

THE MAN SHAKESPEARE

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I DEDICATE THIS BOOK TO MY FRIEND, ERNEST BECKETT (NOW LORD GRIMTHORPE),
A MAN OF MOST EXCELLENT DIFFERENCES, WHO UNITES TO A GENIUS FOR PRACTICAL THINGS A PASSIONATE SYMPATHY FOR ALL HIGH ENDEAVOUR IN LITERATURE AND ART

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INTRODUCTION

This book has grown out of a series of articles contributed to "The Saturday Review" some ten or twelve years ago. As they appeared they were talked of and criticized in the usual way; a minority of readers thought "the stuff" interesting; many held that my view of Shakespeare was purely arbitrary; others said I had used a concordance to such purpose that out of the mass of words I had managed, by virtue of some unknown formula, to re-create the character of the man.

The truth is much simpler: I read Shakespeare's plays in boyhood, chiefly for the stories; every few years later I was fain to re-read them; for as I grew I always found new beauties in them which I had formerly missed, and again and again I was lured back by tantalizing hints and suggestions of a certain unity underlying the diversity of characters. These suggestions gradually became more definite till at length, out of the myriad voices in the plays, I began to hear more and more insistent the accents of one voice, and out of the crowd of faces, began to distinguish more and more clearly the features of the writer; for all the world like some lovelorn girl, who, gazing with her soul in her eyes, finds in the witch's cauldron the face of the beloved. I have tried in this book to trace the way I followed, step by step; for I found it effective to rough in the chief features of the man first, and afterwards, taking the plays in succession, to show how Shakespeare painted himself at full-length not once, but twenty times, at as many different periods of his life. This is one reason why he is more interesting to us than the greatest men of the past, than Dante even, or Homer; for Dante and Homer worked only at their best in the flower of manhood. Shakespeare, on the other hand, has painted himself for us in

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his green youth with hardly any knowledge of life or art, and then in his eventful maturity, with growing experience and new powers, in masterpiece after masterpiece; and at length in his decline with weakened grasp and fading colours, so that in him we can study the growth and fruiting and decay of the finest spirit that has yet been born among men. This tragedy of tragedies, in which "Lear" is only one scene—this rise to intensest life and widest vision and fall through abysses of despair and madness to exhaustion and death—can be followed experience by experience, from Stratford to London and its thirty years of passionate living, and then from London to village Stratford again, and the eternal shrouding silence.

As soon as this astonishing drama discovered itself to me in its tragic completeness I jumped to the conclusion that it must have been set forth long ago in detail by Shakespeare's commentators, and so, for the first time, I turned to their works. I do not wish to rail at my forerunners as Carlyle railed at the historians of Cromwell, or I should talk, as he talked, about "libraries of inanities...conceited dilettantism and pedantry...prurient stupidity," and so forth. The fact is, I found all this, and worse; I waded through tons of talk to no result. Without a single exception the commentators have all missed the man and the story; they have turned the poet into a tradesman, and the unimaginable tragedy of his life into the commonplace record of a successful tradesman's career. Even to explain this astounding misadventure of the host of critics is a little difficult. The mistake, of course, arose from the fact that his contemporaries told very little about Shakespeare; they left his appearance and even the incidents of his life rather vague. Being without a guide, and having no clear idea of Shakespeare's character, the critics created him in their own image, and, whenever they were in doubt, idealized him according to the national type. Still, there was at least one exception. Some Frenchman, I think it is Joubert, says that no great man is born into the world without another man being born about the same time, who understands and can interpret him, and Shakespeare was of necessity singularly fortunate in his interpreter. Ben Jonson was big enough to see him fairly, and to give excellent-true testimony concerning him. Jonson's view of Shakespeare is astonishingly accurate and trustworthy so far as it goes; even his

attitude of superiority to Shakespeare is fraught with meaning. Two hundred years later, the rising tide of international criticism produced two men, Goethe and Coleridge, who also saw Shakespeare, if only by glimpses, or rather by divination of kindred genius, recognizing certain indubitable traits. Goethe's criticism of "Hamlet" has been vastly over-praised; but now and then he used words about Shakespeare which, in due course, we shall see were illuminating words, the words of one who guessed something of the truth. Coleridge, too, with his curious, complex endowment of philosopher and poet, resembled Shakespeare, saw him, therefore, by flashes, and might have written greatly about him; but, alas, Coleridge, a Puritan born, was brought up in epicene hypocrisies, and determined to see Shakespeare—that child of the

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Renascence—as a Puritan, too, and consequently mis-saw him far oftener than he saw him; misjudged him hideously, and had no inkling of his tragic history.

There is a famous passage in Coleridge's "Essays on Shakespeare" which illustrates what I mean. It begins: "In Shakespeare all the elements of womanhood are holy"; and goes on to eulogize the instinct of chastity which all his women possess, and this in spite of Doll Tearsheet, Tamora, Cressida, Goneril, Regan, Cleopatra, the Dark Lady of the Sonnets, and many other frail and fascinating figures. Yet whatever gleam of light has fallen on Shakespeare since Coleridge's day has come chiefly from that dark lantern which he now and then flashed upon the master.

In one solitary respect, our latter-day criticism has been successful; it has established with very considerable accuracy the chronology of the plays, and so the life-story of the poet is set forth in due order for those to read who can.

