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Shakespeare's plays as criticized by Englishmen and Americans of the twentieth century

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BOSTON UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL

Thesis

Shakespeare's Plays as Criticized by
Englishmen and Americans
of
the Twentieth Century

Submitted by

Vivian Ruth Card

(A.B., Dalhousie, 1927)

In partial fulfilment of requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

1930

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and Americans of the Twentieth Century.

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Shakespeare's Plays as Criticized by
Englishmen and Americans
of
the Twentieth Century

Introduction¹

Criticism of the seventeenth century.

Although there is sufficient evidence that Shakespeare was rated as a very popular playwright in his own day, it is quite wrong to suppose that he was held in high esteem as a literary artist. I do not mean to imply that he was ignored entirely by all scholarly men for that would be a gross error. It is true that many writers of the earlier seventeenth century have made no mention of his works, but his praises were sung by many. This praise is not such as we should expect, however, for it lacks appreciation of the true greatness of the man as we conceive of him. In fairness to such men as Jonson it must be said that Shakespeare was considered great, but why he was, they did not know. It is always difficult to judge genius from too close a range, and it is not surprising that even a hundred years after his death, men were able only to feel the tremendous power of the mighty Shakespeare but not to understand it.

¹-Introduction is based on Chapters 2,3,4,5,7, of Mr. Charles F. Johnson's book, "Shakespeare and his Critics."

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Never have men of scholarly and literary attainment been so truly puzzled as those of the seventeenth century. Here was a man whom they could not acknowledge as a great artist, because he violated all the known laws of artistic unity: nevertheless, he was great beyond compare in the force, wit and eloquence of his poetry. Even those who censured most harshly could not deny that spark of genius that all their criticism of wrong dramatic construction would not quell, but seemed to make glow only brighter. How could a man who violated every convention of the worshipped unities of time, place and action, made kings talk as ordinary mortals, mixed tragedy and comedy and even went so far as to commit scenes of bloodshed and brutal violence upon the stage have chanced to write such "well-turned and true-filed lines"?¹ It was all beyond their power of comprehension. As a result, the idea gradually took root that Shakespeare must have been inspired. There was no rational way to account for the "sugred dainties"² that came from the "enchancing quill"² of the "silver-tongued"² barbarian, within whom lived the "sweete, wittie soul of Ovid"³. It is not correct to assume that this intense admiration was expressed by all scholars from the time Shakespeare's plays first appeared on the stage. It gradually developed as the cloak of indifference donned

¹-Ben Jonson--"Shakespeare and his Critics" -p;31

²-Johnson - p.36

³-Francis Meres "Palladis Iamnis" - "Shakespeare and his Critics" - p.24

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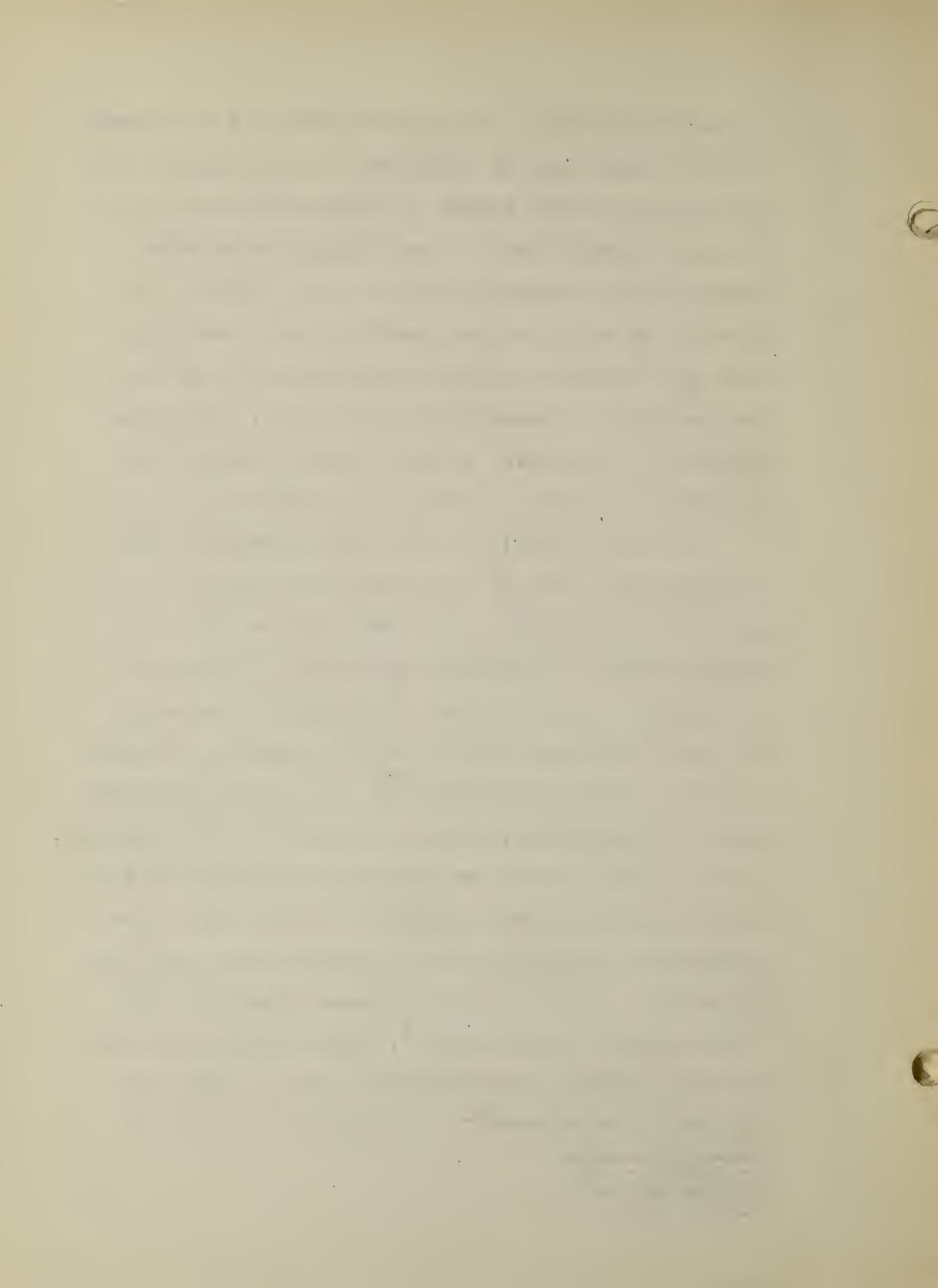
by the professional contemporary world of the dramatist began to wear, and men perceived that the work of this untutored actor was worthy of their consideration and far too honey-tongued to be lightly thrown aside. This unceasing admiration grew on men's minds to so great an extent in another century that a man could ruin his literary reputation by presuming to criticize the works of Shakespeare unfavorably. Englishmen learned to love their "untaught genius" for all his faults, and greatly resented any adverse criticism.

We of the twentieth are likely to underestimate what thoughtful men of the seventeenth century had to say about Shakespeare, and forget that we have three hundred years of experience upon which to base our estimates. It is true that the prevailing tendency was merely to sing his praises in exaggerated language, but there is depth of sincerity in the homage paid him by the honest Jonson, himself an admirer of the classics. Although he asserted that Shakespeare "wanted art"¹, he did not allow his own prejudices to blind him to the greatness of his friend whom he placed first among the dramatists, including those of Greece and Rome, "not of an age, but for all time"². Jonson recognized the literary craftsmanship and natural poetic powers of "my gentle Shakespeare"³. John Milton in the Folio

1-Johnson - p.39

2-Johnson - p.29

3-First Folio



of 1632 adds his praise to the exquisite verse of "Sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy's Child"¹, but like his learned contemporaries, failed to appreciate the nature and quality of a genius which portrayed men and women with true to life attributes. It is interesting to note that one man, whose name we do not know, did recognize this quality in Shakespeare's Plays. He found in him "A stage, ample and true with life, voice, action, age"². This seed of real dramatic criticism lay dormant until the time of Coleridge.

Critics of the Restoration period, like those of the first half of the century, continued to regard Shakespeare as lacking in literary art. The Classic dramatic model, and also the French which was based upon it, dominated, and so keenly were Shakespeare's deficiencies of construction felt by his admirers, that they attempted to remodel his plays after the style of the ancients, an experiment which proved unsuccessful. The brilliant barbarian whose power belonged to some mysterious force without him (the heresy of the day) was not improved by having "the monstrous fine things cut out and reset in regular frame"³.

There was one man in Restoration times who represented all this worship of the ancients. Dryden, the literary dictator of his day, admired and modelled his

1-First Folio

2-I.M.S. Folio of 1632

3-Johnson - "Shakespeare and his Critics" - p.72

The first part of the document discusses the general principles of the project. It outlines the objectives and the scope of the work. The second part describes the methodology used in the study. This includes the data collection methods and the analysis techniques. The third part presents the results of the study. These are discussed in the context of the research objectives. The final part concludes the document and provides recommendations for future research.

2. Methodology

The methodology section details the approach taken for the research. It covers the selection of participants, the design of the study, and the procedures for data collection and analysis. The study was conducted over a period of six months. Data was collected through a series of interviews and focus groups. The analysis was performed using a thematic analysis approach. This allowed for the identification of key themes and patterns in the data. The results of the analysis are presented in the following section.

The results of the study show that there are several key factors that influence the success of the project. These include the quality of the data, the expertise of the researchers, and the support of the organization. The study also identified several challenges that were encountered during the research process. These were related to the complexity of the data and the time constraints. The findings of the study have several implications for practice. They suggest that organizations should invest in high-quality data and provide adequate training and support for their researchers. The study also highlights the importance of ongoing communication and collaboration between researchers and the organization.

own plays on the classics but he felt that, great as they were, there were others equally great in his own country. That he said of Shakespeare that he was to an Englishman what Aechylus was to the Athenians, is evidence of the great esteem in which he held him. Although Dryden felt and comprehended the supremacy of Shakespeare's genius, he was not able to rise entirely above the conventions of his age and resist the temptation of improving him by rewriting the plays according to his own dramatic ideal. But this did not lessen his appreciation of "the man who of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul"¹.

Dryden also defends Shakespeare from that belief that an unschooled man could not have written plays of so great literary value. He says "he (Shakespeare) was unusually learned: he needed not the spectacles of books to read nature: he looked inward and found her there"¹. That he was not eulogizing to gain reputation as an admirer is self-evident, for he continues "I cannot say he is everywhere alike"¹. Nevertheless, Dryden was not entirely free of the heresy of his day, for in speaking of Shakespeare's representations of nature, he says "he drew them not laboriously, but luckily"¹, as though some magical force were at work in the brain of the genius. How far beyond his age would Dryden have been had he

1-Johnson - "Shakespeare and His Critics" - p.72

2-Johnson - p.61

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applied this defense of Shakespeare's learning to a defense of his characters, instead of attributing to him an understanding of the passions (which the seventeenth century took for granted were distinct parts of the character)!¹

Dryden, in attributing to Shakespeare a universal mind and comprehensive soul, was not expressing the popular conceptions of his time. We must turn to Rymer, the champion of regular criticism, to see that intellectual men, even one hundred years after the production of the plays, misunderstood them. With the classical tragedy in mind, he says of Shakespeare, "In tragedy he appears quite out of his element. His brains are turned for he raves and rambles without any coherence, any spark of reason"². Possibly he was thinking of Othello, "a bloody farce without salt or flavor"². His characters violate all claim to "common-sense"². Who ever heard of a soldier like Iago "false and insinuating" instead of frank and plain-dealing?"² asked Mr. Rymer. Although he was rebuked by Dennis and Gildon, that an intellectual man could so senselessly abuse the plays, is evidence that Shakespeare, at the end of the seventeenth century was falsely appraised. It required another century before reverence for the ancients grew weak enough for men to turn their attention from the literary excellence of the classics to a literary interpretation

1-Johnson - "Shakespeare and His Critics" - p.65
2-Johnson - p.67-68

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of their own English writer.

Criticism of the eighteenth century.

How easy it is for us twentieth century models of mankind to scoff at the eighteenth century critics and say "You blocks, you stones, you worse than senseless things." Your predecessors have taught you to say "We admire Shakespeare, with all his faults", and you think to do him greater homage and add, "His fame is everlasting: we shall excuse his ignorance for he was untaught." We cannot overlook the fact that these eighteenth century men have left us proof of their regard and placed Shakespeare in a new position in the world of literature. Contemporary students generally ignored Shakespeare, Restoration thought to improve him and rewrote the plays in 'regular form', but that men like Rowe, Pope, Theobald took upon themselves the difficult task of compiling an edition of the plays is a silent monument to their perception of the greatness of his genius. Here were men of highest intellect, devoting much of their time to editing the works of a writer, whose conception of literature and theory of life were quite foreign to their own. No modern critic could do more to show an appreciation of the genius of Shakespeare.

Even in this early part of the century, we cannot

help feeling, that although the classics were part of their creed, men were not so sure that Shakespeare's ignorance of them detracted from his greatness. It had not occurred to them as yet that there could be two distinct forms of art, both equally great; but that idea was forming in their minds, although they did not quite know how to express themselves; and besides, convention was too strong to allow it expression. Pope speaks of Shakespeare as "a majestic piece of Gothic architecture compared with a neat modern building". He might have added, 'Both are works of art, equally great in their own way'. A quotation from Mr. Rowe, "It is not in this province of the drama that the strength and mastery of Shakespeare lay, so I shall not undertake to point out his several faults"¹, strengthens our conviction that these learned gentlemen of the early eighteenth century revered Shakespeare no less than the classics. The only difference is that convention expected them to worship the ancients outwardly, their own instincts demanded that they worship Shakespeare as an equal of the former, in the only way then possible, that is by deeds. I do not mean to imply that this attitude was conscious, for the thought, if it existed at all, lay too deeply buried beneath conventional beliefs for them to even suspect its presence, themselves.

¹-Johnson - "Shakespeare and his Critics" - p.86

The conviction that the critics thought less of "Shakespeare's faults" than their conventional minds would allow (in the first part of the century) is strengthened by the words of Dr. Johnson, "a conservative classicist",¹ some years later. Although in his day, the classics had lost a little of their hold over men's minds, he is almost frightened by his own temerity in defending Shakespeare from the attack of voltaire at the expense of the beloved ancients' reputation. That is, a confession of the English genius' greatness over that of the ancients' is forced from the mouth of Johnson. Without provocation, undoubtedly, he would have continued to speak of the greatness of Shakespeare "notwithstanding his defects"².

Now that Johnson had paved the way, it was easy to find good arguments to sustain the favorable position which that honest critic had claimed for Shakespeare. At the end of the century, when regard for the classics had gradually decreased more and more, we find writers anxious to outdo Johnson's defense. The tendency to excuse Shakespeare on the grounds of the unpolished character of his age³ shows that the belief that he "lacked art" still survived, but we have no doubt that, at the end of the century, writers were willing to concede "great artistic superiority for the Englishman over Aeschylus"³, a statement Pope would have considered

1-Johnson - "Shakespeare and his Critics" - p.122

2-Pope - Johnson "Shakespeare and His Critics" - p.90

3-Mrs. Montague - Johnson - p.144

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heresy, and Johnson himself refused to acknowledge as "true criticism"¹.

Criticism of the nineteenth century.

It remained for the nineteenth century writers to change the form of Shakesperian criticism. It would be incorrect to assume that all classical students suddenly saw the error of their ways and proceeded to mend them. But there was a new spirit gradually working in literary criticism, traces of which are to be found even in the eighteenth century.² This Romanticism, which regarded literature as a manifestation of the human spirit, had much in common with Elizabethan drama. Shakespeare is no longer judged by classical rules, but on his own merits as a dramatist and poet. Coleridge is representative of this new method of appraisal. He ceased to regard the characters as merely stage figures³, but felt them to be the result of creative power, putting together the elements of human nature in a new combination. More than that, Coleridge was the first to appreciate Shakespeare's female characters as parcels of human nature with all the "elements of womanhood"⁴. The Romanticist judged

1-According to Boswell - Johnson "Shakespeare and His Critics" - p.144

2-The poet Gray, though an academic scholar, was a romantic poet. ("Shakespeare and His Critics" - p.166)

3-Morgann - "Essay on Character of Falstaff (1777) was the only man before 19th century to appreciate the characters as more than stage figures.

