cases, he always puts into their mouths those things which they would be the last to think of, and which it shows the greatest ingenuity in him to find out. The whole is laboured, up-hill work. The poet is perpetually singling out the difficulties of the art to make an exhibition of his strength and skill in wrestling with them . . . A beautiful thought is sure to be lost in an endless commentary upon it . . . Everything is spun out into allegory; and a digression is always preferred to the main story. Sentiment is built up upon plays of words; the hero or heroine feels, not from the impulse of passion, but from the force of dialectics . . ." In many of the *Sonnets*, on the contrary, Hazlitt feels "a mild tone of sentiment, deep, mellow, and sustained, very different from the crudeness of Shakespeare's earlier poems".

Although Professor Prince's essay does not so much as mention Hazlitt, in its assessment of *Venus and Lucrece* it reads in some respects almost as a polemic against the Romantic critic's strictures. Compared with Hazlitt's frankly admitted bias against the two poems, its criticism seems more balanced and objective. Instead of dwelling — as Hazlitt does — preeminently on the "faults" and "flaws" in Shakespeare's treatment of his subject, Professor Prince, however, dismisses them rather lightly and focuses his critical attention on those elements and qualities which he regards as original and praiseworthy. Through this subtle shift of emphasis he imparts to the reader a much more favourable impression of the poems' artistic value than that we receive from a perusal of Hazlitt's critique, or of the poems themselves. His approach is certainly less outspoken than Hazlitt's, but is only apparently less prejudiced.

As fairly characteristic examples of his formally objective attitude two general critical statements about *Lucrece* may be quoted. "In summing up *Lucrece* one is forced continually to qualify praise with reserve. It is a brilliant, uneasy, luxuriant work, and its greatest beauties can hardly compensate for its obvious faults" (p. 15). And again: "*Lucrece*, though a masterpiece of Renaissance rhetoric, is undoubtedly flawed; but it provides invaluable evidence of what Shakespeare could and could not do, at this stage, in tragic poetry" (p. 17). [By the way, the author characterises *Venus and Adonis* as a comedy, *Lucrece* as a tragedy. "In *Lucrece*," he says, "Shakespeare has put on the mask of tragedy, to produce a companion piece and contrast to the comedy of *Venus and Adonis*" (p. 12).]

It is true that his scrutiny reveals or emphasises some of the poetic and dramatic qualities of the two poems which Hazlitt had failed to recognise or had not considered worth his critical notice. Such, among others, as the poet's "personal sense of reality" which he brought to the "frivolous subject" of *Venus* (p. 8), or his "breadth of perception" which enabled him to "enter into the emotional experience" of his characters (p. 11). On the other hand, it is also true, as suggested above, that the numerous "obvious faults" of the poems [such as "a tendency to labour the conceits; to moralize as fully as possible; and to extract the last ounce of emotion from the heroine's sufferings", or "to let the soliloquies spread too far" (p. 12), or a tendency to indulge in "exaggerated and superfluous detail" (p. 15), in "prettiness" (p. 14), etc.] are merely glanced at, with or without explanation or excuse, and do not much affect the author's final critical opinion.

The last two chapters of the essay under review (pp. 42—47) discuss *A Lover's Complaint* (probably a fragment) and *The Phoenix and Turtle*. These two shorter poems are regarded by the author as undoubtedly of Shakespeare's authorship. Both external and internal evidence lends some support to this view which, moreover, is shared by many recent and some earlier Shakespearean scholars. Our author's rather high appreciation of these poems as works of art, may not, however, find equally strong support, though we admit that the value of *A Lover's Complaint* "as a document" (p. 44) has so far been rather neglected. Neither, perhaps, will many readers of the allegorical *Phoenix and Turtle* fully agree with the author's conclusion that "the final impression (of this poem) is wholly Shakespearean: the freshness of language and imagery, the deep and overflowing human feeling" . . . coming "out of the depths of (Shakespeare's) being". The two poems, indeed, in no remarkable way widen our knowledge or deepen our understanding of Shakespeare the man and poet; and should they finally prove not to have been written by him, his reputation would suffer no loss, since it rests exclusively on the plays and sonnets.

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