This then is what I found—a host of commentators who saw men as trees walking, and mistook plain facts, and among them one authentic witness, Jonson, and two interesting though not trustworthy witnesses, Goethe and Coleridge—and nothing more in three centuries. The mere fact may well give us pause, pointing as it does to a truth which is still insufficiently understood. It is the puzzle of criticism, at once the despair and wonder of readers, that the greatest men of letters usually pass through life without being remarked or understood by their contemporaries. The men of Elizabeth's time were more interested in Jonson than in Shakespeare, and have told us much more about the younger than the greater master; just as Spaniards of the same age were more interested in Lope de Vega than in Cervantes, and have left a better picture of the second-rate playwright than of the world-poet. Attempting to solve this problem Emerson coolly assumed that the men of the Elizabethan age were so great that Shakespeare himself walked about among them unnoticed as a giant among giants. This reading of the riddle is purely transcendental. We know that Shakespeare's worst plays were far oftener acted than his best; that "Titus Andronicus" by popular favour was more esteemed than "Hamlet." The majority of contemporary poets and critics regarded Shakespeare rather as a singer of "sugred" verses than as a dramatist. The truth is that Shakespeare passed through life unnoticed because he was so much greater than his contemporaries that they could not see him at all in his true proportions. It was Jonson, the nearest to him in greatness, who alone saw him at all fairly and appreciated his astonishing genius.

Nothing illustrates more perfectly the unconscious wisdom of the English race than the old saying that "a man must be judged by his peers." One's

peers, in fact, are the only persons capable of judging one, and the truth seems to be that three centuries have only produced three men at all capable of judging Shakespeare. The jury is still being collected.

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But from the quality of the first three, and of their praise, it is already plain that his place will be among the highest. From various indications, too, it looks as if the time for judging him had come: "Hamlet" is perhaps his most characteristic creation, and Hamlet, in his intellectual unrest, morbid brooding, cynical self-analysis and dislike of bloodshed, is much more typical of the nineteenth or twentieth century than of the sixteenth. Evidently the time for classifying the creator of Hamlet is at hand.

And this work of description and classification should be done as a scientist would do it: for criticism itself has at length bent to the Time-spirit and become scientific. And just as in science, analysis for the moment has yielded pride of place to synthesis, so the critical movement in literature has in our time become creative. The chemist, who resolves any substance into its elements, is not satisfied till by synthesis he can re-create the substance out of its elements: this is the final proof that his knowledge is complete. And so we care little or nothing to-day for critical analyses or appreciations which are not creative presentments of the person. "Paint him for us," we say, "in his habit as he lived, and we will take it that you know something about him."

One of the chief attempts at creative criticism in English literature, or, perhaps it would be fairer to say, the only memorable attempt, is Carlyle's Cromwell. He has managed to build up the man for us quite credibly out of Cromwell's letters and speeches, showing us the underlying sincerity and passionate resolution of the great Puritan once for all. But unfortunately Carlyle was too romantic an artist, too persuaded in his hero-worship to discover for us Cromwell's faults and failings. In his book we find nothing of the fanatic who ordered the Irish massacres, nothing of the neuropath who lived in hourly dread of assassination. Carlyle has painted his subject all in lights, so to speak; the shadows are not even indicated, and yet he ought to have known that in proportion to the brilliancy of the light the shadows must of necessity be dark. It is not for me to point out that this romantic painting of great men, like all other make-believes and hypocrisies, has its drawbacks and shortcomings: it is enough that it has had its day and produced its pictures of giant-heroes and their worshippers for those who love such childish toys.

The wonderful age in which we live—this twentieth century with its X-rays that enable us to see through the skin and flesh of men, and to study the working of their organs and muscles and nerves—has brought a new spirit into the world, a spirit of fidelity to fact, and with it a new and higher ideal of life and of art, which must of necessity change and transform all the conditions of existence, and in time modify the almost immutable nature of man. For this new spirit, this love of the fact and of truth, this passion for reality will do away with the foolish fears and futile hopes which have fretted the childhood of our race, and will slowly but surely establish on broad foundations the

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Kingdom of Man upon Earth. For that is the meaning and purpose of the change which is now coming over the world. The faiths and convictions of twenty centuries are passing away and the forms and institutions of a hundred generations of men are dissolving before us like the baseless

fabric of a dream. A new morality is already shaping itself in the spirit; a morality based not on guess-work and on fancies; but on ascertained laws of moral health; a scientific morality belonging not to statics, like the morality of the Jews, but to dynamics, and so fitting the nature of each individual person. Even now conscience with its prohibitions is fading out of life, evolving into a more profound consciousness of ourselves and others, with multiplied incitements to wise giving. The old religious asceticism with its hatred of the body is dead; the servile acceptance of conditions of life and even of natural laws is seen to be vicious; it is of the nobility of man to be insatiate in desire and to rebel against limiting conditions; it is the property of his intelligence to constrain even the laws of nature to the attainment of his ideal.

Already we are proud of being students, investigators, servants of truth, and we leave the great names of demi-gods and heroes a little contemptuously to the men of bygone times. As student-artists we are no longer content with the outward presentment and form of men: we want to discover the protean vanities, greeds and aspirations of men, and to lay bare, as with a scalpel, the hidden motives and springs of action. We dream of an art that shall take into account the natural daily decay and up-building of cell-life; the wars that go on in the blood; the fevers of the brain; the creeping paralysis of nerve-exhaustion; above all, we must be able even now from a few bare facts, to re-create a man and make him live and love again for the reader, just as the biologist from a few scattered bones can reconstruct some prehistoric bird or fish or mammal. And we student-artists have no desire to paint our subject as better or nobler or smaller or meaner than he was in reality; we study his limitations as we study his gifts, his virtues with as keen an interest as his vices; for it is in some excess of desire, or in some extravagance of mentality, that we look for the secret of his achievement, just as we begin to wonder when we see hands constantly outstretched in pious supplication, whether a foot is not thrust out behind in some secret shame, for the biped, man, must keep a balance. I intend first of all to prove from Shakespeare's works that he has painted himself twenty times from youth till age at full length: I shall consider and compare these portraits till the outlines of his character are clear and certain; afterwards I shall show how his little vanities and shames idealized the picture, and so present him as he really was, with his imperial intellect and small snobberies; his giant vices and paltry self-deceptions; his sweet gentleness and long martyrdom. I cannot but think that his portrait will thus gain more in truth than it can lose in ideal beauty. Or let me come nearer to my purpose by means of a simile. Talking with Sir David Gill one evening on shipboard about

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the fixed stars, he pointed one out which is so distant that we cannot measure how far it is away from us and can form no idea of its magnitude. "But surely," I exclaimed, "the great modern telescopes must bring the star nearer and magnify it?" "No," he replied, "no; the best instruments make the star clearer to us, but certainly not larger." This is what I wish to do in regard to Shakespeare; make him clearer to men, even if I do not make him larger.