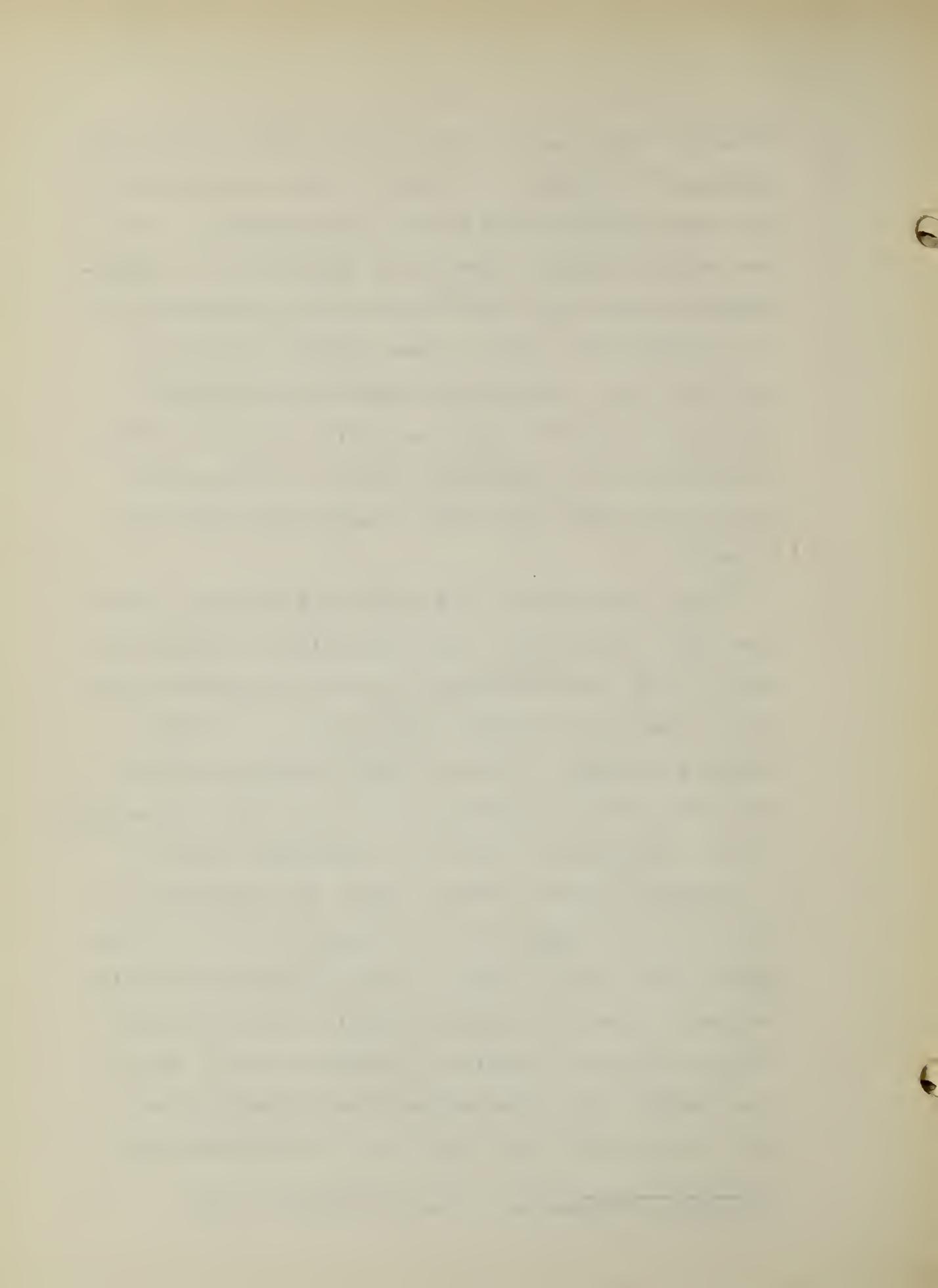
4-Johnson - p. 170

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from the heart, and although he was likely to allow his feelings to run away with him at times, he was capable of really understanding the art of Shakespeare. This new school produced libraries of descriptions of Shakespeare's people and created the all but universal habit of speaking about them in terms usually reserved for actual people. Charles Lamb held the characters in so great esteem that he, an excellent critic of acting, protested that no actor was capable of interpreting Lear, for he said "The Lear of Shakespeare cannot be acted".¹

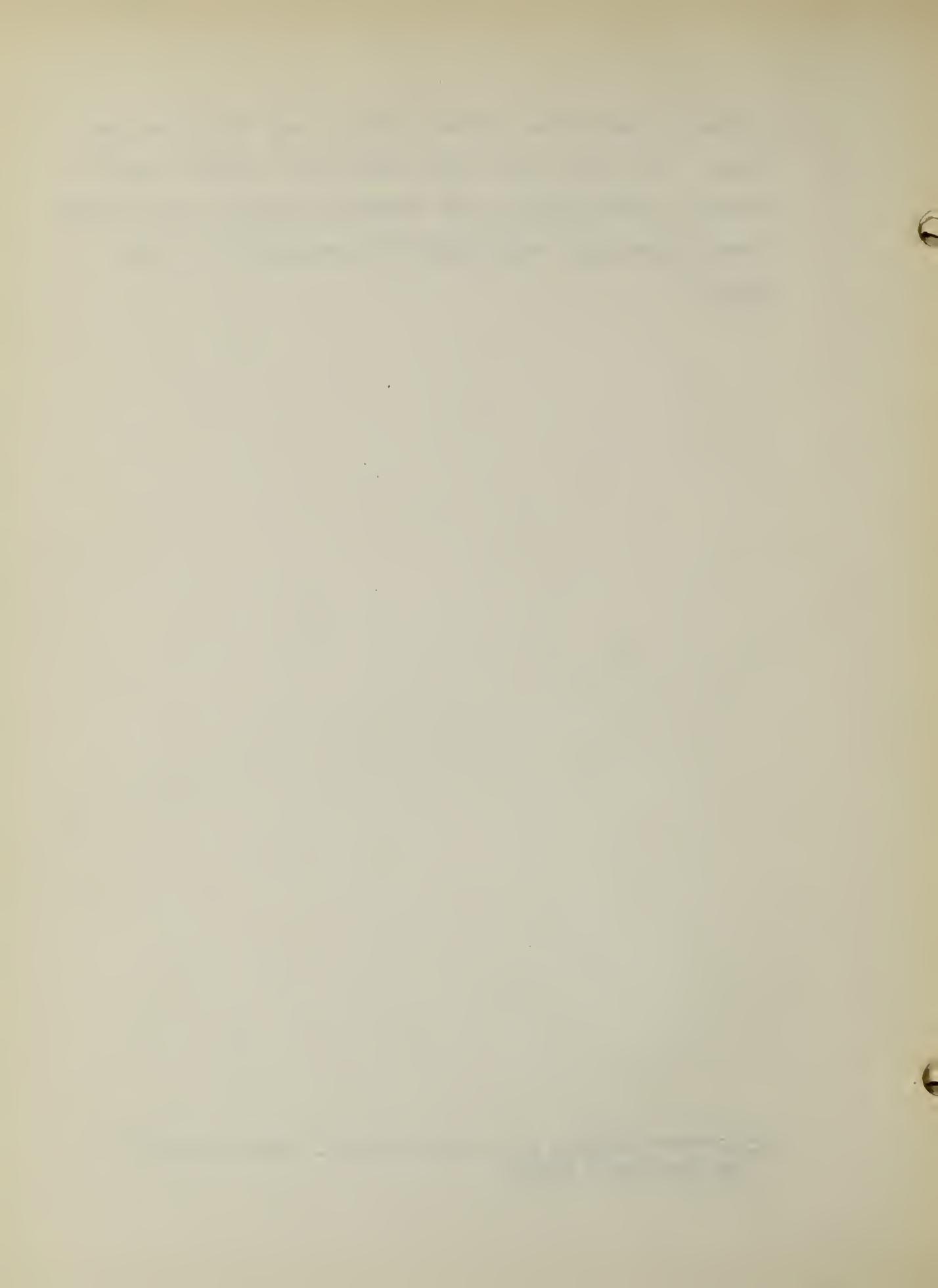
The Romanticists did not overlook the great poetic qualities of the plays. William Hazlitt, though not so great a scholar as Coleridge nor Lamb, possessed an unerring instinct for poetic appreciation. In Shakespeare's passages it was the verbal harmony, the wit and eloquence that appealed to him more than the settings. He was particularly fond of the poetry and humor in "A Midsummer Night's Dream", and it is interesting to note that he disapproved of a stage production of this play as Lamb did of "Lear". That the early nineteenth century literary men had no dramatic ability may well account for this objection to Shakespeare as a man of the theatre. That they appreciated Shakespeare as a poet of high order and understood his characters was

¹-Johnson - "Shakespeare and His Critics" p.186



a great advance over the attitude of the preceding century. It is true that their admiration blinded them to faults in the plays but the important thing is that these Romanticists knew why Shakespeare was great in their sight.¹

¹-The 19th century also produced many new editions of Shakespeare's plays.



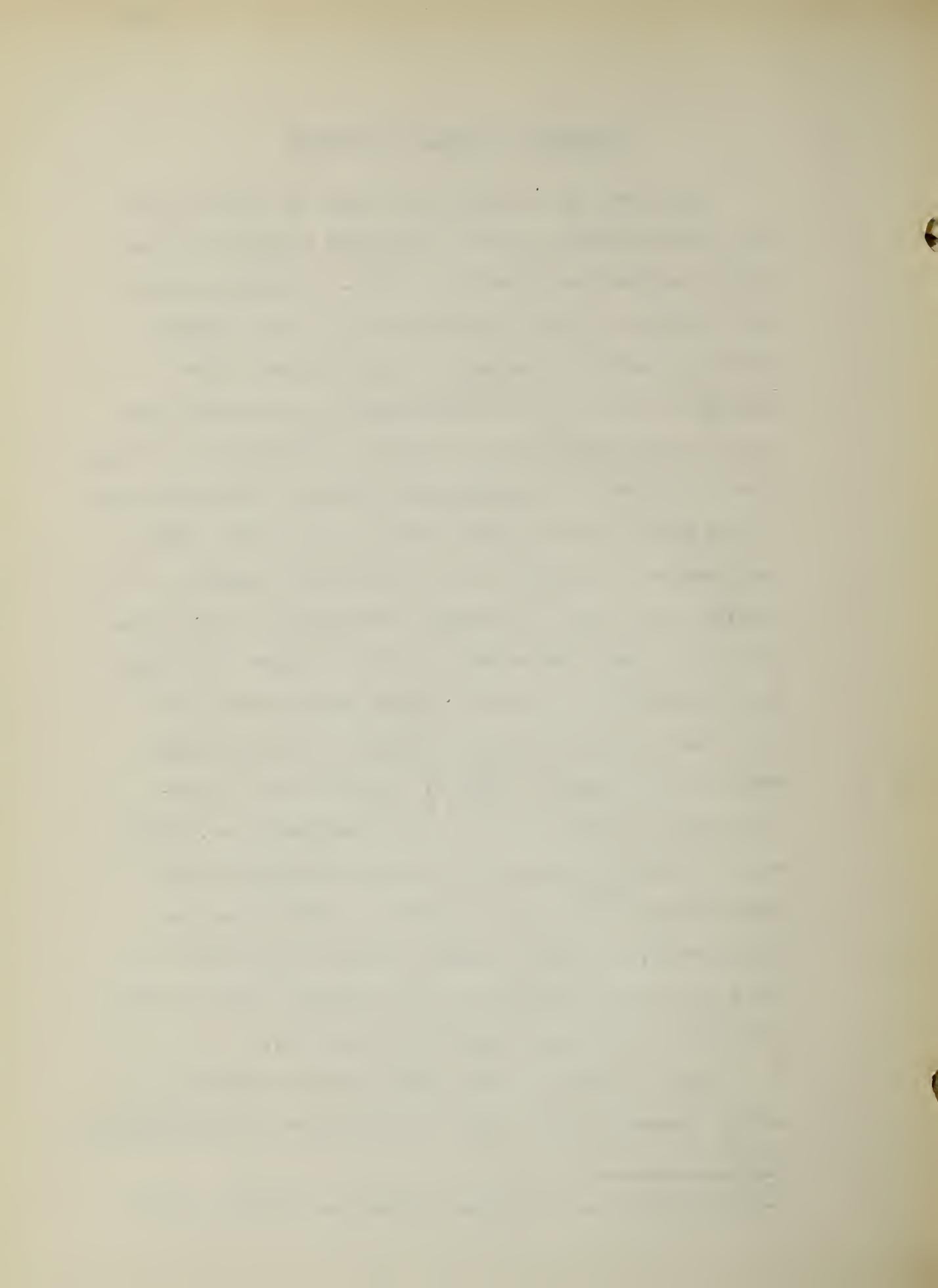
Twentieth Century Criticism

The close of the nineteenth and the dawn of the twentieth century has been marked by a spirit of reaction against the Romantic school. Coleridge broke with opinions of the classicists and judged Shakespeare on merits of which we today approve. Our quarrel is not with the excellent criticisms the men early in the last century advanced, but with this thing, commonly known as Shakespearean worship, which has been in the air since the publication of the first Folio,¹ and reached its zenith in the nineteenth century. The present era, too, is somewhat susceptible to this idea that the mighty Shakespeare "could not err", but leading literary men, like Mr. George Bernard Shaw, who love Shakespeare and acknowledge him to be a mighty genius, are pained to hear him praised for his deficiencies and not for his true greatness. Mr. Shaw, who is rated as one of the greatest dramatists of modern times,² has been accused of underestimating Shakespeare. On the contrary, he is so anxious to do his predecessor justice that his remarks are very outspoken and therefore often misinterpreted.

Like the Romanticists, the twentieth century is deeply concerned with the interpretation of Shakespeare's

1-1623

2-An introduction to Drama (Hubbell and Beaty) p.527



characters. Coleridge discovered that the female characters possessed qualities of greatness comparable to those of the heroes. We have gone a step further and are concerned with all of Shakespeare's world, finding that the mighty genius has not merely created a group of heroic men and women, but, more than that, has depicted humanity in every phase of life with equal skill. Shakespeare's characters are Elizabethan in customs and manners, from Hamlet to the most lowly serving-man, but in their inherent nature, they are types of humanity as true for one age as another.

Passing from the characters themselves to their medium of expression, the twentieth century critics offer praise well marked with thought. In this realm, Shakespeare had been more fairly judged throughout the ages. Poets of highest rank from Milton to Swinburne have appreciated the poetic quality of Shakespeare's work. Mr. Shaw speaks often and in glowing terms of the genius of a man who can clothe in the music of words the "hollowest platitude"¹ and "most blackguardy repartee"¹.

The re-action against the Romantic School has opened the eyes of critics to another phase of Shakespeare's genius which has been poorly appreciated since his own day. Because he wrote for a stage which

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has long since ceased to exist, it has been a common error to suppose that, as a playwright, Shakespeare did not rank highly. The Restoration critics attempted to remodel the plays after their conception of perfection, which was based on the classical formula. After them, and down to very recent times, producers have tried to 'improve' the structure, that the plays might be adapted to modern stage conditions. It was not until interest was aroused by studying the Elizabethan stage that the truth came to light that Shakespeare possessed infinite skill in adapting his plays to the stage, as he knew it. That they have lent themselves as fluently as they have to adverse producing facilities, is a mark of their greatness. The twentieth century is an age skilled in stage-craft, and just how far Shakespeare will be producible under the best conditions that man has ever yet devised, will be a true test of Shakespeare's skill as a man of the theatre. The early nineteenth century, an age of actors rather than dramatists, felt that the plays were not for production. The modern era tends to favor the playwright and hopes to grant him every facility for the true interpretation of his plays.

