T H E S I S.

DRAMATIC CREATION AS EXEMPLIFIED IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS.

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CONTENTS.

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PART I. PRELIMINARY AESTHETIC THEORY.

PART II. THE HISTORIES AND COMEDIES.

PART III. THE EARLIER TRAGEDIES.

PART IV. THE LATER TRAGEDIES.

PART V. THE LAST PLAYS.

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PART I.

PRELIMINARY AESTHETIC THEORY.

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I. INTRODUCTION.

In the following essay I propose to examine Shakespeare's method of dramatic creation, not primarily for its own sake, but in the hope that it may throw light on the process of creation in general.

I have chosen Shakespeare as the nearest approach I can find to a dramatist pure and simple, who creates a new world solely out of his artistic consciousness. This position is not so easy to take up now as it would have been a hundred years ago. In the light of recent investigation we cannot accept Shakespeare as the impersonal, universal, perfect, timeless artist whom Coleridge worshipped. We have heard too much of his artistic defects, his personal idiosyncrasies, his borrowings and makeshifts, and his concessions to the stage and audiences for which he wrote. Still, in spite of the modifications we have had to make upon Coleridge's picture, it is remarkable how little its main features have been altered. The chief difference is that we have now a more accurate knowledge of the chronological order of the plays, and so can form a better idea of the development of the dramatist's mind. We now think of his genius as growing rather than static.

Now as we wish to consider Shakespeare only in so far as he is a dramatist pure and simple, we must in the same way consider the growth of his genius only in so far as it is a purely internal development, intelligible without reference to/

to the events of his personal life, the changes in his environment, or even his growth in years. Such external influences we shall notice only to discount them. What we are in search of is what Goethe would call the ground type of the drama.

There are two methods which we may pursue. We may either begin with the plays, and then, after subtracting everything that can be traced to external influences, try to find the most probable explanation of what is left, or we may first construct a theory of the normal working of the pure dramatic imagination, and then see how it fares when applied to the actual plays. In the present instance the latter method seems the more appropriate. My investigation of Shakespeare is not meant to be conducted in an impartial scientific spirit, but in support of a theory, and it seems fair that the reader should know as soon as possible what that theory is. I shall make no attempt to argue in its favour, but merely put it forward as a working hypothesis whose proof will lie in the success of its application.

As the drama is one of the forms of Beauty, I shall begin with some preliminary remarks on the nature of Beauty.

II. BEAUTY.

Beauty has two aspects. It is a source of joy, and an aid to mental vision.

These two aspects are connected. Vision is the business of the mind, and can be either helped or hindered by the nature of the object. Now it seems to be a fundamental fact that the mind enjoys being helped in its work, and is distressed at being hindered. That is to say, any aid to vision given by the object is a source of joy.

For instance, if a multitude of points be arranged in a circle, we can comprehend them at a glance, whereas if they were scattered at random the mind would be bewildered. The circle is consequently felt as beautiful. Its beauty, however, is rather bare, and gives less pleasure than might be expected from the aid it renders. The reason is that our vision is less rich than it appears to be. We do not see all the points individually, but only the general form of their arrangement. In the higher mathematical curves the various parts have greater individuality, so that a richer effect of beauty is produced. Still, the same excess of generality over individuality prevails more or less in all the mathematical curves, and indeed in all beauty based on any kind of intellectual formula. In perfect/

perfect vision the order of the whole should be such as to bring into view the distinct individuality of all the parts.

To introduce clearness into our conceptions we shall make the assumption, which of course is merely a convenient fiction, that beauty can be measured, and shall adopt two measures of it. By the total beauty of an object we shall understand the total aid it gives to vision, which will correspond to the total amount of pleasure we receive from it. By the intensity of beauty of an object we shall mean the ratio of the aid received to the mental effort expended, which will correspond to the pleasure received as compared with the scale of the object. For instance, we may have a greater intensity of beauty in a sonnet than in an epic, though the epic may have the greater total beauty. A large total gives the feeling of greatness, whereas a high intensity gives the feeling of perfection.

Now though perfection can be more readily attained in a small object than in a great one, it would seem that a great object offers richer opportunities for complex organisation than a small one, so that if full advantage is taken of these opportunities, not only a greater totality, but a greater intensity of beauty can be attained in a large object than in a small one. The practical difficulty of achieving a great perfection may make it rarer than a little one, but when/

when it does occur it will reach a higher order, not only of greatness, but of perfection.