And if I were asked why I do this, why I take the trouble to re-create a man now three centuries dead, it is first of all, of course, because he is worth it—the most complex and passionate personality in the world, whether of life or letters—because, too, there are certain lessons which the English will learn from Shakespeare more quickly and easily

than from any living man, and a little because I want to get rid of Shakespeare by assimilating all that was fine in him, while giving all that was common and vicious in him as spoil to oblivion. He is like the Old-Man-of-the-Sea on the shoulders of our youth; he has become an obsession to the critic, a weapon to the pedant, a nuisance to the man of genius. True, he has painted great pictures in a superb, romantic fashion; he is the Titian of dramatic art: but is there to be no Rembrandt, no Balzac, no greater Tolstoi in English letters? I want to liberate Englishmen so far as I can from the tyranny of Shakespeare's greatness. For the new time is upon us, with its new knowledge and new claims, and we English are all too willing to live in the past, and so lose our inherited place as leader of the nations.

The French have profited by their glorious Revolution: they trusted reason and have had their reward; no such leap forward has ever been made as France made in that one decade, and the effects are still potent. In the last hundred years the language of Moli`ere has grown fourfold; the slang of the studios and the gutter and the laboratory, of the engineering school and the dissecting table, has been ransacked for special terms to enrich and strengthen the language in order that it may deal easily with the new thoughts. French is now a superb instrument, while English is positively poorer than it was in the time of Shakespeare, thanks to the prudery of our illiterate middle class. Divorced from reality, with its activities all fettered in baby-linen, our literature has atrophied and dwindled into a babble of nursery rhymes, tragedies of Little Marys, tales of Babes in a Wood. The example of Shakespeare may yet teach us the value of free speech; he could say what he liked as he liked: he was not afraid of the naked truth and the naked word, and through his greatness a Low Dutch dialect has become the chiefest instrument of civilization, the world-speech of humanity at large.

FRANK HARRIS.

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BOOK I

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SHAKESPEARE PAINTED BY HIMSELF

CHAPTER I

HAMLET: ROMEO—JAQUES

"As I passed by ... I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you." This work of Paul—the discovery and proclaiming of an unknown god—is in every age the main function of the critic.

An unknown god this Shakespeare of ours, whom all are agreed it would be well to know, if in any way possible. As to the possibility, however, the authorities are at loggerheads. Hallam, "the judicious," declared that it was impossible to learn anything certain about "the man, Shakespeare." Wordsworth, on the other hand (without a nickname to show a close connection with the common), held that Shakespeare unlocked his heart with the sonnets for key. Browning jeered at this belief, to be in turn contradicted by Swinburne. Matthew Arnold gave us in a sonnet "the best opinion of his time":

"Others abide our question. Thou art free.

We ask and ask—Thou smilest and art still,

Out-topping knowledge."

But alas! the best opinion of one generation is in these matters often flat unreason to the next, and it may be that in this instance neither

the opinion of Hallam nor Browning nor Arnold will be allowed to count. As it is the object of a general to win battles so it is the life-work of the artist to show himself to us, and the completeness with which he reveals his own individuality is perhaps the best measure of his genius. One does this like Montaigne, simply, garrulously, telling us his height and make, his tastes and distastes, his loves and fears and habits, till gradually the seeming-artless talk brings the man before us, a sun-warmed fruit of humanity, with uncouth rind of stiff manners and sweet kindly juices, not perfect in any way, shrivelled on this side by early frost-bite, and on that softened to corruption through too much heat, marred here by the bitter-black cicatrice of an ancient injury and there fortune-spotted, but on the whole healthy, grateful, of a most pleasant ripeness. Another, like Shakespeare, with passionate conflicting sympathies and curious impartial intellect cannot discover himself so simply; needs, like the diamond, many facets to show all the light in him, and so proceeds to cut them one after the other as Falstaff or Hamlet, to the dazzling of the purblind.

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Yet Shakespeare's purpose is surely the same as Montaigne's, to reveal himself to us, and it would be hasty to decide that his skill is inferior. For while Montaigne had nothing but prose at his command, and not too rich a prose, as he himself complains, Shakespeare in magic of expression has had no equal in recorded time, and he used the lyric as well as the dramatic form, poetry as well as prose, to give his soul utterance.

We are doing Shakespeare wrong by trying to believe that he hides himself behind his work; the suspicion is as unworthy as the old suspicion dissipated by Carlyle that Cromwell was an ambitious hypocrite. Sincerity is the birthmark of genius, and we can be sure that Shakespeare has depicted himself for us with singular fidelity; we can see him in his works, if we will take the trouble, "in his habit as he lived."