The twentieth century is concerned with every phase of Shakespeare. The publication of the text with emendations and explanatory footnotes is still going on.

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Although it is the general belief that we know all the biographical facts that can be ascertained, research has been carried on in this field in recent years in the hope of finding out something that would throw a new light on the life of him about whom we know so little. Then, there is the question of authentic authorship out of which has grown the Baconian controversy, to say nothing of the studious inquiries into the grammar, pronunciation, metrics and vocabulary of Elizabethan times. Scholarship and criticism have become merged in the re-action from the purely interpretative criticism of Coleridge to the historical criticism of today. The latter is of growing importance as we feel that a real appreciation of Shakespeare requires a knowledge of the conditions under which he worked. This has resulted in critics becoming more concerned with Shakespeare as "a dramatist rather than as a philosopher and personality"¹. The modern American and English critic is not satisfied with that praise which makes Shakespeare's genius so obscure that the good and bad rank equally high.

Shakespearean Skeptics

"Every aspect of the man and his works has been so thoroughly discussed and re-discussed that it sometimes seems that not only the subject but the world at

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large had been exhausted"¹. But the critics have not done with him yet. Shakespearean controversy is perhaps more alive today than it has ever been, due to the "revolutionary" ideas which are being advanced by some of the best minds of our time. Because this vigorous reaction has set in against the traditional praise, which could see no wrong in the mighty Shakespeare, it does not follow that men have suddenly discovered that the older views are all wrong and that Shakespeare is not a genius after all. On the contrary, it is an attempt to discover the true worth of the greatest dramatist of all time and to show wherein he is truly great.

An Introduction to Shakespeare's Characters.

The characters of Shakespeare "have stood four-square to the winds of time, although the waves of criticism have beat perpetually about their base"². There is no need to question why, for we have only to read and re-read the plays of "the immortal genius" to know that his people never disappoint us, that there is more in them than we thought; for "they are types of humanity as true for one age as another"³. Although their environment is strange to us, we still feel that they are mortals with feelings and desires much the same as ours.

1-L.G.Abbott Outlook December 30, 1925
 2-E.K.Chambers Annual Shakespearean Lecture 1924
 3-G.P.Baker "Shakespeare as a Dramatist" p.343

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To profess that we thoroughly understand the characters is only to pretend. They, like our friends, are only revealed to us in part, as they come within the range of our own personal experience. There are those whom we understand more fully than others, just as we understand one person better than we do another. As years go by, how often do we lose interest in a friend of former days whose scheme of life has become quite detached from our own. But Shakespeare's men and women wear well. Upon first meeting, some of them may seem just casual acquaintances, but after we have lived longer, they come to have deeper significance for us, and the more we cultivate them, the more human they seem.

Take Hamlet, for example. This character holds the interest of young and old because his is not the tragedy of "an individual but of any individual"¹. Shakespeare has put us (if not our situations) on the stage, and, as human beings, we never lose interest in what pertains in any way to ourselves. We all are faced with problems in life, just as Hamlet, and as individuals trying to work out our own salvation, we have a common bond with our fellow-beings and Hamlet is a fellow-being. It matters not that his "trappings" are Elizabethan any more than that people in our own age

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have customs and an outlook on life different from our own. The thing that makes us all one is the human nature breathed into us by our creator, our power of feeling love, hate, jealousy, sorrow, pain and joy. In proportion as our conditions of life have called the passions into play are we able to understand others who have felt as we have. As we mingle with the people of Shakespeare's world, we sympathize with them in their joys and pains in a greater or less degree in accordance with what life has already taught us. We read the riddle of motive and personality in Hamlet as we are capable. Although at times he may act in a manner which we know we should not have, we feel that he is following the instincts of his inward nature and is acting in the only way that a man of his particular makeup could have. In a word, he is real and not merely acting a part thrust upon him by his creator. His condition enlists our sympathy, for we see in him a disillusioned man, unable to cope with the hardships life has thrust upon him. As he pours forth his inmost thoughts we feel we are peering into the very depths of a troubled and heart-sick soul. We cannot resist the human appeal of one whose sufferings are so true to life.

Of necessity, the personality of a character will

not be the same for all of us. We all feel the human touch of a Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, but the impression will not be identical on any two minds. As Professor Kittredge says, "There will be as many Hamlets as there are readers and spectators"¹. If we all were impressed alike it would be safe to say that Shakespeare had not created a personality but a mere type of man, full of a particular humor (in the Jonsonian sense). His characters would be nothing but walking formulae, which would never for over three hundred years have held the attention of the young and old, of diverse races and decades. There must be something in them when the whole of humanity finds them striking a note, here and there, which blends in perfect harmony. Although we cannot follow Shakespeare as he plays upon the harp of life, this common note is sufficient to enable us to enjoy his creations, and say with Mr. Clutton-Brock², "Though their behavior may seem to us unintelligible, we are aesthetically convinced by it. As they act, we feel so they would act; and that is all we have a right to expect of the dramatist"³.

1-Professor Kittredge - Lecture on Shakespeare - 1916

2-Mr. Clutton-Brock - has psycho-analysed Hamlet
Contemporary Review - March 1924

3-Mr. Clutton-Brock - Sewanee Review - 1927

Skeptical Criticism of Certain Characters.

The school of skeptical criticism or historical criticism, as it is sometimes called, disagrees with Mr. Clutton-Brock and others of his opinion in this, "As they act, we feel so they would act". They cannot reconcile the outward actions of the characters with their conception of them, as men and women. They call them "psychologically inconsistent"¹, in that the relationship of the characters to the action of the play is irreconcilable.

For example, a man of Hamlet's type would not act as Shakespeare has made him act. He would not have killed Polonius in cold blood, would have shown mercy to Rozencrantz and Guildenstern, and have been more gallant toward Ophelia. If he could kill Polonius, why could he not murder the king, which action would have been justified? The skeptics have an explanation for these inconsistencies which sounds very plausible. Mr. J. M. Robertson says, "Shakespeare retained all the archaic machinery (of an old Hamlet) while transfiguring all the characters. The ultimate fact is that he could not make a psychological or otherwise consistent play out of a plot which retained a strictly barbaric action, while the hero was transformed into a super-subtle Elizabethan"². In

¹-Sewanee Review - January 1927

²-North American Review - March '22. (George B. Shaw upholds the same opinion in his article in Harper's Magazine - May 1924)

accordance with the old plot, Hamlet must do certain things, although they are not in keeping with the new character created by Shakespeare. The old play was a revenge play, and the hero had to avenge a father's death. The king was so strongly armed that he could not succeed, so he feigned madness and thus eluded the guards. Shakespeare's Hamlet is not prevented from gaining vengeance by external barriers, but by internal struggle. His noble mind and sensitive nature recoil against bloody deeds, but he must kill. Moreover, he must feign madness, in accordance with the plot. Now we know why Hamlet turned mad and treated Ophelia so shamefully and why he finally killed Claudius. Elizabethan convention will explain the rest. Polonius, Rozencrantz, and Guildenstern must leave this life to satisfy the love of bloodshed and revenge of the audience. It is thus that Shakespeare ruins the artistic unity of his plays.

Mr. J. C. Squires¹ takes upon himself the task of defending Hamlet from the criticism of inconsistency. He defies the skeptics to find much that clashes with the hero and his pessimism and introspection. Is it so easy to define the character of our friends, for example, that we can reduce him to a fixed and settled principle? The brooding Hamlet is not intrinsically

incompatible with Hamlet, the good soldier, and master of fencing who lunges at Polonius through the arras, leaps wildly into Ophelia's grave, sends his warders to death and boards a pirate ship single-handed. It is one thing to attack a pirate when you see one or to pink an eavesdropper; but even a man constitutionally fearless, and, when issues are clear, might well recoil from murdering an uncle in cold-blood. Consider the situation, personally. It is lack of imagination that causes all this discussion as to whether Hamlet is sane or not. "Do the critics know what a high strung man is or what horror is?"¹ Is not Hamlet too human for their appraisal? Hamlet shams lunacy with Polonius, and is brutal to Ophelia. Have we not all, when overwrought spoken cruelly to a loved one? Moreover, Hamlet is in doubt as to the sincerity of her love. Suppose ourselves in his place--a mother married to our father's murderer, whom we must kill for vengeance. Moreover, we are racked by thoughts of all the evil in the world, and the impossibility of abolishing a crime or of quieting pain by revenge. If we knew we had to seek revenge, would we not perhaps during sleepless nights be liable to excesses of temper and distracted bitter talk? Hamlet is not understood, because he is "of all men too human"²,

¹-Living Age December 13, 1919

²-Ernest Boyd - "Literary Blasphemies" - p. 42

and "hereby hangs a tale". The historical critics forget that they are dissecting a character with human qualities, which, like a real person cannot be interpreted so inclusively that all actions may be fully accounted for like those of a mechanical man.

The skeptics have not done Hamlet so great harm as may at first appear. After they have carefully accounted for the "inconsistencies", between Shakespeare's character and his deeds, they are willing to concede that Hamlet is "a son of nature, full of love and tenderness, grief and melancholy, hate, scorn, rage, despair, humor and irony, scepticism and fear"¹. I wonder just how Mr. Stoll would expect a person to act whose nature was stirred to its very depths by all the emotions he himself has attributed to Hamlet? It is so easy for one who has not experienced another's pangs of grief to offer good advice, and criticize the sufferer for allowing his feelings to overshadow his better judgment.

Mr. Bradley whose "Shakespearean criticism" combines the enthusiasm of the romanticists with the common sense of the scientific method²" and who does not agree with the skeptics, has attributed Hamlet's irresolution to a state of mind quite abnormal and induced by special circumstances--"a state of profound melancholy"². He goes on to say that this melancholy is perfectly

¹-Professor Stoll - "Shakespeare's Studies" - p.142

²-Johnson "Shakespeare and His Critics" - p.321

consistent with "that incessant dissection of the task assigned". But this does not answer the query of the skeptics, who wonder that Hamlet could kill wholesale at certain times and even murder his uncle, finally, but could not bring himself to gain revenge when time was most opportune. Although Shakespeare was quite ignorant of what we term psychology, with which statement the skeptics will most readily agree, he has shown a most keen insight into the workings of the human mind (and psychologists only nope to explain it) in not permitting Hamlet to murder according to the conventional code.

We have only to look, I think, at the Hamlet Shakespeare created to test the truth of Professor Bradley's statement. We behold a man whose inherent nature is at variance with everything around him, a man whose fine sensibilities forbid him to close his eyes to the corruptness of those whom he has loved and honored from his childhood, a man who sees his most cherished ideals fallen in the dust. We feel that here we have witnessed a tragedy of life, the tragedy of one, in the flower of his manhood, suddenly cut off from his ideal world (and we all have ideals in life) and unable to adjust himself to things as they are. A practical man of affairs would have removed the obstacle and started life anew,

but not so with Hamlet. Removing the evil would not have restored his broken ideals. When his over-cultivated imagination is roused to fever heat by the appearance of the ghost, he thinks to cure the evil of the times, but because he does not act while the fit is on him, his passion subsides and his intellectual powers gain ascendancy. He cannot resist, in his calmer mood, to take time for thought. To think a thing over has been the habit of a life-time, and the habit is not easily broken in a man of Hamlet's temperament. "The intellectual element outweighs the practical"¹ in his nature, and herein lies a tragedy of life, "the impotence of the over-cultivated imagination and over-subtilized reasoning power to meet the call of every day life for practical efficiency"². In a world of action, speculative intellect is ineffective for the course of events rolls ever on and on, waiting for no man's indecision. While Hamlet's intellect was "enchanting itself in the discovery of obstacles to avoid the fatal necessity for action"¹ the world at large was contriving against him and fashioning a plan to annihilate him from the scheme of things.

The skeptics do not stop at Hamlet. Professor E. E. Stoll³, a foremost American scholar, believes the

¹-E.K.Chamber^s - "Shakespeare:A Survey" - p.187
²-E.K.Chamber^s - "Shakespeare:A Survey" - p.182
³-University of Minnesota Studies - 1915

same is true of Othello. He compares the words of the man of the free and open nature 'one not easily jealous', (within one scene)--"Perdition catch my soul, but I do love thee". After Iago has planted the seed of suspicion and told of the lost handkerchief, the same Othello says, "I'll tear her all to pieces". Mr. Stoll explains this inconsistency thus: "Jealousy is not born and bred in the hero, but through immemorial convention it is instilled into his soul by a villain's wiles"¹. Mr. Stoll goes on to defend his criticism. Orthodox critics who agree that Othello's one weakness was trustfulness and, that by this alone, he fell before the compelling arts of Iago, must logically say that Othello's trust in Iago argues suspicion toward Desdemona, whom Othello should have trusted before Iago. In the first two hundred and fifty lines, Iago gives no proof to bear out his story in the temptation scene (his arts were not so compelling); then he tells his story of Cassio's dream. Othello's normal re-action would be "Sir, this is my wife", and the tragedy would have ended.

Mr. Bernard Shaw² defends the skeptics' criticism of Othello. "The jealousy is purely melodramatic. The part tested by the brain is ridiculous; tested by the ear is sublime"³. This brings to my mind a question of Mr. Squire's in his defense of Hamlet, "Do the

1-University of Minnesota Studies - 1915

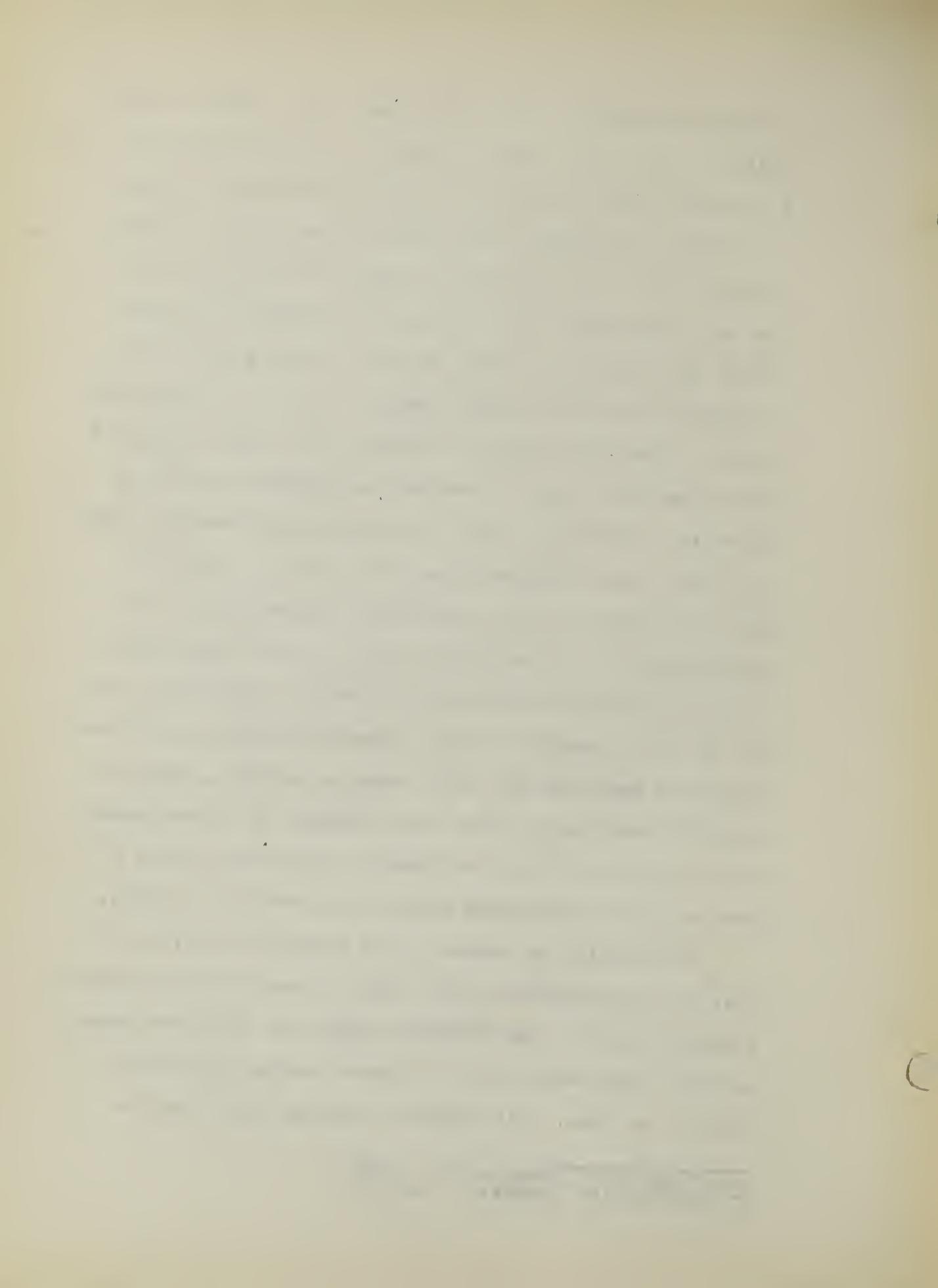
2-Shakespeare's Sceptics - North American - March 1922

3-Shakespeare's Sceptics - North American - March 1922

critics know what a high strung man is?¹ Again, do the critics know what a jealous man is? Othello may be of a free and open nature, but jealousy can make a maniac of any man: he cannot be "tested by the brain." There is no accounting for a jealous man's actions, and, in the case of Othello, he, being of a different nationality from his wife, would be more easily aroused by a suspicion that she might prefer a man of her own kind to him. Jealousy knows no reason, and to say Othello's nature was free from it because he showed no previous signs is a debatable point. Man does not show any passion until some occasion gives rise to it. We do not know the depths of our passionate natures until circumstances in life call forth this or that particular feeling, and how often we are ourselves surprised that we can be so deeply stirred, under favorable conditions. Othello's jealousy may have remained dormant, and the skeptics have had to base their charge of inconsistency upon some other trait in Othello's character which a new set of circumstances might have brought to light.

In speaking of Macbeth, the historical critics insist that Shakespeare went "wide of the strictly psychological mark."² The character says one thing and means another, and feels what his inmost nature would forbid him to feel. His apparent motive, ambition, is

1-Living Age - December 13, 1919
2-"Shakespeare Studies" - p. 100



not kept before us, for when he dwells on the murder, in his mind's eye, he sees the dagger and not the diadem. Nor does Shakespeare's Macbeth find any justification for his deed. Mr. Stoll¹ says that he (Macbeth) is psychologically - or rather unpsychologically - reduced to lowest terms.

To explain Shakespeare's character, the skeptics go back to the old sources and find buried in them, a Macbeth of a different type, with motives for killing which are more sufficient and plausible than those given in the play of Shakespeare. In like manner, they have discovered that Don John and Margaret in "Much Ado about Nothing", and Iago and Emilia in "Othello", and Lear, who divides his kingdom among his daughters, had reasons for so doing which Shakespeare has not made clear. To this, they attribute many of the so-called inconsistencies between the characters and their actions. The mighty Shakespeare could not have done this unwittingly. It may be he wished to simplify matters, or perchance, it was to gain vividness by contrast between character and action and thereby appeal to his audience with its insatiable appetite for sensationalism; or it may have been that lack of time prevented him from reconciling the actions of the character to their nature.²

Shakespeare's skeptics³ point out that Macbeth

1-"Shakespeare Studies" - p.96

2-Mr. Stoll - "Shakespeare Studies" - p.142

3-North American - March 1922

in the old story, is a blunt warrior, without the moral imagination or conscience which Shakespeare has woven in to his character. The old Macbeth could wallow in bloodshed without disturbing our sense of propriety. But the Macbeth which Shakespeare has created is far superior to the original and one whose nature would not allow him to act in the conventional manner that the master has required.

The historical critics weaken their own arguments by admitting that, despite his conventionalism, Macbeth has a semblance of reality. They admit that Shakespeare has created a personality which so greatly occupies the mind of the spectator that "the actions follow so unquestionable realities"¹, although the character seems far superior to his actions. All this, it seems to me, is but another way of saying that Shakespeare was an Elizabethan in his use of plot and technique (a generally accepted fact), but that his genius broke the bonds of conventionalism in the portrayal of a character far superior to the Elizabethan type, by reason of the "plastic life-giving touch" of the artist's hand.²

Mr. R. W. Babcock³ attacks the skeptics through Mr. Stoll. He contends that the latter has turned his back upon his own dramatic convention in speaking of Shylock. Mr. Stoll explains for us the inconsistencies

¹-Mr. Bridges - "Shakespeare's Studies" p.115

²-Mr. Stoll - "Shakespeare's Studies" p.115

³-Sewanee Review - January 1927

of this character, a conventional comic villain of Elizabethan England, and goes on to say, "The Jewishness of Shylock is kept before us but Shakespeare adds a cosy individuality beyond the satire scheme (the Jews were hated at this time). Thus, the logic of characterization is disturbed but the reality of it is heightened"¹. Moreover he adds, "By sheer potency of art, Othello, Iago, Desdemona and Emilia maintain throughout their spiritual vicissitudes their individual tone. Their passions ever speak true. In the rhyme, accent, intonation, choice of words or figures there is often something that stamps them, that faculty which lends form to a statue, a picture or even a song"¹. Mr. Babcock feels that any further remarks are unnecessary -- Shakespeare has been exonerated, artistically. It is true that the arguments of the skeptics would be most convincing if we were to begin tearing the characters of Shakespeare "out of the picture on the floor",² and dissecting them psychologically, casting aside all thought of their general aesthetic perfection as art. Mr. J. M. Robertson is criticised for this very thing. "He is a fair advocate, but lacks what cannot be omitted in appreciating Shakespeare--the faculty of experiencing a work of art"³.

Shakespeare has performed his task so well and

¹-Sewanee Review - January 1927

²-Babcock - University of Minnesota Studies - 1915

³-Mr. H. J. M. - Nation 1922

made his people so human that the consistency of their actions in relation to their character is not comprehensible to those who would judge from the brain and not the heart; and thereby, class him with his contemporaries as a dramatist who did not rise above Elizabethan conventions. In all fairness to the new school let it be said that they do not propose to belittle Shakespeare but strive to open the eyes of the people to the fact that he is a human with his faults, not a god to be worshipped. Mr. Babcock¹ suggests that the scholarly achievement of Mr. Stoll and his knowledge of Elizabethan stage conventions might be well utilized to show wherein Shakespeare is an Elizabethan, a man of his own time. Most aptly have the skeptics pointed out, in their attempts to make the characters historical, wherein Shakespeare does not rise above the customs of his day.

Having satisfied themselves that Shakespeare's genius was subordinate to the imposing influence of Elizabethan conventions,--for they excuse the inconsistencies "by a fundamental historical explanation",² the skeptics do not trouble to make a through survey of Shakespeare's characters. They concern themselves only with the best known figures, namely the heroes of tragedy. This is to be expected, for their purpose

1-"Shakespeare's Sceptics North American - March 3, 1922
2-Babcock "University of Minnesota Studies" No.2 - 1915

is to eradicate Shakespearean worship by showing that there are faults in the plays, which faults people admired along with the really admirable qualities. But, in assuming that Shakespeare did not understand human nature, (although Mr. E. E. Stoll¹ admits that the characters have a sense of reality, he is questioning Shakespeare's understanding of the human mind when he accuses him of making them act inconsistently, which accusation is also made by Mr. G. B. Shaw²), the skeptics remind Mr. Palmer³ of Dryden and Garrick, who believed that he did not know his business as a playwright. He, (Mr. Palmer) pleads with them to take warning from Dryden, who would have "refined Shakespeare's language" and Garrick, who cut the texts and omitted characters, yet would "lose no drop of that immortal man."³ It would seem that the historical critics are running the grave danger of defeating their own purpose by finding too much fault with Shakespeare in respect to his people, and becoming so interested in this phase of their work that they "fall a victim to the fascination of their own critical system⁴". Mr. Stoll⁵ rightly objects to those who would discover "a reflection of the world as it is or as we see it" in the works of Shakespeare; but

1-Mr. Babcock rates Mr. Stoll as leading American Scholar of last ten years, - Sewanee Review - January 1927

2-Letter From G.B.Shaw in "Tolstoi on Shakespeare" p.166-167

3-Living Age - January 24, 1916

4-Babcock R.W.Modern Sceptical Criticism of Shakespeare
Sewanee Review - January 1927

5.University of Minnesota Studies - No.2 - 1915

this does not justify his attitude of seeing too little of the "world as it is or as we see it" in the works of him who knew "the human mind in its most minute and intimate workings".¹

Mr. G. Bernard Shaw's Criticism of Criticism.

No modern discussion of Shakespearean criticism would be complete if the name of Mr. George Bernard Shaw were not given prominence, since he is one of the greatest of present-day dramatists and should be in a favorable position to estimate the worth of the greatest dramatist of all time. He has another thing in common with Shakespeare, and that is that he has been as thoroughly misunderstood as the great bard himself. Mr. Shaw knows human nature well enough to realize that if a statement is not made in strong terms it will not be noticed, and so he expresses himself accordingly. Mr. Huneker in his introduction to Shaw's "Dramatic Opinions and Essays"² says that he (Shaw) is never more in earnest than when he is most whimsical. The Shavian blasphemies have brought many a storm of protest upon the author's head, but he does not mind a trifle like that, if his words take effect and, in the case of Shakespeare decrease the prevailing hero-worship attitude. Mr. Shaw holds the immortal William in so high esteem that he has spared

¹-Mr. Palmer - "Living Age" - July 24, 1916

²-Introduction to "Dramatic Opinions and Essays"--vol.1 -p.13

no effort in striving to "open English eyes to the emptiness of Shakespeare's philosophy, to his weakness and incoherence as a thinker and his disqualification for the philosophic eminence claimed for him."¹ He hopes by clearing away the dross that the "genuine Shakespearean tissue"² will be given its due and people will learn to apprehend wherein the greatness of Shakespeare lies.

A great deal of Mr. Shaw's criticism is aimed more directly at the critics than at Shakespeare himself. He has written at some length on various productions of the plays which he has seen, which I shall consider later, as well as on the opinions advanced by his contemporaries. Mr. Shaw does not blame Shakespeare because he was an Elizabethan and used tactics which we consider crude. In fact, he rather excuses the "needless murder, lust, obscenity and cruelty"³ of the borrowed plots. What he does blame is this insistence of the English people to praise in the same breath everything Shakespearean, whether it be an exquisite line of verse or the "callous-sensation mongering in murder and lust"⁴. This is the type of thing that induces Mr. Shaw to strike so fiercely at the deficiencies in Shakespeare's work; it is this attitude that so thoroughly exasperates him with the ad-

1-Letter from Mr. Shaw in "Tolstoi on Shakespeare" - p.168

2-Preface to "Man and Superman"

3-Introduction to Dramatic Opinion and Essays - p.15 - Vol. I

4-Mr. Robert Bridges - North American - March 1922

mirers of Shakespeare that at first sight, we think he is blaming the dramatist when, in reality, he is ridiculing the praise-giver. Mr. Shaw realizes that Shakespeare wrote many things to please an audience which delighted in coarse jests and comedy, bloodshed and brawls, but to consider these things in the light of genius is to be marked as "a descendant of the blockheads for whom Shakespeare wrote"¹. No veneration for genius should blind one to the fact that "the foolish things were written for the foolish, the filthy for the filthy and the brutal for the brutal"².

As I have said, Mr. Shaw directs the irony of his wrath against the annotators of Shakespeare who would ask us to worship him and at the same time "join in a conspiracy to make him unintelligible, unenjoyable and inaccessible"³. To fight against this common tendency, Mr. Shaw and others of his opinion have found it necessary to broadcast the weaknesses of Shakespeare in order to point out just what is admirable in the plays. Mr. Shaw, with his usual honesty, refuses to adopt the tactics of the Bardolators and presume that what is objectionable is not Shakespearean. We found Pope doing this sort of thing in regard to certain of the plays and presuming that only "some characters, single scenes and a few particular passages were of his (Shakespeare's)

1-Shakespeare and Shaw - Sewanee Review - 1908
 2-Mr. Karl Young - North American - March 1922
 3-Ernest Boyd - "Literary Blasphemies" - p.27

hand"¹. Coleridge was of the same mind for in speaking of "Love's Labour's Lost" and some other of the not entirely genuine plays he thought he "could point out to one-half line what was really Shakespeare"². This attitude has built up an almost impregnable wall which certain modern critics are now besieging; but the wall is slowly crumbling before their merciless attacks, and when the smoke of battle has cleared away, we shall be able to see what lies behind. The beauty of Shakespeare will be isolated and shine all the brighter when we need not behold it through a barricade of false appreciation, which holds up everything he wrote as worthy of the master's hand. When admiring a beautiful picture we do not exclaim, "How beautiful is the frame" especially if it be a hideous one. Why should we then make so much of the Elizabethan mold in which Shakespeare has cast his work, and assume that because he has employed methods common to his contemporaries they are to be regarded as being sacred because Shakespeare used them? There is a great deal of truth in what Mr. Shaw has said regarding Shakespeare's genius, "If nothing were left of Shakespeare but his genius, our Shakespeareolators would miss all that they admire in him"³. This is the type of thing that people refuse to take seriously in Shaw because they think he is

¹-Shakespeare and His Critics - p.90

²-Chamber's lecture on "The Disintegration of Shakespeare"
Annual Shakespeare Lecture 1924

³-"Literary Blasphemies" - p.34

merely trying to be witty. On the contrary he has summed up in one sentence an apt criticism of much that has been called Shakespearean criticism.

Mr. Shaw is willing to concede to Shakespeare great skill as a portrayer of human character. He refuses to go to the length of the Romantic school, and find embodied in his people the greatest ideas about life, for as an original thinker, Mr. Shaw would almost discredit Shakespeare¹. Nor is he alone in this assertion, for Sir Leslie Stephen says if they (philosophical theories) are concealed in Shakespeare's plays "they are concealed so cleverly that I'll have to wait for a profound critic to reveal them"². Mr. G. Bernard Shaw attributes the Shakespearean delineation of character to "the turn of the line which lets us into the secret of the utterer's mood and temperament"³, and not to the common-place meaning. The most he will say for Shakespeare's thought content is well expressed in Pope's line; he gave us "what oft was thought but ne'er so well expressed"³. Mr. Shaw marvels at the genius of the man who could clothe hackneyed thought in language of such exquisite beauty.