We are doing ourselves wrong, too, by pretending that Shakespeare "out-tops knowledge." He did not fill the world even in his own time: there was room beside him in the days of Elizabeth for Marlowe and Spenser, Ben Jonson and Bacon, and since then the spiritual outlook, like the material outlook, has widened to infinity. There is space in life now for a dozen ideals undreamed-of in the sixteenth century. Let us have done with this pretence of doglike humility; we, too, are men, and there is on earth no higher title, and in the universe nothing beyond our comprehending. It will be well for us to know Shakespeare and all his high qualities and do him reverence; it will be well for us, too, to see his limitations and his faults, for after all it is the human frailties in a man that call forth our sympathy and endear him to us, and without love there is no virtue in worship, no attraction in example.

The doubt as to the personality of Shakespeare, and the subsequent confusion and contradictions are in the main, I think, due to Coleridge. He was the first modern critic to have glimpses of the real Shakespeare, and the vision lent his words a singular authority. But Coleridge was a hero-worshipper by nature and carried reverence to lyric heights. He used all his powers to persuade men that Shakespeare was [Greek: $\mu\upsilon\tau\acute{\alpha}\nu\alpha\kappa\tau\omicron\varsigma$ anaer $\mu\upsilon\tau\acute{\alpha}\nu\alpha\kappa\tau\omicron\varsigma$]—"the myriad-minded man"; a sort of demi-god who was every one and no one, a Proteus without individuality of his own. The theory has held the field for nearly a century, probably because it flatters our national vanity; for in itself it is fantastically absurd

and leads to most ridiculous conclusions. For instance, when Coleridge had to deal with the fact that Shakespeare never drew a miser, instead of accepting the omission as characteristic, for it is confirmed by Ben Jonson's testimony that he was "of an open and free nature," Coleridge proceeded to argue that avarice is not a permanent passion in humanity, and that Shakespeare probably for that reason chose to leave it undescribed. This is an example of the ecstasy of hero-worship; it is begging the question to assume that whatever Shakespeare did was

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perfect; humanity cannot be penned up even in Shakespeare's brain. Like every other man of genius Shakespeare must have shown himself in his qualities and defects, in his preferences and prejudices; "a fallible being," as stout old Dr. Johnson knew, "will fail somewhere." Even had Shakespeare tried to hide himself in his work, he could not have succeeded. Now that the print of a man's hand or foot or ear is enough to distinguish him from all other men, it is impossible to believe that the mask of his mind, the very imprint, form and pressure of his soul should be less distinctive. Just as Monsieur Bertillon's whorl-pictures of a thumb afford overwhelming proofs of a man's identity, so it is possible from Shakespeare's writings to establish beyond doubt the main features of his character and the chief incidents of his life. The time for random assertion about Shakespeare and unlimited eulogy of him has passed away for ever: the object of this inquiry is to show him as he lived and loved and suffered, and the proofs of this and of that trait shall be so heaped up as to stifle doubt and reach absolute conviction. For not only is the circumstantial evidence overwhelming and conclusive, but we have also the testimony of eye-witnesses with which to confirm it, and one of these witnesses, Ben Jonson, is of rare credibility and singularly well equipped. Let us begin, then, by treating Shakespeare as we would treat any other writer, and ask simply how a dramatic author is most apt to reveal himself. A great dramatist may not paint himself for us at any time in his career with all his faults and vices; but when he goes deepest into human nature, we may be sure that self-knowledge is his guide; as Hamlet said, "To know a man well, were to know himself" (oneself), so far justifying the paradox that dramatic writing is merely a form of autobiography. We may take then as a guide this first criterion that, in his masterpiece of psychology, the dramatist will reveal most of his own nature.

If a dozen lovers of Shakespeare were asked to name the most profound and most complex character in all his dramas it is probable that every one without hesitation would answer Hamlet. The current of cultivated opinion has long set in this direction. With the intuition of a kindred genius, Goethe was the first to put Hamlet on a pedestal: "the incomparable," he called him, and devoted pages to an analysis of the character. Coleridge followed with the confession whose truth we shall see later: "I have a smack of Hamlet myself, if I may say so." But even if it be admitted that Hamlet is the most complex and profound of Shakespeare's creations, and therefore probably the character in which Shakespeare revealed most of himself, the question of degree still remains to be determined. Is it possible to show certainly that even the broad outlines of Hamlet's character are those of the master-poet?

There are various ways in which this might be proved. For instance, if one could show that whenever Shakespeare fell out of a character he was drawing, he unconsciously dropped into the Hamlet vein, one's suspicion

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as to the identity of Hamlet and the poet would be enormously strengthened. There is another piece of evidence still more convincing. Suppose that Shakespeare in painting another character did nothing but paint Hamlet over again trait by trait—virtue by virtue, fault by fault—our assurance would be almost complete; for a dramatist only makes this mistake when he is speaking unconsciously in his proper person. But if both these kinds of proof were forthcoming, and not once but a dozen times, then surely our conviction as to the essential identity of Hamlet and Shakespeare would amount to practical certitude. Of course it would be foolish, even in this event, to pretend that Hamlet exhausts Shakespeare; art does little more than embroider the fringe of the garment of life, and the most complex character in drama or even in fiction is simple indeed when compared with even the simplest of living men or women. Shakespeare included in himself Falstaff and Cleopatra, beside the author of the sonnets, and knowledge drawn from all these must be used to fill out and perhaps to modify the outlines given in Hamlet before one can feel sure that the portrait is a re-presentation of reality. But when this study is completed, it will be seen that with many necessary limitations, Hamlet is indeed a revelation of some of the most characteristic traits of Shakespeare.

To come to the point quickly, I will take Hamlet's character as analyzed by Coleridge and Professor Dowden.

Coleridge says: "Hamlet's character is the prevalence of the abstracting and generalizing habit over the practical. He does not want courage, skill, will or opportunity; but every incident sets him thinking; and it is curious, and at the same time strictly natural, that Hamlet, who all the play seems reason itself, should be impelled at last by mere accident to effect his object." Again he says: "in Hamlet we see a great, an almost enormous intellectual activity and a proportionate aversion to real action consequent upon it."