To illustrate his statement, our modern thinker takes a concrete example; Mr. Shaw feels that Benedick,

¹-Mr. William Archer a prominent London critic, and one who influenced Shaw disputes Shakespeare's right to be ranked as a colossal intellect. "The Old Drama and the New" - p.125

²-Sewanee Review - 1908

³-Hubbell and Beaty - "Introduction to Drama" - p.133

in "Much Ado About Nothing", must have covered Shakespeare with shame in his later years, for his lack of wit and coarseness of speech. Search the speeches of the "Merry Gentleman" as you will for thought content and you will be unrewarded. you will be charmed with the music of the words and not feel disillusioned, for the stupendous genius of Shakespeare need not speak didactically. Mr. Shaw¹ has taken a couple of lines from the play to show wherein the master of words has charmed us with the music of his art without expressing any thought, but by merely using commonplace remarks. Beatrice says to Benedick, "I wonder that you will still be talking, Senior Benedick: nobody marks you", to which the gentlemen replies "Oh, my dear Lady Disdain, are you still living?" Mr. Shaw transforms the above into what would be in his estimation, a modern un-Shakespearean equivalent, and fails not to impress us with the beauty of the former. It is doubtful if he will ever be completely forgiven by Shakespearean admirers for daring to paraphrase the speech of Beatrice thus, "Hold your jaw", and Benedick "Oh, you're here, are you, you beauty"? Nobody but Shaw would presume to take such liberty with even one line of Shakespeare, but has he in any way spoiled the effect? He has impressed upon his readers, after the first shock is over, the skill of the man who could

make even the most common and, in other hands, vulgar expressions charm the ear. Should this seem to be an extreme case, we might convince ourselves by taking some of the most beautiful poetic passages in the plays and reduce them to common terms. We do not want to do this for we feel we are destroying beauty needlessly. Doubtless, Mr. Shaw would have preferred to refrain also, but his desire to see Shakespeare loved for his beauty, and the pain it costs him to hear people praise they know not what has urged him on. This one passage would not suffice to prove that Shakespeare is not an original thinker, but it does, as Mr. Shaw hoped it would, so startle us that we shall not be likely to talk of Shakespeare's genius in a thoughtless manner without realizing he is a great musician of words, and that, through the medium of the English language, he has portrayed a world of men and women akin to us.

Mr. Shaw is not trying to prove that Shakespeare had no brains, or as the Restoration critics and even Dryden would have it, that he was merely inspired. To say a man is not an original thinker is not to brand him as a dullard, for even the most advanced thinker of any age is bound, in a greater or less degree, by the prevailing beliefs of his time. Shakespeare was

not concerned with the subtle reasoning of the philosophers. He was too human for that. He saw man's nature as it is and ever shall be until the end of time, and thus he drew it out of the genius of his understanding.

There is nothing of the superhuman in Shakespeare's world of men and women for he has portrayed just us ordinary mortals with the problems of life before us. We ordinary mortals are not concerned with propounding theories of advanced thought and so it would follow, that, from the nature of his genius, we should not expect Shakespeare to be an advanced thinker. The Romanticists thought that the wisdom which they beheld in Shakespeare was more than the everyday truths of human life, for they confused the thought-content with the genius of him who expressed better than anyone else "the trumperies and commonplaces of a wisdom which age brings to us all"¹. It is hard to make people believe this, says Mr. Shaw², for the ordinary person, and the English in particular, like to flatter themselves that they have listened to the profundity of Shakespeare's thought and comprehended with ease. Fortunately, we are slowly growing out of this habit of reading into Shakespeare things he never intended us to see there. Mr. Shaw¹ and Mr. Ernest Boyd³ say in chorus, "We have nothing to learn from Shakespeare

1-Mr. Shaw - North American Review - March 1922

2-Academy 52:453

3-"Literary Blasphemies" - p.32-33

Faint, illegible text, possibly bleed-through from the reverse side of the page. The text is too light to transcribe accurately.

for he has no message for mankind." This is not echoed so much in a tone of rebuke, as in a manner to cure people of the habit of looking for the wrong thing to praise in Shakespeare. We do not want Shakespeare to have made a system of thought for his race, for it would have been temporary and today we would be divided from him because his ideas would be foreign to us. Thoughts, like manners and customs, have their day and cease to be. Shakespeare merely clothed his poetic genius in the temporary fashions of his day which are easily thrown aside; and there is left for us, not a system of thought, but personalities like ourselves expressing themselves through the poetic medium of genius.

Mr. Shaw is not infallible as a critic of Shakespeare, else we should be wasting our time in giving even a passing thought to the criticisms of other men. He loves, even worships, the stupendous genius of the Elizabethan who "in sheer imaginative and creative power towers above our standards"¹, but he will not allow his love to blind him to Shakespeare's faults. It is not that they stand foremost in his mind and, in any way, eclipse his appreciation of genius. He only means to exonerate the great one by ridiculing those who love blindly and do not give praise where

¹-William Archer - "The Old Drama and the New" - p.125

it is due.

More General Trends of Criticism.

While Mr. Stoll is busy explaining Shakespeare's characters historically, and Mr. Shaw is spending his time killing conventionalities, other critics are offering their contributions to the ever swelling volume of Shakespearean controversy. In point of interest, the characters hold the stage, whether they be interpreted as individuals or compared with one another or introduced to the creations of modern dramatists. There seems to be no end to what can be said about Shakespearean men and women.

Shakespearean Tragedy.

Critics, like Professor A. C. Bradley are primarily interested in the tragic figures of Shakespeare. The skeptics emphasize the fact that the old plots demanded the death of these characters but that is not an adequate explanation. In the case of Hamlet it is not sufficient to say that his death is purely historical. It would be more fair to argue that Shakespeare created a Hamlet, who, by nature of his being was doomed to destruction, for when the master dramatist allows his creations to come to a tragic end, he is not "killing needlessly"¹ and trying to excuse his method by calling

¹-Mr. G.B. Shaw's opinion: "Quintessence of Ibenism" - p.229

it fate. In Shakespeare, "character is destiny"¹. Hamlet reacted to his environment in the only way possible for a character with his particular traits. The more poetic and less speculative Othello, would have killed the King and ended the play, whereas, Hamlet would have seen through the trick which deceived Othello. No two persons with the same start in life ever come to the same end. Shakespeare says "There's a divinity that shapes our ends", which is something beyond our immediate control. One person will surmount all kinds of difficulties, another will make a failure of life under the most favorable conditions. Like Hamlet, we all are subject to our own peculiar nature, and what we have in us will out. Whether or not our lives end in tragedy depends upon our circumstances.

If, as Mr. Shaw says, Shakespeare kills needlessly, why do we speak of the tragedy of Hamlet or Othello or of another character I have not mentioned before, Romeo, and why not of Claudius, Iago, Tybalt? The latter, we feel, only received their due, but in the case of Hamlet, Othello and Romeo, we cannot say the same thing. These three, like many other characters in Shakespeare, meet the fate of the evil ones through no apparent fault of their own. Is Shakespeare then, killing needlessly, purposely destroying both good and evil, perhaps to

¹-John Henneman - "Shakespeare in Recent Years"
Sewanee Review - 1908

please a blood-thirsty audience? If he were, we should cease to speak of his plays as tragedies. As we look into the lives of those whom Shakespeare meant to be tragic, we observe, as in the case of Hamlet, that their destiny is determined by the nature of their character.

To bear this out in another instance, let us take the case of Romeo, whom Mr. Harris¹ calls the younger twin brother of Hamlet. He is an impetuous, daring youth, who goes to the home of his greatest enemy, Capulet, where he meets and falls in love with his host's daughter, Juliet. More than that, he dares to enter the garden of his fair lady wherein discovery would mean instant death to him or his opponent. Then, he marries Juliet in spite of the family feud, and shortly afterwards tries to end the duel between his friend, Mercutio, and Tybalt, of the house of Capulet. This results in Mercutio's death, which Romeo must avenge. All these events, none of which are other than an expression of Romeo's pleasing personality, and we should think the less of him had he acted differently in any case, result in his death. Circumstances beyond his control bear a relation to his character which ends in tragedy. Shakespeare is not to blame. He created, but could not control the destiny of his heroes and heroines, unless like his contemporaries he had been without

1-"Realistic Criticism" - Academy - April - 1914

"his glorious insight into human nature and the laws of God"¹. Shakespeare's heroic men and women are destroyed by "the excess of some trait" as Mr. Masfield² puts it. Although men may smile at the ending of Hamlet and the rest, and protest against a fate who destroys both innocent and guilty "'tis true, 'tis pity, and pity 'tis, 'tis true to life"¹.

Comparison of Shakespearean Characters.

Critics have spent time endeavoring to show wherein certain of Shakespeare's characters are like-personalities. Mr. G. B. Shaw in his preface to "The Dark Lady of the Sonnets", expresses the opinion that Shakespeare's heroes are differentiated by what they do more than by what they are. "Macbeth is Hamlet committing murders and engaging in hand to hand combat". It is true we can trace certain similarities in the two characters. The "pigeon-livered" Hamlet and Macbeth who is "too full of the milk of human kindness" are both imaginative and poetic souls, who shrink from committing cold-blooded murder, but it does not follow from this that the two are essentially the same. Imagine Hamlet in Macbeth's circumstances, with a Lady Hamlet who urged him on to revenge by calling him coward "afraid to be the same in act and valor as thou

¹-Mr. John Palmer - "Present Disrepute of Shakespeare"
Living Age - July 24, 1916
²-William Shakespeare - p.208

art in desire." Would she have succeeded? Yes, in the same degree as did the ghost of Hamlet's father, arousing his imagination for the instant, but as for the deed, she must needs have performed it herself, if it were done. Shakespeare's Hamlet and Macbeth are not one and the same man. That which would stir one on to action would be entirely lost upon the other.

Are Hamlet and Romeo more akin to each other than Hamlet and Macbeth? Mr. Frank Harris would have us believe that "Hamlet is the later finished picture of which Romeo was merely the charming sketch"¹. Then Hamlet is Romeo grown up, with his imagination still, but with passion matured to thought, as the problems of life bear weight upon him. Accordingly, we should expect to see signs of this transformation as Romeo betakes himself to Juliet's tomb, for since their parting he has lived many years. He has grown from youth to manhood before his time, by reason of the sorrows life has thrust upon him. But do we behold the meditating Hamlet in the dying Romeo, and feel that had he lived longer Shakespeare would have had no need to create the "melancholy Dane"? There is something in each of them, and in Macbeth, which marks the man as a thing apart, just as in real life each individual is himself first, and then has traits in common with certain of his fellow-beings.

¹-Realistic Criticism - Academy - April 1914

Because two souls have been endowed by their creator with a highly sensitive imagination, it does not follow that they are everywhere the same, and under any circumstances, their lives would have a tragic ending.

Minor Shakespearean Characters.

In Shakespeare's major characters, just as in us, we find "a certain redundancy but much of inexhaustibility of thought and fancy"¹, for some of us are more alike than others, but none of us are all alike. Nor need we restrict ourselves to the prominent figures in Shakespeare's world to be assured that he has created individuals of his own imagining who are as true to life as you or I. Dramatists today do not feel they need always portray the man or woman in prominent circumstances, for in characters of less degree, there is as much and sometimes more of human interest than in those of high estate. Although Shakespeare followed the convention of his age and created heroes and heroines of high degree, he foreshadowed the modern movement, by treating sympathetically, the most insignificant serving-man and woman. Certain critics, among them Professor Bradley, manifest interest in these characters of less importance. As an illustration of the type of criticism I have introduced into this thesis an article from the Contemporary Review of 1923. We find

1-Contemporary Review - March 1923

that Shakespeare's Minors are not mere prescriptions to be filled out when a play requires a lady-in-waiting, a page or servant. Shakespeare was too great a genius to be content with anybody less than an individual personality, however small the rôle. Although they are not so specific in detail, he has "revealed one of his greatest talents, in his power of divining what passes through the mind of uneducated people, old people, drunken people."¹

These smaller folk, "who stroll through the play, and give it atmosphere"² are a convincing group and have a definite part in the stirring pageants of life which Shakespeare depicts. We should miss them if they were not there to play their tiny rôles and then fade out of the picture when they have served their purpose. They are a motley crew with "their own affections, passions, joys, sorrows, ambitions, and temptations"². Nowhere does Shakespeare show himself more sympathetic than with these.

As we glance at one group of these minor characters, the ladies-in-waiting, we are impressed with the remarkable imaginative knowledge Shakespeare had of women. Lord Byron once said of them, "Shakespeare's women are women all over"². What could be more intensely feminine than the sharp-tongued Margaret with her love of "graceful and excellent fashions"³, who in league with Ursula,

1-John Chapman - "A Glance toward Shakespeare" - p.20

2-"Contemporary Review" - March 1923

3-"Much Ado About Nothing" - Act III - Scene IV

plots to trick her mistress' cousin, Beatrice, into marrying Benedick: or the coy little Alice who tried to instruct her mistress and vastly amuses the King by her faltering remark, "I cannot tell what is bairer in English"¹? There is the mocking Katherine whose conceits had "wings swifter than arrows, bullets, wind, thoughts swifter things"², and the "merry nimble"² Rosalind, as little akin to Margaret or Alice as to the matronly dignified Patience³ whose "sweetness and resignation"⁴ comforted the heartsick Queen in her last hours of earthly sorrow. The daring Charmian, who would have the soothsayer give her good fortune, makes so bold as to reprove the fiery Cleopatra at times, but she is no less loyal to her royal mistress than the more tender and gentle Iras who pleads with the Queen to comfort Antony after his defeat. The Abbess Emilia, a shrewd observer of life and its motives, with characteristic artifice forces Adriana to confess her guilt in driving her husband mad. She, unlike the narrow-minded Francisca (Measure for Measure) is not a typical nun but a "lovable and strong character"⁵. And so they go on and on, ever loyal and devoted to those whom they serve, until we wonder that their creator did not exhaust his wits and beg them play a double rôle while he rested his

1-"King Henry the Fifth" - Act III - Scene V

2-"Love's Labour's Lost" - Act V - Scene II

3-"King Henry the Eighth"-

4-Constance Spender Contemporary Review - March 1923

5-"Love's Labour's Lost"

weary brain.

But Shakespeare delighted too much in his creations to bid his fancy deprive us of that group, not less gay and witty than the first, which flits across the stage with all the charm of youth. We cannot resist the sweet child Mamillus¹ whose "shy coyness"² has an ever ready answer to his father's fond raillery. Sharp and observant is he, even as the pert page, Robin³ and that "dear imp"⁴ who warbles to please his master. Moth, at the bottom of his impishness is a real boy, without the boldness of the little baggage who answers Benedick so promptly.

Shakespeare has sketched another side of child-life which we grown-ups with our greater responsibilities, often underestimate. We forget that the tender mind of a child is easily depressed by its little sorrows which seem so trivial to us. The tiny son of Macduff elicits our sympathy when, upon hearing of his father's flight, says he will live as birds do, "with what I get, I mean"⁵. The childish prattle ceases when the little lad hears his father called traitor and he courageously defies the murderer in the outspoken manner of youth, "Thou liest, thou shag-haired villain"⁶.

1-"Winter's Tale"

2-Constance Spender - Contemporary Review - March 1923

3-"The Merry Wives of Windsor"

4-"Loves Labours Lost" - Act 1 - Scene 11

5-Act IV - Scene 11

6-"Loves Labours Lost" - Act I - Scene 11

Children are more highly imaginative than older folk. The little page of Paris fears the churchyard, perhaps has visions of ghosts and goblins but he says "Yet will I venture"¹. He reminds us of the boy, Lucius, whose soul is filled with childish terror by his poor tongueless aunt Lavinia. Much as he fears her, "See how swift she comes"², he does not wish to hurt her feelings and explains, "Alas, sweet aunt, I know not what you mean".

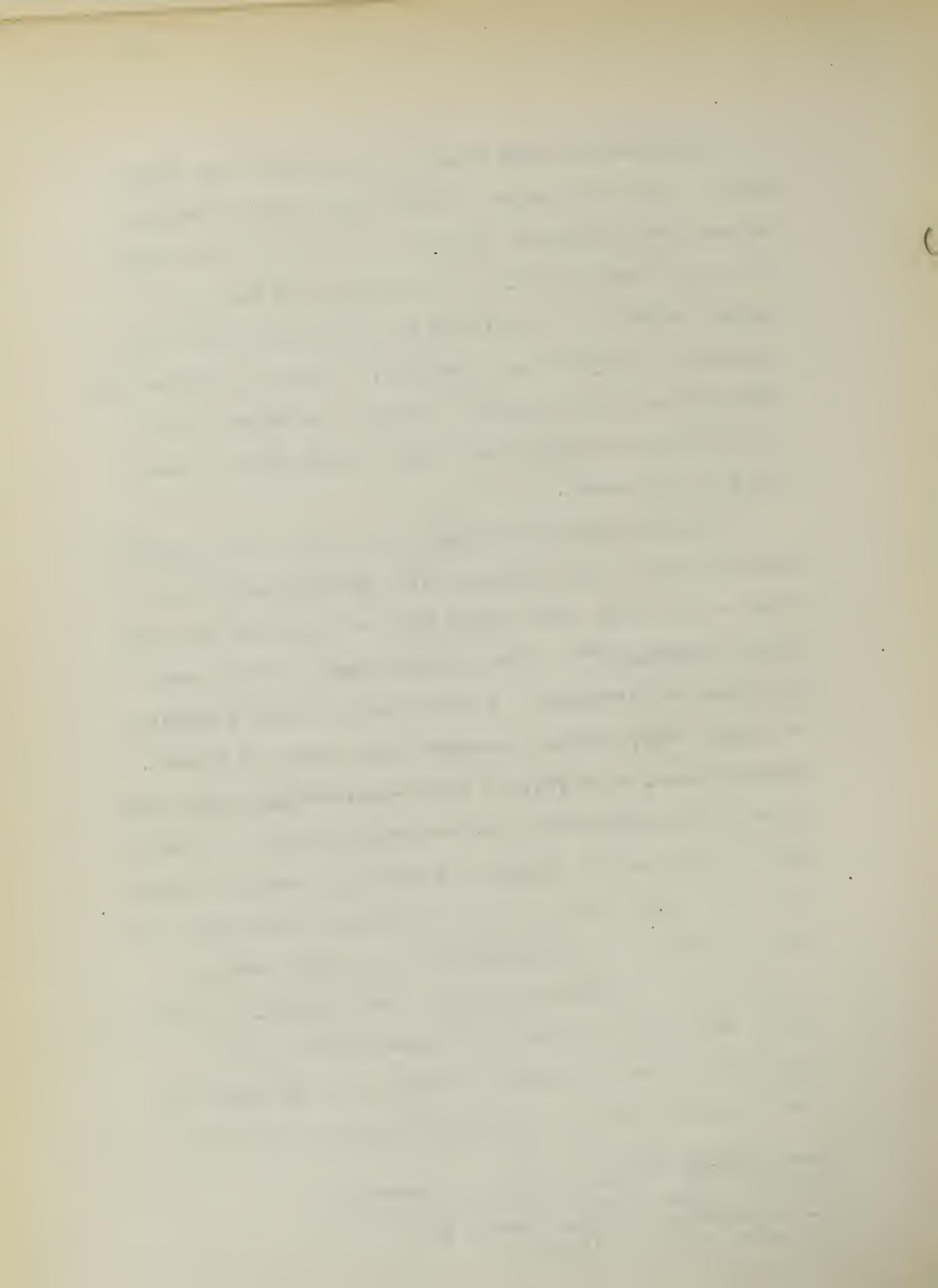
Although Shakespeare shows contempt for the great middle class, whose speeches are usually absurd and wide of the mark, he "thinks well of servants and even minor attendants"³. The faithful heart of old Adam, that best of servants, is reflected in those servants of Timon, who, though dismissed, yet wear his livery. Servants are, as a rule, a light-hearted and gossiping group which Shakespeare has portrayed in Mrs. Quickly, who in spite of her washing, wringing, brewing, baking and making beds, finds time to play the go-between for Falstaff and his friends and also for Anne Page and her lovers. Her fellow-servant, John Kugley, is "an honest willing, kind fellow"⁴ whose worst fault is that he is given to prayer. Life-like they are, and how ingenious was the mind that fashioned them! Mr.

1-"Romeo and Juliet" - Act v - Scene 111

2-"Titus Andronicus" - Act IV - Scene 1

3-Contemporary Review - March 1923

4-"Merry Wives of Windsor" -



Frank Harris may be right when he says that "humanity cannot be penned up even in Shakespeare's brain"¹, but we cannot read his plays and come in contact with that "photographic panorama of all types and degrees of men"² and not find an amazingly accurate copy of the stirring pageants of life around us.

Shakespeare and Ibsen.

Modern dramatists depict life as they see it, but their characters are not more life-like than Shakespeare's. Mr. G. B. Shaw delights in comparing the two dramatists he esteems so highly and asserts that "Shakespeare is alive by what he has in common with Ibsen"³, meaning, presumably, that neither playwright ever makes his characters act conventionally. But Mr. Shaw feels there is a want not supplied by Shakespeare, which makes Ibsen's plays the more important to us, "Shakespeare puts ourselves but not our situations on the stage. Ibsen gives us not only ourselves but ourselves in our own situations"⁴.

However that may be, there is a fundamental difference in the characters of the two dramatists. Ibsen, by reason of his technique, creates individuals whose psychological consistency cannot be so easily questioned as Shakespeare's. He adds "trait to trait"⁵ until he has

1-Academy - April 1914

2-Felix Grendon - "Shakespeare and Shaw" - Sewanee Review 1908

3-"Quintessence of Ibsenism" - p.228-230

4-"Quintessence of Ibsenism" - p.228-230

5-Mr. John Palmer - Living Age - July 24, 1916

constructed a logical whole, whereas Shakespeare conceived his characters intuitively. When they come upon the scene, they are possessed of a vitality and will which acts powerfully upon us, so powerfully that "we assume at once that we know all about them"¹. By reason of this difference, we regard the actions of the former as illustrative of the characters. But Hamlet is not the product of what he says and does. He is a man complete from the first and comes before us, not that we may see him develop, but just to visit with us for a time. We do not judge him by what he does and call him cruel, for we know that he is by nature kind. We must judge Ibsen's men by what they do, for we have no other clue. If Hamlet acts cruelly, we know that he is acting out of his nature due to "the chance perversity of the moment"¹. It is not difficult to see that Ibsen's characters cannot be labelled inconsistent, where as Shakespeare's, like people in real life, cannot be depended upon to always act properly.

Shakespeare's Skill as a Playwright.

It is only in recent years that Shakespeare has become "appreciated as a playwright"². That the Restoration critics rewrote the plays and men of the eighteenth century sought to improve them by such innovations as play-

¹-Mr. John Palmer - Living Age - July 24, 1916

²-Walter Clayton - Forum - 1907

ing "Lear" with a "Polyanna ending"¹ and having "Romeo and Juliet" live to bid each other a last farewell, to say nothing of cutting such scenes as the gravedigger in "Hamlet" and the porter in "Macbeth", did not concern the people of the nineteenth century very much, because they did not esteem the art of playwriting. The modern world is tremendously interested in play production and the dramatist holds a position of so great importance that producers are forced to adapt their theatres to meet the demands of the author. The time was when the situation was quite the reverse. This new movement has brought Shakespeare into his own, and has stimulated interest in him as a playwright. In this field, the diligent research of the historical critics is indispensable, for to understand Shakespeare's technique, we must have some knowledge of the stage for which he wrote.

Shakespeare's Technique.

Shakespeare's reputation has soared by leaps and bounds in this century because of the exalted position of the dramatist. Men have carefully gone into the structure of the plays, and with their knowledge of his stage, have found that the Elizabethan's skill as a man of the theatre was second to none. Even Mr. G. Bernard

Shaw who prefers to save his praise for the poetic genius of Shakespeare, is roused to action by those who presume to underestimate the perfection of his workmanship for he says "Shakespeare with all his shortcomings was a very great playwright"¹. He regrets that Mr. Pinero, Mr. Grundy and Monsieur Sardou had not been persuaded to learn from him how to write a play "without wasting the first hour of the performance in tediously explaining its 'construction'"².

Mr. Shaw is saying with Professor Bradley that Shakespeare's expositions are masterpieces. In a few scenes, we are able "to master the situation"³ and, in the story-telling type of play, this is not so easy a matter, for the method must be dramatic. The street brawl in "Romeo and Juliet" is an excellent example of Shakespeare's skill. We learn of the family feud and in a most natural manner, the characters come upon the stage without confusing the reader. The opening of "Richard II" and "The Comedy of Errors" if not so excellent for we cannot help feeling somewhat that the speaker is addressing us.

As the play advances, with scene following scene in rapid succession, the reader is carried along and loses nothing of the sequence of thought, for all is clear and perfectly logical. There are no long or un-

1-The Nation - April 28, 1926

2-Dramatic Opinions and Essays - Vol.I - p.115

3-Shakespearean Tragedy - p.42

explained gaps of time, for if the hero is called away upon a journey, he does not appear again until a sufficient length of time has elapsed to enable him to make the journey and return. It occasion necessitates prolonged absence, Shakespeare throws a scene in between, and introduces a sub-plot. Skill is required to prevent the two trends of thought from becoming entangled; Shakespeare is equal to the occasion and rushes the main plot and its subsidiary "forward with equal rapidity toward their clash at the climax"¹. Mr. Maccowan¹ calls our attention to the fact that Shakespeare's technique reminds us more of the modern scenario-writer than the modern dramatist.

Shakespeare's plays do not according to all the critics show the same power of stage-grasp. He developed his skill as he continued to write. Mr. George P. Baker² clearly illustrates this point by observing that at first he (Shakespeare) was deficient in the art of telling a story dramatically, as an examination of "Love's Labour's Lost" reveals. The "Comedy of Errors" shows increasing skill and in the "Merchant of Venice", Shakespeare has interwoven three stories in a masterly fashion. His power of dramatic presentation developed rapidly. Mr. Shaw, whose favorable criticism is not to be despised, praises Shakespeare's art in that "most

¹-Century - July 1922

²-"Shakespeare and His Critics" - p. 342

effective sample of Romantic nonsense in existence , for which the author publicly disclaims any responsibility for its pleasant and cheap falsehood by throwing it in the face of the public with the phrase, "As You Like It"¹. He believes that the thing is done as well as it can be done within the limits of human faculty.

Shakespeare's Conventions.

Shakespeare's conventions are those of his age; and as ours are different, we are likely to underestimate their importance in the Elizabethan theatre. In the case of the soliloquy, "it is necessary for us to appreciate its value in Shakespeare's plays"². Most important things are revealed by its use, and, with the Elizabethan audience it was a legitimate means of bringing them in sympathy with the actor. They felt much as we should if we were to come upon a person airing his sorrows in the private of his chamber. The soliloquy is used so little in our day that it seems artificial to us, but, in order to appreciate Shakespeare as a playwright, we must learn to look beyond this and other dramatic practices of a past age.

1-Sewanee Review - 1908

2-Hardin Craig - English Journal - October 1924

Shakespeare's Faults in Structure.

Shakespeare's workmanship is not perfect, for genius in any form is likely to disregard the minor faults which persons of average intelligence can point out. In many of the plays, there are scenes which do not assist the action of the play, and speeches which are "undramatic".¹ Mercutio's long speech on Queen Mab, Falstaff's on honor and Jacques' on the seven ages of man are not necessary. Doubtless, the Elizabethans and Shakespeare delighted in these outbursts of words. Although Shakespeare holds a high position by virtue of his mastery of dramatic craftsmanship, "he does not attain the perfection of workmanship that characterizes a lesser dramatist like Racine"².

Modern Stage Productions of Shakespeare's Plays.

Because Shakespeare's manners and customs and language are so different from those employed by modern dramatists, the problem of staging his plays is a difficult one, in that a solution of the difficulties lies in no one thing. Mr. Granville-Barker³, an English playwright and producer of rank, suggests that the only way to meet the situation is that those who possess an intimate knowledge of the possibilities and limitations of both the contemporary and Elizabethan stage work out

¹-Dukes, A. - Theatre Arts - March 1925

²-Hubbell and Beaty - "An Introduction to Drama" p.133

³-Yale Review - January - 1926

a solution in the case of each play.

Until recently, little attention has been paid to Shakespeare, the playwright. As a result, many performances have been very poor and lovers of the plays have felt that they preferred to read them in the quiet of their study rather than see them misrepresented upon the stage. This is a strange aversion when we remember that Shakespeare wrote, not for the few, but the whole uneducated mass who went to the theatre to see plays. His whole purpose was to write for production, for he cared so little for his work as literature that he did not trouble, as Ben Jonson, to write it down for posterity. Many modern critics are very harsh in their attitude toward modern productions, which they say have taken no heed of Shakespeare as a playwright. Mr. Ernest Boyd¹ asserts that almost never has the English-speaking world achieved an actual performance of Shakespeare's own work. Nor does he stand alone in this. Mr. Bernard Shaw, upon witnessing certain productions of the plays goes home to write his opinions of what he has seen under the title, "poor Shakespeare"². He feels sorely disappointed that the performances have failed to bring out any real idea of "the theatrical power, brilliance and effectiveness of this great practical playwright"³.

These criticisms bring to mind the opinion of Mr.

1-Ernest Boyd - "Literary Blasphemies" - p.21

2-"Dramatic Opinions and Essays" - vol.1 - p.24

3-North American - March 1922

Shaw that we are growing out of Shakespeare and he (Shakespeare) is becoming, like Byron "a household pet"¹. Is it true that Shakespeare has lost prestige and is not able to compete with modern writers, or would it be more correct to say that we are living in a period which marks the beginning of a great Shakespearean revival? Undoubtedly, the tendency of the times is to increase the number and quality of productions of the plays. We have only to take note of what is going on in our own city to test the truth of this assertion. Within a month three companies have found it profitable to stage Shakespearean productions here, and no one company has spoiled the other's chances of success. This does not prove anything, of course, but it does testify that Shakespeare is still able to hold attention on the stage, that people will attend productions of the plays if they are presented, as those of modern dramatists, in an attractive manner. How many people would go to see even the most popular modern play if they felt, beforehand, that the production would be a poor one? There seems to be no cause to fear that Shakespeare, the playwright, is doomed to an untimely end. Producers do not so greatly concern themselves with something that has ceased to be of use, nor do critics of Mr. Shaw's ability waste their time wrangling over the production of something that is not worthy the name of

play.

Those who criticize modern performances remind us of Mr. Shaw, whose practice it is, not to reprove Shakespeare himself, but rather those people who write about him and produce his plays. To the ever-swelling volume of criticism of Shakespeare's people may be added another newer volume of criticism, that of the presentation of these people upon the stage. Again, we owe much to the historical critic whose efforts have been instrumental in creating this new interest. Today, a critic does not write that such and such an actor did or did not play his part well, but that such and such a producer did or did not do credit to the great playwright, Shakespeare, on his stage.

The question, how shall we stage Shakespeare today is still unanswered, although his plays have been produced for over three hundred years. Mr. Granville-Barker's suggestion of which I have spoken before, does not solve the problem, for no two producers come to the same conclusion. Opinion is fairly evenly divided between those who insist that the modern type of production is best,¹ and those who demand that Shakespeare ought to be presented on a stage approximating the one for which he wrote². The modernists declare that Shakespeare loses nothing by being presented in the dress

¹-C. Lewis Hind - Outlook - September 30, 1925
²-Kenneth MacCowan - Century - July 1922

and setting of our day, whereas the "Elizabethans" are of the opinion that he is not done justice on a stage that requires him to be distorted as a playwright, and made ridiculous by having his "medieval"¹ gentlemen look like moderns and talk like Elizabethans.

Problems of Dress.

All the talk about Shakespeare in modern dress, which the modern productions have caused, does not mean very much because the idea is as old as Shakespeare himself, and even as ancient as the Greeks. Shakespeare has always been played in modern dress until comparatively recent times. Our tradition "with its archaeological costumes goes back no farther than the cradle songs of Queen Victoria"². In Restoration times and during the reign of the four Georges² costumes of the day were used on the Shakespearean stage. The great Garrick, the foremost actor of the eighteenth century, played Macbeth in contemporary dress.³ Why then all this fuss about Hamlet in a dress-suit, lounge suit, golf togs and bowler hat? "If he is the deathless man of the stage why should he not be made contemporaneous?"⁴

When actors and actresses put on costumes of another day there is grave danger that they will cease

1-Literary Digest - March 3, 1928
 2-John Mason Brown - Theatre Arts - 1926
 3-Dr. Max Hühner - Poet Lore - June 1926
 4-Literary Digest - October 3, 1925

to speak and act as human beings. An actress, who was attending a modern performance asked the reason for this, which she acknowledged to be very true¹. The performers naturally feel antiquated, and are not so likely to throw themselves into their rôles as naturally as in modern costumes. Although there is much adverse opinion and critics worry themselves over problems which should be left to the producer (such as the type of nightwear that Macbeth and Lady Macbeth should appear in if they are not to be ridiculous²), there can be no doubt that the audience is given an opportunity of seeing wherein Shakespeare is immortal³, wherein Hamlet's problems, for example, "become those of a serious young man of today"⁴.