Professor Dowden's analysis is more careful but hardly as complete. He calls Hamlet "the meditative son" of a strong-willed father, and adds, "he has slipped on into years of full manhood still a haunter of the university, a student of philosophies, an amateur in art, a ponderer on the things of life and death who has never formed a resolution or executed a deed. This long course of thinking apart from action has destroyed Hamlet's very capacity for belief.... In presence of the spirit he is himself 'a spirit,' and believes in the immortality of the soul. When left to his private thoughts he wavers uncertainly to and fro; death is a sleep; a sleep, it may be, troubled with dreams.... He is incapable of certitude.... After his fashion (that of one who relieves himself by speech rather than by deeds) he unpacks his heart in words."

Now what other personage is there in Shakespeare who shows these traits or some of them? He should be bookish and irresolute, a lover of thought

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and not of action, of melancholy temper too, and prone to unpack his heart with words. Almost every one who has followed the argument thus far will be inclined to think of Romeo. Hazlitt declared that "Romeo is Hamlet in love. There is the same rich exuberance of passion and sentiment in the one, that there is of thought and sentiment in the other. Both are absent and self-involved; both live out of themselves in a world of imagination." Much of this is true and affords a noteworthy example of Hazlitt's occasional insight into character, yet for reasons that will appear later it is not possible to insist, as Hazlitt does, upon the identity of Romeo and Hamlet. The most that can be said is that

Romeo is a younger brother of Hamlet, whose character is much less mature and less complex than that of the student-prince. Moreover, the characterization in Romeo—the mere drawing and painting—is very inferior to that put to use in Hamlet. Romeo is half hidden from us in the rose-mist of passion, and after he is banished from Juliet's arms we only see him for a moment as he rushes madly by into never-ending night, and all the while Shakespeare is thinking more of the poetry of the theme than of his hero's character. Romeo is crude and immature when compared with a profound psychological study like Hamlet. In "Hamlet" the action often stands still while incidents are invented for the mere purpose of displaying the peculiarities of the protagonist. "Hamlet," too, is the longest of Shakespeare's plays with the exception of "Antony and Cleopatra," and "the total length of Hamlet's speeches," says Dryasdust, "far exceeds that of those allotted by Shakespeare to any other of his characters." The important point, however, is that Romeo has a more than family likeness to Hamlet. Even in the heat and heyday of his passion Romeo plays thinker; Juliet says, "Good-night" and disappears, but he finds time to give us the abstract truth:

"Love goes towards love, as schoolboys from their books,
But love from love, toward school with heavy looks."

Juliet appears again unexpectedly, and again Hamlet's generalizing habit asserts itself in Romeo:

"How silver-sweet sound lovers' tongues by night,
Like softest music to attending ears."

We may be certain that Juliet would have preferred more pointed praise. He is indeed so lost in his ill-timed reverie that Juliet has to call him again and again by name before he attends to her.

Romeo has Hamlet's peculiar habit of talking to himself. He falls into a soliloquy on his way to Juliet in Capulet's orchard, when his heart must have been beating so loudly that it would have prevented him from hearing himself talk, and into another when hurrying to the apothecary. In this latter monologue, too, when all his thoughts must have been of Juliet and their star-crossed fates, and love-devouring Death, he is able to picture for us the apothecary and his shop with a wealth of detail that says more for Shakespeare's painstaking and memory than for

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his insight into character. The fault, however, is not so grave as it would be if Romeo were a different kind of man; but like Hamlet he is always ready to unpack his heart with words, and if they are not the best words sometimes, sometimes even very inappropriate words, it only shows that in his first tragedy Shakespeare was not the master of his art that he afterwards became.

In the churchyard scene of the fifth act Romeo's likeness to Hamlet comes into clearest light.

Hamlet says to Laertes:

"I pr'ythee, take thy fingers from my throat;
For though I am not splenitive and rash
Yet have I something in me dangerous
Which let thy wisdom fear."

In precisely the same temper, Romeo says to Paris:

"Good, gentle youth, tempt not a desperate man;
Fly hence and leave me; think upon these gone,
Let them affright thee."

This magnanimity is so rare that its existence would almost of itself be sufficient to establish a close relationship between Romeo and Hamlet.

Romeo's last speech, too, is characteristic of Hamlet: on the very

threshold of death he generalizes:

"How oft when men are at the point of death,
Have they been merry? which their keepers call
A lightening before death."

There is in Romeo, too, that peculiar mixture of pensive sadness and loving sympathy which is the very vesture of Hamlet's soul; he says to "Noble County Paris":

"O, give me thy hand,
One writ with me in sour misfortune's book."

And finally Shakespeare's supreme lyrical gift is used by Romeo as unconstrainedly as by Hamlet himself. The beauty in the last soliloquy is of passion rather than of intellect, but in sheer triumphant beauty some lines of it have never been surpassed:

"Here, here will I remain
With worms that are thy chambermaids; O, here
Will I set up my everlasting rest
And shake the yoke of inauspicious stars
From this world-wearied flesh."

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The whole soliloquy and especially the superb epithet "world-wearied" are at least as suitable to Hamlet as to Romeo. Passion, it is true, is more accentuated in Romeo, just as there is greater irresolution combined with intenser self-consciousness in Hamlet, yet all the qualities of the youthful lover are to be found in the student-prince. Hamlet is evidently the later finished picture of which Romeo was merely the charming sketch. Hamlet says he is revengeful and ambitious, although he is nothing of the kind, and in much the same way Romeo says: "I'll be a candle-holder and look on,"

whereas he plays the chief part and a very active part in the drama. If he were more of a "candle-holder" and onlooker, he would more resemble Hamlet. Then too, though he generalizes, he does not search the darkness with aching eyeballs as Hamlet does; the problems of life do not as yet lie heavy on his soul; he is too young to have felt their mystery and terror; he is only just within the shadow of that melancholy which to Hamlet discolours the world.

Seven or eight years after writing "Romeo and Juliet," Shakespeare growing conscious of these changes in his own temperament embodied them in another character, the melancholy "Jaques" in "As You Like It." Every one knows that Jaques is Shakespeare's creation; he is not to be found in Lodge's "Rosalynde," whence Shakespeare took the story and most of the characters of his play. Jaques is only sketched in with light strokes, but all his traits are peculiarly Hamlet's traits. For Jaques is a melancholy student of life as Hamlet is, with lightning-quick intelligence and heavy heart, and these are the Hamlet qualities which were not brought into prominence in the youthful Romeo. Passages taken at haphazard will suffice to establish my contention. "Motley's the only wear," says Jaques, as if longing to assume the cap and bells, and Hamlet plays the fool's part with little better reason. Jaques exclaims:

"Give me leave
To speak my mind, and I will through and through
Cleanse the foul body of the infected world,
If they will patiently receive my medicine."

And Hamlet cries:

"The Time is out of joint; O curs'd spite
That ever I was born to set it right."

The famous speech of Jaques, "All the world's a stage," might have been

said by Hamlet, indeed belongs of right to the person who gave the exquisite counsel to the players. Jaques' confession of melancholy, too, both in manner and matter is characteristic of Hamlet. How often Shakespeare must have thought it over before he was able to bring the peculiar nature of his own malady into such relief:

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"I have neither the scholar's melancholy, which is emulation; nor the musician's, which is fantastical; nor the courtier's, which is proud; nor the soldier's, which is ambitious; nor the lawyer's, which is politic; nor the lady's, which is nice; nor the lover's, which is all these; but it is a melancholy of mine own, compounded of many simples, extracted from many objects, and, indeed, the sundry contemplation of my travels; which, by often rumination, wraps me in, a most humourous sadness."

This "humourous sadness," the child of contemplation, was indeed Shakespeare's most constant mood. Jaques, too, loves solitude and the country as Hamlet loved them—and above all the last trait recorded of Jaques, his eagerness to see the reformed Duke and learn from the convert, is a perfect example of that intellectual curiosity which is one of Hamlet's most attaching characteristics. Yet another trait is attributed to Jaques, which we must on no account forget. The Duke accuses him of lewdness though lewdness seems out of place in Jaques's character, and is certainly not shown in the course of the action. If we combine the characters of Romeo, the poet-lover, and Jaques, the pensive-sad philosopher, we have almost the complete Hamlet.

It is conceivable that even a fair-minded reader of the plays will admit all I have urged about the likeness of Romeo and Jaques to Hamlet without concluding that these preliminary studies, so to speak, for the great portrait render it at all certain that the masterpiece of portraiture is a likeness of Shakespeare himself. The impartial critic will probably say, "You have raised a suspicion in my mind; a strong suspicion it may be, but still a suspicion that is far from certitude."

Fortunately the evidence still to be offered is a thousand times more convincing than any inferences that can properly be drawn from Romeo or from Jaques, or even from both together.

CHAPTER II

HAMLET—MACBETH

There is a later drama of Shakespeare's, a drama which comes between "Othello" and "Lear," and belongs, therefore, to the topmost height of the poet's achievement, whose principal character is Hamlet, Hamlet over again, with every peculiarity and every fault; a Hamlet, too, entangled in an action which is utterly unsuited to his nature. Surely if this statement can be proved, it will be admitted by all competent judges that the identity of Hamlet and his creator has been established. For Shakespeare must have painted this second Hamlet unconsciously. Think of it. In totally new circumstances the poet speaks with Hamlet's voice in Hamlet's words. The only possible explanation is that he is speaking

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from his own heart, and for that reason is unaware of the mistake. The drama I refer to is "Macbeth." No one, so far as I know, has yet thought of showing that there is any likeness between the character of Hamlet and that of Macbeth, much less identity; nevertheless, it seems to me easy to prove that Macbeth, "the rugged Macbeth," as Hazlitt and Brandes call him, is merely our gentle irresolute, humanist, philosopher Hamlet masquerading in galligaskins as a Scottish thane.

Let us take the first appearance of Macbeth, and we are forced to remark at once that he acts and speaks exactly as Hamlet in like circumstances would act and speak. The honest but slow Banquo is amazed when Macbeth starts and seems to fear the fair promises of the witches; he does not see what the nimble Hamlet-intellect has seen in a flash—the dread means by which alone the promises can be brought to fulfilment. As soon as Macbeth is hailed "Thane of Cawdor" Banquo warns him, but Macbeth, in spite of the presence of others, falls at once, as Hamlet surely would have fallen, into a soliloquy: a thing, considering the circumstances, most false to general human nature, for what he says must excite Banquo's suspicion, and is only true to the Hamlet-mind, that in and out of season loses itself in meditation. The soliloquy, too, is startlingly characteristic of Hamlet. After giving expression to the merely natural uplifting of his hope, Macbeth begins to weigh the for and against like a student-thinker:

"This supernatural soliciting
Cannot be ill; cannot be good; if ill,
Why hath it given me earnest of success,
Commencing in a truth? I am thane of Cawdor:
If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
Whose horrid image ...
... function
Is smothered in surmise and nothing is
But what is not,—"

When Banquo draws attention to him as "rapt," Macbeth still goes on talking to himself, for at length he has found arguments against action:
"If chance will have me King, why chance may crown me,
Without my stir,"—

all in the true Hamlet vein. At the end of the act, Macbeth when excusing himself to his companions becomes the student of Wittenberg in proper person. The courteous kindness of the words is almost as characteristic as the bookish illustration:

"Kind gentlemen, your pains
Are registered where every day I turn
The leaf to read them."