This play (the critics single it out for discussion) has suffered intensely from too great admiration and too little understanding. Not only has the hero been presented to us as a fragile flower whose sunhouse has been shattered, subjecting him to the cold winds of destiny, but he has been so over-emphasized that the rest of the characters have had to retreat almost out of sight. Although this is not the place to discuss an interpretation of Hamlet's irreconcilable actions, it is noteworthy that right here we have an opportunity of discovering why his actions have appeared inconsistent. The part

1-Outlook - September 30, 1925

2-Literary Digest - March 3, 1928

3-Mr. C. Lewis Hind - Outlook - September 30, 1925

4-Living Age - October 10, 1925

has always been taken by the leading actor, who naturally, wished to make himself as conspicuous to the audience as possible. As a result, the other characters have not been faithfully interpreted, and, we have not been able to understand why Hamlet did not run his sword through that obnoxious villain of an uncle, then and there.

Critics, when commenting upon the modern presentations say that never before have they witnessed such well rounded productions¹. In the case of Hamlet, it is made clear that Shakespeare has not squandered all his art on the creation of the central figure. He has as carefully drawn all the others to show us that Hamlet's introspective nature is in conflict not only with itself, but also with the strong character of his uncle, Claudius. If we see the King through Hamlet's eyes, we picture him an old time stage-villain; but if we see him as Shakespeare drew him, we, at once, see the cause of much of the nephew's hesitancy to kill him. More than that, we say to ourselves, "We are not so modern as we think we are. Why three-hundred years ago, Shakespeare understood us better than we do ourselves and he had never heard of psychology! This Hamlet and Claudius and Gertrude and the rest of them are right here in this audience, tonight". We will not say that we know a Claudius who has murdered a young man's father,

¹-Fortnightly Review - November 1926; Outlook September 20, 1925.

but that we do know a man of Claudius' type who has cheated a young man, of whom Hamlet is an example, of all he held dear. This man, like Claudius, has not written in black letters all over his face, "I am a villain". He is so charming, magnetic, intelligent and resourceful¹, that even the injured one doubts, when in his presence, that so (seemingly) likeable a man could be so full of guile. And here, Shakespeare knew his business better than we thought. Hamlet cannot kill the King when he sees him kneeling in prayer, not because he feared his uncle's soul would go to Heaven, (this is merely such an excuse as we all would make for ourselves when we wish to avoid performing an unpleasant task), but because the charm of Claudius' personality acted like a drug, deadening Hamlet's brain and stirring his highly emotional nature. When Hamlet is alone the spell is broken and he chides himself for his weakness.

This modern method of production has also made Gertrude seem a very real person. When Hamlet held the stage, she was all weakness, as Claudius was all villainous. Here, again, we saw her, only through Hamlet's eyes, a poor, weak, despicable person. The play, when presented in true perspective, shows her as a very

¹

 I-C. L. Hind - Outlook - September 30, 1925

attractive woman, the type which appeals to certain men by sheer femininity. She is of weaker stuff than Hamlet; is it then so great a marvel that she would leave her husband (who, although he loved her, in all probability preferred his afternoon nap to amusing her) and become enamored of the brother who knew so well how to enslave her very being? This surely would not startle a twentieth century person.

The lovesick distracted Ophelia, the tedious Polonius, the blustering Laertes, the loyal Horatio and all the rest fit as adequately into this picture torn from the page of life. And this is only one little part of the world that Shakespeare has created for us. This masterpiece, alone, would justify all the time and energy that men have expended to bring before us on the stage the children of Shakespeare's imagination. Of what significance are clothes and settings so long as they serve the necessary purpose of clothing the characters, just as in real life?

Problems of Actors.

Mr. Dukes, who ranks "costume as of no importance"¹ and the speaking of the lines as all important, suggests that the "best way to present Hamlet in modern dress is to present an undress rehearsal of the play"².

¹-Mr. Granville - Barker's opinion - Yale Review - Jan. 1926
²-Theatre Arts - March 1925

The purpose of this is that the characters will not gain vividness at the expense of Mr. Shakespeare, poet. Although many complain that the lines and the modern dress cannot be reconciled¹, those less prejudiced agree that 'dinner coats and revolvers' cannot destroy what Shakespeare had to say. If the actors remember that the lines must not be "slurred and blurred"³, and that an absolute conception of character is established by every true utterance of a speech. A good actor can make us forget the incongruity of dress and mode of expression, for Shakespeare himself has costumed each character in his own language. If the part is well interpreted, "in less than five minutes"⁴, we forget almost such minor details as costume and become interested in the affairs of the human being who stands before us on the stage. It is the actor's business to convey scene, character, feeling, and atmosphere to his audience through the medium of rhetoric, for Shakespeare's skill as a playwright, "consists in obliging an audience to disbelieve the palpable evidence of its eyes by filling its ears"⁵. If the actor is not an artist in his own profession this heavy burden thrown upon him may prove too great, and the modern type of production will lay itself open to

1-Blackwoods - October 1925

3-Mr. Granville-Barker's opinion - Yale Review Jan. 1926

4-L. F. Abbott - Outlook - December 30, 1925

5-Fortnightly - November 1925

the charges of ridicule.

Problems of the Stage.

Although Shakespeare in modern costume and setting has been favorably commented upon by critics, there are a great many people who feel that we have little more right to bring Shakespeare's plays out on our modern stage than we should have to present modern plays on an Elizabethan stage. They insist, and not without good grounds, that Shakespeare is not being justly treated when his plays are "cut up and rearranged to please stage hands of the realistic theatre"¹. That the plays should be reproduced as nearly as possible in the original form, is not an unreasonable demand. The agitators of this new movement are not mere fanatics, who reverence the text and feel that not a single word or scene ought to be omitted. They admit that there are certain passages "which are not essential to the development of plot and the revelation of character"², for the plays, "fine and precious as they are not perfect"¹.

Those who favor the Elizabethan type of production, argue that much of the beauty of Shakespeare is lost and his skill as a dramatist is not emphasized when the plays are artificially marked into scenes and acts. It is true that Shakespeare had no such division in mind when he

¹-Kenneth MacCowan - Century - July 1922

²-Mr. William Winter - Current Opinion 1917

fashioned the plays, for lack of scenery on the Elizabethan stage made them unnecessary. The cry is, let us get "back to Shakespeare"¹, fashion a stage as nearly as possible like the one for which he wrote. Then we shall be able to enjoy these "moving pageants of speech, action and color"² as they were enjoyed in Shakespeare's time, on a stage which affords opportunity for a swift and lyrical performance.

Mr. George Bernard Shaw³, who never misses an opportunity to rap modern stage productions, is a firm believer in the art of Shakespeare's stage-craft. He favors the idea of reverting to a method of presentation that will leave the plays unaltered. In his "Dramatic Opinion and Essays"⁴ he rejoices that the number of possible ways of altering Shakespeare's plays unsuccessfully but "hastens on the day when the mere desire for novelty will lead to the experiment of leaving them unaltered". He makes no mention of an Elizabethan type of stage as a possible means of arriving at a solution of the problem. This does not detract from the value of his opinion for it is not his custom to offer remedies for the evils he attacks.

"The experiment of leaving them unaltered" has already attracted wide attention. The movement began in

1-Kenneth Macgowan - Century - July 1922

2-Mr. J. Dover Wilson - Annual Shakespeare Lecture of British Academy 1929.

3-Mr. Shaw has been called the most provocative theatrical critic in England - North American - March 1922

4-p.186

Germany¹, and has gradually found its way back to the home of Shakespeare, where the Stratford Repertory Company look forward to the day when the completion of the National Theatre will make it possible to produce the plays as they were written. The problem is not so simple as it may sound for the form of the stage is only the first step toward realizing the objective. We cannot satisfy modern audiences by producing the plays on a bare stage, as Shakespeare did, because Twentieth Century folk have outgrown the conventions accepted by Elizabethans, of imagining that "light thickens; and the crow makes wing to the rooky wood". Scenery there must be to lend a sense of reality to the word-paintings of Shakespeare if we are to follow the delightful imaginings of his artistic mind, and not be left in a state of utter confusion as the swiftly moving play hastens onward toward its end. We do not require that our imagination be stifled by the presentation of every little picture-scene found in the plays, but there must be sufficient suggestive scenery to enable the modern mind to bridge the gap made by the three centuries which separate us from Shakespeare. Too much realism in stage settings defeats its own purpose, and attracts the eye of the audience from the play. When Mercutio is commenting on his death-wound, we do not wish to see the

actual "wellhead on the portico of an actual church in Verona"¹ which Sir Henry Irving pictured for his audience in his production of "Romeo and Juliet".

Just what we do and do not want in the matter of scenery is the big problem of the producer. Since 1888, when a sketch of the Swan Theatre was discovered by De-Witt, there have been frequent experiments in Elizabethan staging in Germany, and some attempts have been made in England and America. Mr. Max Reinhardt's productions are perhaps the best known of those of Germany in the English speaking world. He has paid tribute to the experiments of Mr. Gordon Craig¹, whose presentation of the great tragedy "Macbeth" was so favorably received in America about a year ago. A consideration of this production gives us an excellent idea of what is being done for Shakespeare on the stage.

Mr. Craig has very definite ideas on stage-settings, whose sole purpose is, in his opinion, to assist the actor in "communicating to the spectators the intention of the dramatist"¹. To avoid the error of Mr. Irving, the effect of the scenery on the minds of the audience must be subconsciously achieved. Shakespeare intended that his audience create the play within their own imagination and Mr. Craig has designed his settings with that thought in mind. For instance, "the great

murder scene is played in a shadowy and fear-compelling set that is painted entirely with lights and shadows"¹. There is no suggestion of localization of time and place, for Mr. Craig's purpose is to impress his audience with the universality of Shakespeare's interest in humanity; which in this particular instance it is the primordial experience of the "human conscience tortured by the disintegration of the human soul"¹.

In this same production, Mr. Craig has endeavored to force his audience to imagine "the most magnificent throne-room in the most magnificent palace that ever was"¹. This illusion is effected by the erection of a tall flight of stairs at the top of which is placed a golden chair. In the chair is seated a grey-bearded man wearing a golden crown, and he is surrounded by half a dozen courtiers, gorgeously arrayed. Each courtier holds aloft "a towering staff from which depends a gorgeous banner"¹. The grandeur of the setting is accentuated by lighting effects. Macbeth enters, covered with blood and mud of battle, and looks upward at the royal pageant. We feel, as Macbeth's eyes climb from stair to stair that the end is inevitable. He will never rest content until he has replaced Duncan and sits in that golden chair, in his stead. Nothing but the grandeur of a King will still the ambitious yearnings of his

soul.

There is nothing in the settings of Mr. Craig's production that detracts attention from the actors. The scenery and the action coöperate and set before the eyes of the spectators that deathless creation conceived in the mind of Shakespeare centuries ago. In this, Shakespeare lives again in the eternal scheme of things and shall continue to live long after we have ceased to be. Another race of men must needs inhabit the earth if the appeal of Shakespeare is ever to be silenced. He, "the greatest monument of the stage"¹, cannot die while the heart of humanity beats on and on.

Shakespeare on the Screen.

The last word has not yet been uttered on Shakespearean production. What form it will take in the future is more or less a matter of conjecture. The tendency of the time is to follow the lead of Germany and adhere as closely as possible to the manner in which Shakespeare himself saw his plays produced. There is another mode of production which the twentieth century has attempted, but the results have been far from satisfactory. Shakespeare has been presented on the screen from time to time, within recent years, and although most folks smile at the idea, it is not improbable that future generations

1-Ernest Boyd - "Literary Blasphemies" - p.21

will accept it.

Mr. Maccowan does not hesitate to state that a modern understanding of the great dramatist "begins with Goethe and ends with the movies"¹. Goethe discovered that there were no act and scene divisions in the quarto volumes, and it is true that there is a marked "similarity in structure and form between Shakespeare's plays and modern photodrama"². Moreover, there are many things in the plays that the screen can reproduce with more reality than the legitimate stage, the battle scenes in Macbeth and Julius Caesar, the shipwreck in "The Tempest", the thunder-smitten wanderings of Lear and the dainty fantasies of a "Mid Summer Night's Dream". We recognize, today, that a certain amount of this scenery which Shakespeare depicts in words must be actually reproduced because we cannot, as the Elizabethans, follow so readily a form of speech which is unfamiliar to our ears.

An idea of what the movies can do by way of replacing the stage is exemplified in the recent production of Mr. Eugene O'Neill's modern play, "Anne Christie". Although it would be nonsense to assert that the movies type of production is preferable to that of the stage today, it is not highly improbable that when the difficulties of sound production have been overcome that people

¹-Century - July 1922

²-Brian Hooker - Century - December 1926

will look with increasing favor upon plays of the screen. We accept the conventions of a stage which requires that every play produced must be cut, somewhat. Supposing that these same plays, in future, can be presented upon a screen which need not omit anything, which form is the public going to prefer?

We do not question the shortcomings of a stage upon which scenery and the length of a play must be limited, because we accept theatrical conventions which are forced upon us. But, in the future, when the movies have accustomed people to having everything presented before them, it is questionable whether they will be content with less than all. They will outgrow the conventions of our stage and be bored with a performance which omits instances in the plays of Shakespeare with which the screen has familiarized them. They will feel much the same as we should, today, if the gravedigger's scene in Hamlet or the porter's scene in Macbeth were not included. Such a transition would enable us to understand how the Elizabethans enjoyed performances which we should consider under-staged. Many people believe that the movies will never take the place of the stage. We cannot be quite sure of that when we remember that, after all, the stage is merely an illusion and that people may become thoroughly accustomed to that other illusion, the screen.

In the case of Shakespeare, the latter can offer greater facilities for the reproduction of his stories, which are not plays in the modern sense. It is interesting to note that Sir Nigel Playfair is of the opinion that the "movie will be the national theatre"¹ of the future.

We rest assured today, that Shakespeare, as a playwright, is very much alive. Mr. Bertram Clayton¹ prophesies that he will be much more alive when the plays have become popularized on the screen, and Shakespeare, is once more as accessible to the masses as he was over three hundred years ago.

Summary

Shakespeare's reputation as a great writer is as old as himself. His contemporaries expressed their admiration of his work in the Folio of 1623, which was compiled some six years after his death. He was not held in universal regard, by scholars of his day, but men like Ben Jonson, did not refrain from singing his praises. Later in the century, when regard for the classics was at its height, critics came to look upon Shakespeare as an untutored genius, and except for the criticism of Dryden, there is nothing to show that men of the Restoration period comprehended the greatness of their native dramatist. In the beginning of the eighteenth century, when unreasoning admiration had grown to worship, men like Rowe and Pope, raised a silent monument to Shakespeare by attempting, with some degree of success, to compile editions of his plays. This placed Shakespeare in a new position in the world of literature, which was intensified, when some years later, Dr. Samuel Johnson made his famous defense of the English dramatist at the expense of the beloved classicists.

From Johnson's time until the beginning of the next century, Shakespeare gradually gained ascendancy, as respect for the ancients grew less and less. Soon we

hear no more of the 'faults of Shakespeare', for beginning with Coleridge, the new school, known as the Romantic, cared nothing for the classics and everything for the mighty Shakespeare. Admiration for the character, portrayal and poetry of the play was savored with an understanding of the nature of Shakespeare's genius, which was lacking in his classical admirers. But as the Romanticists dipped deeper and deeper, they tended to allow their imagination unbounded sway, until, instead of admiring only the fine things in Shakespeare, they came to accept him as universally great. Romanticism, like classicism, wore itself out, and with its death, came a strong reaction against the type of criticism it fostered.