If this is not Hamlet's very tone, manner and phrase, then individuality of nature has no peculiar voice.

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I have laid such stress upon this, the first scene in which Macbeth appears, because the first appearance is by far the most important for the purpose of establishing the main outlines of a character; first impressions in a drama being exceedingly difficult to modify and almost impossible to change.

Macbeth, however, acts Hamlet from one end of the play to the other; and Lady Macbeth's first appearance (a personage almost as important to the drama as Macbeth himself) is used by Shakespeare to confirm this view of Macbeth's character. After reading her husband's letter almost her first words are:

"Yet do I fear thy nature.
It is too full o' the milk of human kindness
To catch the nearest way."

What is this but a more perfect expression of Hamlet's nature than Hamlet himself gives? Hamlet declares bitterly that he is "pigeon livered," and lacks "gall to make oppression bitter"; he says to Laertes, "I loved you ever," and to his mother:

"I must be cruel only to be kind,"

and she tells the King that he wept for Polonius' death. But the best phrase for his gentle-heartedness is what Lady Macbeth gives here: he is "too full o' the milk of human kindness." The words are as true of the Scottish chieftain as of the Wittenberg student; in heart they are one and the same person.

Though excited to action by his wife, Macbeth's last words in this scene are to postpone decision. "We will speak further," he says, whereupon the woman takes the lead, warns him to dissemble, and adds, "leave all the rest to me." Macbeth's doubting, irresolution, and dislike of action could hardly be more forcibly portrayed.

The seventh scene of the first act begins with another long soliloquy by Macbeth, and this soliloquy shows us not only Hamlet's irresolution and untimely love of meditation, but also the peculiar pendulum-swing of Hamlet's thought:

"If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly: if the assassination
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch
With his surcease success: that but this blow
Might be the be-all and the end-all; here,
But here upon this bank and shoal of time
We'd jump the life to come. . . ."

Is not this the same soul which also in a soliloquy questions
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fate?—"Whether 'tis better in the mind...."

Macbeth, too, has Hamlet's peculiar and exquisite intellectual fairness—a quality, be it remarked in passing, seldom found in a ruthless murderer. He sees even the King's good points:

..... "this Duncan

Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
So clear in his great office, that his virtues
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued, against
The deep damnation of his taking off."

Is it not like Hamlet to be able to condemn himself in this way beforehand? Macbeth ends this soliloquy with words which come from the inmost of Hamlet's heart:

"I have no spur

To prick the sides of my intent, but only
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself,
And falls on the other."

Hamlet, too, has no spur to prick the sides of his intent, and Hamlet, too, would be sure to see how apt ambition is to overleap itself, and so would blunt the sting of the desire. This monologue alone should have been sufficient to reveal to all critics the essential identity of Hamlet and Macbeth. Lady Macbeth, too, tells us that Macbeth left the supper table where he was entertaining the King, in order to indulge himself in this long monologue, and when he hears that his absence has excited comment, that he has been asked for even by the King, he does not attempt to excuse his strange conduct, he merely says, "We will proceed no further in this business," showing in true Hamlet fashion how resolution has been "sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought." In fact, as his wife says to him, he lets "I dare not wait upon 'I would' like the poor cat i' the adage." Even when whipped to action by Lady Macbeth's preternatural eagerness, he asks:

"If we should fail?"

whereupon she tells him to screw his courage to the sticking place, and describes the deed itself. Infected by her masculine resolution, Macbeth

at length consents to what he calls the "terrible feat." The word "terrible" here is surely more characteristic of the humane poet-thinker than of the chieftain-murderer. Even at this crisis, too, of his fate Macbeth cannot cheat himself; like Hamlet he is compelled to see himself as he is:

"False face must hide what the false heart doth know."

I have now considered nearly every word used by Macbeth in this first act: I have neither picked passages nor omitted anything that might make

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against my argument; yet every impartial reader must acknowledge that Hamlet is far more clearly sketched in this first act of "Macbeth" than in the first act of "Hamlet." Macbeth appears in it as an irresolute dreamer, courteous, and gentle-hearted, of perfect intellectual fairness and bookish phrase; and in especial his love of thought and dislike of action are insisted upon again and again.

In spite of the fact that the second act is one chiefly of incident, filled indeed with the murder and its discovery, Shakespeare uses Macbeth as the mouthpiece of his marvellous lyrical faculty as freely as he uses Hamlet. A greater singer even than Romeo, Hamlet is a poet by nature, and turns every possible occasion to account, charming the ear with subtle harmonies. With a father's murder to avenge, he postpones action and sings to himself of life and death and the undiscovered country in words of such magical spirit-beauty that they can be compared to nothing in the world's literature save perhaps to the last chapter of Ecclesiastes. From the beginning to the end of the drama Hamlet is a great lyric poet, and this supreme personal gift is so natural to him that it is hardly mentioned by the critics. This gift, however, is possessed by Macbeth in at least equal degree and excites just as little notice. It is credible that Shakespeare used the drama sometimes as a means of reaching the highest lyrical utterance.

Without pressing this point further let us now take up the second act of the play. Banquo and Fleance enter; Macbeth has a few words with them; they depart, and after giving a servant an order, Macbeth begins another long soliloquy. He thinks he sees a dagger before him, and immediately falls to philosophizing:

"Come let me clutch thee:—

I have thee not and yet I see thee still.

Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible

To feeling as to sight? or art thou but

A dagger of the mind, a false creation

Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?

I see thee yet in form as palpable

As that which now I draw...

Mine eyes are made the fools o' the other senses.

Or else worth all the rest: I see thee still;

And on thy blade and dudgeon gouts of blood

Which was not so before.—There's no such thing."

What is all this but an illustration of Hamlet's assertion:

"There is nothing either good or bad

But thinking makes it so."

Just too as Hamlet swings on his mental balance, so that it is still a debated question among academic critics whether his madness was feigned

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or real, so here Shakespeare shows us how Macbeth loses his foothold on reality and falls into the void.

The lyrical effusion that follows is not very successful, and probably

on that account Macbeth breaks off abruptly:

"Whiles I threat he lives,
Words to the heat of deeds too cold breath gives,"
which is, of course, precisely Hamlet's complaint:

"This is most brave;

That I, the son of a dear father murdered,
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must, like a whore, unpack my heart with words."

After this Lady Macbeth enters, and the murder is committed, and now wrought to the highest tension Macbeth must speak from the depths of his nature with perfect sincerity. Will he exult, as the ambitious man would, at having taken successfully the longest step towards his goal? Or will he, like a prudent man, do his utmost to hide the traces of his crime, and hatch plans to cast suspicion on others? It is Lady Macbeth who plays this part; she tells Macbeth to "get some water,"

"And wash this filthy witness from your hand,"

while he, brainsick, rehearses past fears and shows himself the sensitive poet-dreamer inclined to piety: here is the incredible scene:

Lady M. There are two lodged together.

Macb. One cried, 'God bless us!' and 'Amen' the other,

As they had seen me with these hangman's hands.

Listening their fear, I could not say 'Amen,'

When they did say 'God bless us.'

Lady M. Consider it not so deeply.

Macb. But wherefore could not I pronounce 'Amen' ?

I had most need of blessing, and 'Amen'

Stuck in my throat."

This religious tinge colouring the weakness of self-pity is to be found again and again in "Hamlet"; Hamlet, too, is religious-minded; he begs Ophelia to remember his sins in her orisons. When he first sees his father's ghost he cries:

"Angels and ministers of grace defend us,"

and when the ghost leaves him his word is, "I'll go pray." This new trait, most intimate and distinctive, is therefore the most conclusive proof of the identity of the two characters. The whole passage in the mouth of a murderer is utterly unexpected and out of place; no wonder

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Lady Macbeth exclaims:

"These deeds must not be thought

After these ways: so, it will make us mad."

But nothing can restrain Macbeth; he gives rein to his poetic imagination, and breaks out in an exquisite lyric, a lyric which has hardly any closer relation to the circumstances than its truth to Shakespeare's nature:

"Methought I heard a voice cry, 'Sleep no more!

Macbeth does murder sleep,'—the innocent sleep:

Sleep, that knits up the ravell'd sleeve of care,"

and so forth—the poet in love with his own imaginings.

Again Lady Macbeth tries to bring him back to a sense of reality; tells him his thinking unbends his strength, and finally urges him to take the daggers back and

"smear

The sleepy grooms with the blood."

But Macbeth's nerve is gone; he is physically broken now as well as mentally o'erwrought; he cries:

"I'll go no more;

I am afraid to think what I have done.

Look on't again I dare not."

All this is exquisitely characteristic of the nervous student who has been screwed up to a feat beyond his strength, "a terrible feat," and who has broken down over it, but the words are altogether absurd in the mouth of an ambitious, half-barbarous chieftain.

His wife chides him as fanciful, childish—"infirm of purpose,"—she'll put the daggers back herself; but nothing can hearten Macbeth; every household noise sets his heart thumping:

"Whence is that knocking?

How is't with me when every noise appals me?"

His mind rocks; he even imagines he is being tortured:

"What hands are here? Ha!

They pluck out my eyes."

And then he swings into another incomparable lyric:

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"Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
Making the green one red."

There is a great deal of the poet-neuropath and very little of the murderer for ambition's sake in this lyrical hysteria. No wonder Lady Macbeth declares she would be ashamed "to wear a heart so white." It is all Hamlet over again, Hamlet wrought up to a higher pitch of intensity. And here it should be remembered that "Macbeth" was written three years after "Hamlet" and probably just before "Lear"; one would therefore expect a greater intensity and a deeper pessimism in Macbeth than in Hamlet.

The character-drawing in the next scene is necessarily slight. The discovery of the murder impels every one save the protagonist to action, but Macbeth finds time even at the climax of excitement to coin Hamlet-words that can never be forgotten:

"There's nothing serious in mortality;"

and the description of Duncan:

"His silver skin laced with his golden blood"

—as sugar'd sweet as any line in the sonnets, and here completely out of place.

In these first two acts the character of Macbeth is outlined so firmly that no after-touches can efface the impression.

Now comes a period in the drama in which deed follows so fast upon deed, that there is scarcely any opportunity for characterization. To the casual view Macbeth seems almost to change his nature, passing from murder to murder quickly if not easily. He not only arranges for Banquo's assassination, but leaves Lady Macbeth innocent of the knowledge. The explanation of this seeming change of character is at hand. Shakespeare took the history of Macbeth from Holinshed's Chronicle, and there it is recorded that Macbeth murdered Banquo and many others, as well as Macduff's wife and children. Holinshed makes Duncan have "too much of clemencie," and Macbeth "too much of crueltie."

Macbeth's actions correspond with his nature in Holinshed; but Shakespeare first made Macbeth in his own image—gentle, bookish and irresolute—and then found himself fettered by the historical fact that Macbeth murdered Banquo and the rest. He was therefore forced to explain in some way or other why his Macbeth strode from crime to crime. It must be noted as most characteristic of gentle Shakespeare that even when confronted with this difficulty he did not think of lending Macbeth any

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