It is not surprising, to find, in the twentieth century that men have wearied of the blameless praise accorded Shakespeare and have set out to formulate opinions of their own. Modern critics set about their task, by turning back the dial of time and familiarizing themselves with the age of Shakespeare. They have discovered that, in many ways, he is a product of his day, but in comparison with his contemporaries, he stands aloft as a mountain peak. But the critics are anxious that we do leave him in his splendid isolation and continue, in the steps of the Romanticists, to regard him as perfect.

They take upon themselves the task of determining wherein his greatness lies, that we of the twentieth century may come to a truer appreciation of his real worth and realize that great as he is, he is but a kindred soul and not a god, at whose altar we must come to worship.

The Romanticists' criticism of Shakespeare's character is not to be lightly tossed aside. Many critics of our own day follow in their lead and interpret the people of Shakespeare's world in terms of reality. But our sceptical friends, who feel that it is their mission to find some fault everywhere, will have us believe that, although Shakespeare endowed his creations with life-like qualities, he failed to make them act as people of their nature would act. They carefully show us wherein the characters are subject, not to their own natures, but to the plot which Shakespeare used. Hamlet feigned madness, consigned Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to death, killed Polonius and Claudius because the play must follow in the main, the order of events of an old Hamlet. Shakespeare's creations were not born to act in any such manner but the master had borrowed an old plot and follow it, he must; and Hamlet is not the only one who has been subjected to this mal-treatment. Othello, Macbeth and any number of Shakespeare creations are found to have had their actions mapped out for them,

before time. Having assured themselves that Shakespeare did not draw consistent characters, the sceptical critics hope that they have dispelled the illusion that he 'could not err'.

What Mr. Stoll and Mr. Robinson have really done is not to destroy our belief in the reality of the characters, but point out very definitely wherein Shakespeare is an Elizabethan. True, he did make use of old plots and sources, but as Mr. Squires points out, his characters convince us that they are acting in the only way possible for people of their peculiar nature, under the special circumstances enforced upon them. Hamlet, Othello and Macbeth like human beings, cannot have a code of conduct drawn up for them, to fit every occasion. To say that Shakespeare's characters act inconsistently is to further our belief in them as creatures like ourselves, who re-act to our environment each in a different way.

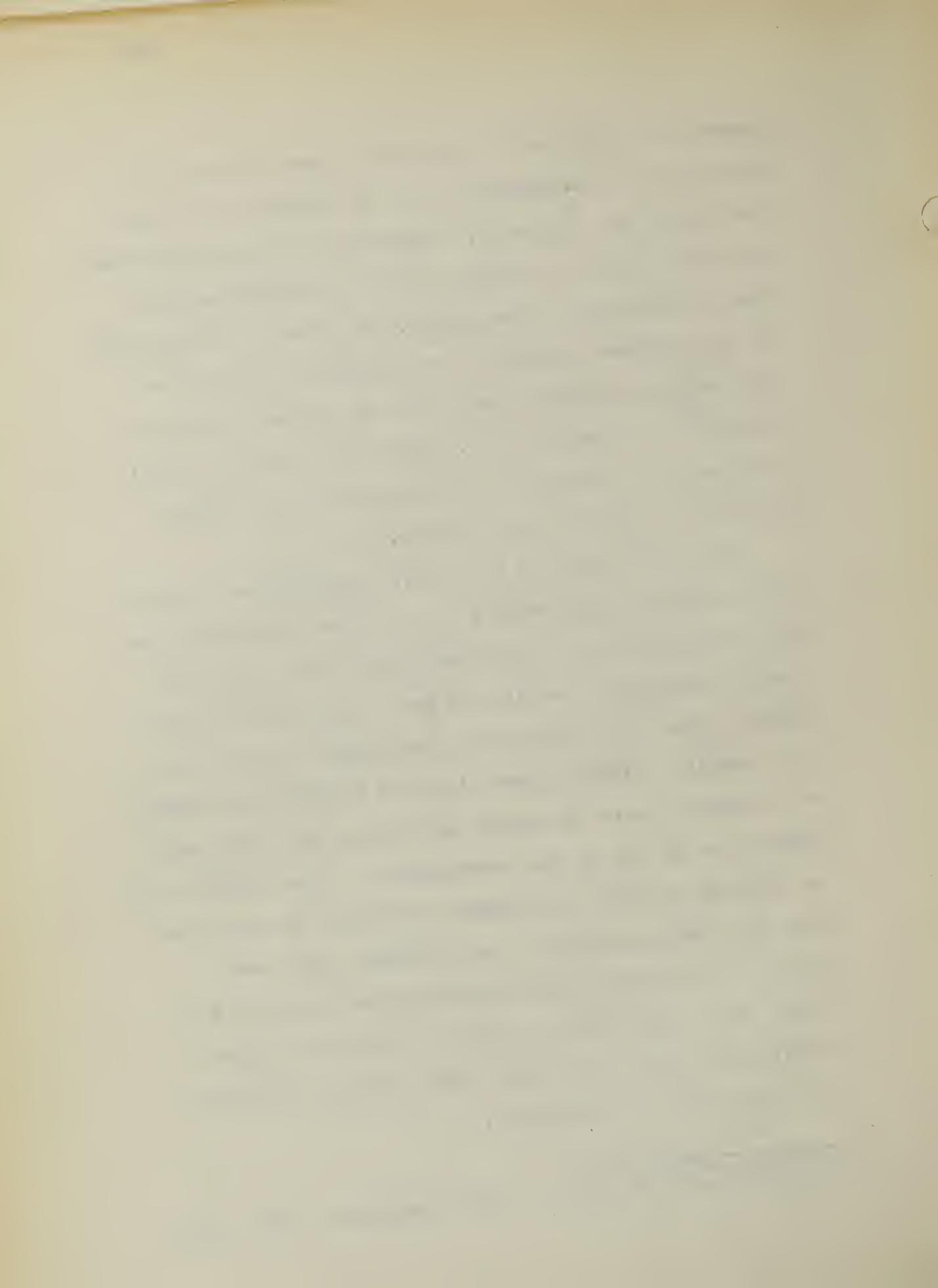
Mr. George Bernard Shaw has the same idea in mind as Mr. Stoll, namely to free the public mind of the conception that Shakespeare is too perfect for adverse criticism. Although, in his remarks on Othello, he agrees with the sceptics that the character's actions are forced upon him from without, for the most part, Mr. Shaw directs his critical remarks, not so much against Shake-

speare, as those people who have formed the habit of praising him indiscriminately. He wishes us to understand that, in many ways, Shakespeare did not rise above the conditions of his age, but that does not detract from the splendour of a genius, the power of which lies "in his enormous command of word-music"¹ and not in "the callous sensation mongering in murder, lust and ghosts"². Furthermore, Mr. Shaw would cure the public conscience of the absurd conception that Wm. Shakespeare is a thinker of high rank.

While the sceptics are busily employed with their re-valuation of Shakespeare as a genius, other critics are paying tribute to his greatness. The characters seem to fascinate the mind of man, for the more that is written about them the more there seems to have been left unsaid. Critics never tire of interpreting Hamlet as a tragic figure who seems as true to the twentieth century as he did to the seventeenth. This interest in the tragedy of life is further manifested by those men, like Mr. Bradley and Mr. John Henneman, who seek to search out just what Shakespeare's conception of the tragic was. They find it is not a belief in blind destiny, but that "the fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves".

¹-Sewanee Review - 1908

²-Shakespeare's Sceptics - North American - March 1922



Just as we are fond of drawing comparisons of the personalities of our friends, so are the critics, when engrossed in Shakespeare's world of men and women, tempted to compare one character with another. Like real people they have their resemblances to each other, but when all is said and done they are distinct individuals. And this does not apply only to the major characters, but to that giant host of lesser folk which Shakespeare has created out of the greatness of his human understanding. Although they were born over three hundred years ago, human nature remains so much the same from one age to the next that, today, we cannot detract from their reality by comparing them with the creations of our modern dramatists, not even the greatest, be it Shaw or Ibsen.

Modern critics, due to their historical attitude, have rendered Shakespeare a great service in learning to appreciate another phase of his genius, namely his ability as a playwright. Scholarly achievement in the field of Elizabethan stage-craft has brought to light the fact that Shakespeare exercised unlimited skill in adapting himself to the stage conditions of his day. His ability to fit his plays into the scheme of things did not come all at once, but as Mr. George P. Baker carefully traces for us, his skill increased with

practice, a fact which may be verified by comparing the structure of an early play like "Love's Labour's Lost", with a later one like "The Merchant of Venice"¹. Mr. Granville Barker² asserts that Shakespeare the playwright, is not less important than Shakespeare, the poet, and that if we would come to a complete understanding of him, we must appreciate him in this respect. This is a point of view which belongs to the twentieth century alone, for in bygone ages, men either assumed that Shakespeare lacked the art of playwriting or they disregarded this aspect of his genius entirely.

This discovery of Shakespeare, the playwright, has stimulated interest in the theatres, and during the last twenty-five years no effort has been considered too great to bring before the public productions of the plays that are worthy of the greatest dramatist of all time. Men vary in their opinions greatly regarding this question of stage presentation, a fact which assures us that producers are sincere in their efforts, for practical folk do not worry themselves over questions of stage technique if they consider that the plays in question are of little value. That Shakespeare's plays present problems which need not be considered in the staging of modern plays doubly assures us that producers see great possibilities of employing these Elizabethan master-

¹-Shakespeare and His Critics - p.343

²-Yale Review - January 1926

pieces effectively.

Within recent years, Shakespeare has been repeatedly presented upon the stage in modern costumes and setting. This style of production has been accepted by many in a most enthusiastic manner. However, approval of this movement has been far from general, for there are many lovers of Shakespeare who feel that this modern method does not do justice to the plays. There is a great deal that can be said in favor of both sides. The modern productions which undoubtedly do not make the most of the skill Shakespeare displayed in the construction of his plays, are valuable in that they impress upon the public mind the fact that Shakespeare's plays can be enjoyed in a perfectly natural manner. The familiar settings and costume "clear away obstructions between the modern play goer and the play which is modern because it is eternal"¹. Mr. Dukes, who is not concerned with dress or settings, fears that in these modern performances there is a grave possibility of the poetry of Shakespeare being lost. It is true that the burden of the thing is thrown upon the actor, and for that reason, many critics feel that it would be better to stage the plays in such a manner that the scenery employed would assist the actor to interpret the mood and motives of the characters. Moreover, the actor

would not feel conscious of the incongruity between speech and dress, for the costumes in this instance would be historical.

There is something else which critics insist we should consider in staging Shakespeare's plays. Not only must the scenery be appropriate but it must be employed on a stage which allows for almost instantaneous change of setting. Shakespeare's plays flow on in story form and to interrupt the action by long waits, is to spoil the effect and necessitate frequent cuts. The growing tendency is to stage the plays as nearly as possible as they were written that we may enjoy the swiftly moving panorama of words, color and action. There are a few critics who feel that the stage will never be in a position to stage Shakespeare as he ought to be staged. They look to the screen for the fulfillment of their ideal presentation of the plays, and prophesy that, through this medium, alone, will Shakespeare return to the universal popularity he enjoyed during his own lifetime.

In brief, the twentieth century is re-appraising Shakespeare. No longer is he regarded as the great philosopher of all things. His position today is enhanced because people are coming to see wherein his greatness lies, and are less prone to praise him in an

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unreasoning manner. We accept him as a great diviner of the workings of the human mind, one who could enter at will into the minds of people of every type and degree. His poetic medium of expression is considered by certain people as the sum total of his genius, in particular by Mr. George Bernard Shaw¹ who asserts that, in a deaf nation Shakespeare would have been dead long ago. Over and above his ability to express human feeling through the medium of word-music, there is his skill as a writer of plays, which phase of his genius is attracting more and more attention. Shakespeare is supreme by virtue of his creative ability, his poetic gift and his technical skill, but he is not so faultless that we feel chilled by the marble perfection of his art.

¹-Dramatic Opinion and Essays - vol.I - p.24

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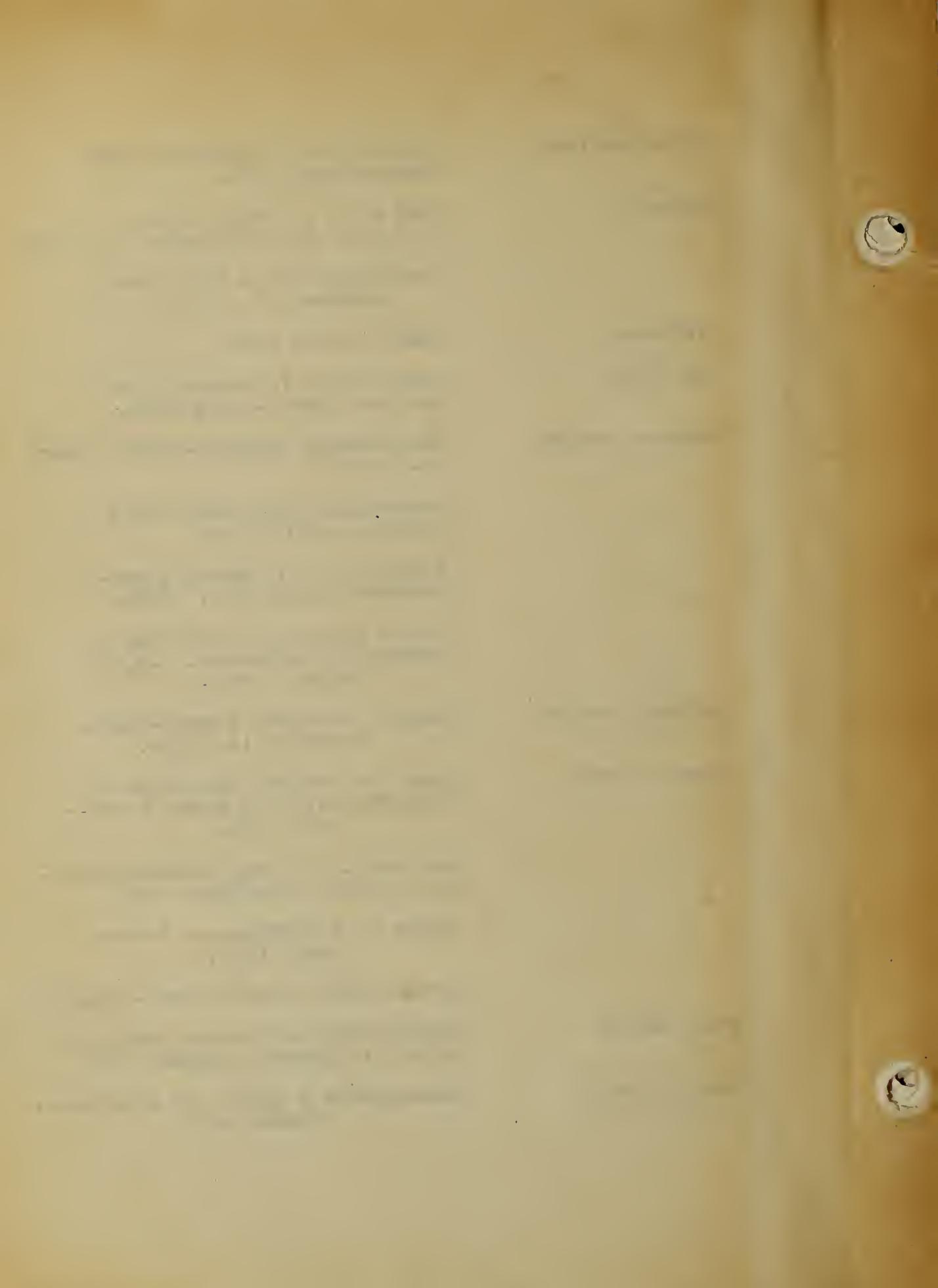
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