It follows that the mind can comprehend through the form of beauty what it can comprehend in no other way. I think we must assume that the amount of effort which the mind can exert at any moment is limited, so that the return it obtains from its effort will depend on the beauty of the content apprehended. Beauty in fact serves the mind as a telescope or microscope serves the eye. By multiplying the power of vision it brings a whole world into view which would otherwise remain invisible. Thus while beauty in its smaller and simpler forms is only a luxury, in its larger developments it becomes a necessity of the higher mental life. Indeed we may say that beauty, as we commonly use the word, only begins when it reveals to us what without it would remain unknown. The limit of vision is reached when our maximum amount of mental effort aided by the greatest possible intensity of beauty just allows a content to be grasped and no more. Here the mind will receive the greatest joy of which it is capable.

From this account we see that in all beauty worthy of the name there must always be something mysterious and apparently miraculous. The mind penetrates into regions where the prosaic understanding cannot follow. Especially mysterious will be the operation of the mind when it is stretched/

stretched to its utmost, for then it is so entirely occupied by what it sees that it has no thought to spare for any reflection upon its method of seeing it. Aesthetic discussion must therefore be always more or less hypothetical. What we see through beauty, we can never bring down into the light of common day.

But what we see should seem intelligible to the mind while it is still seen. We should always feel that our admiration of beauty has a visible foundation. We do not feel about a poem as we do about the taste of a strawberry, that the pleasure we take in it is something given from without. We believe that we can actually <u>see</u> the beauty of a poem, though we cannot explain it. The order which makes a vision beautiful seems wholly contained within the vision itself. That is to say, an object of beauty is a self-contained whole.

III. NATURAL AND ARTIFICIAL BEAUTY.

Beauty may be either natural or humanly constructed. In richness and fineness of texture the products of nature far surpass those of man. Their defect, from our point of view, is that they are less self-contained. Everything that is necessary to the perfection of a landscape painting, for instance, is contained within its rectangular frame, but it would be only by an infinitely improbable accident if a corresponding section of a natural landscape should be similarly self-contained. Even animals and plants, which have an internal organic unity, have also, at any given moment, some particular connection with their environment, which makes it impossible to isolate them without violence. If there is a self-contained whole in Nature at all it must be the entire universe itself, which, if it be indeed infinite, as we are accustomed to believe, is utterly beyond our comprehension. If we desire a more self-contained whole than finite Nature can give us, we must make it for ourselves. By sacrificing something of her richness, we may approach nearer to that perfection which she sometimes suggests, but never displays.

It has been held at various times that human art should imitate Nature, but it would seem that there can be an endless diversity of relations between human and natural products. Sometimes our object is to take a permanent record,

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as accurate as possible, of one of those rare moments when Nature rises to an unusual perfection of beauty. Sometimes we take an imperfect natural whole and try to purge it of its external connections and increase the perfection of its internal order.. Sometimes we try to divine and reproduce what we think the design of the whole universe would be like if it were infinitely simplified and reduced in scale. Sometimes we take natural objects as our raw material and weave them into a pattern which as a whole is unlike anything in Nature. Sometimes, as in music, we discard Nature altogether, and build afresh from the beginning. In short, we use Nature as we think fit, and stand or fall by the result. In the human production of beauty the essential process is not imitation, but creation. When Nature anticipates man, he may adopt her creations as his own. Like a Court of Session judge whose opinion has already been expressed by another, he "concurs" with the previous Creator.

Of humanly constructed beauty there are two main types, Art and Games.

IV. ART.

The Art which we shall consider here is the extreme type from which the Game element is excluded, and is therefore an artificial ideal which is seldom found in its purity in actual works of art.

In this sense, a work of art is a thing of beauty deliberately created and completely prepared for perception before the mind of the perceiver is brought to bear upon it. The process of creation exists only for the sake of the completed product, and disappears into it.

We may say also that a work of art is the creation of a single mind, for in the rare, unimportant, and usually unsatisfactory cases of collaboration, the intention of the different minds is to work as one. Art thus secures the unity which is characteristic of the single mind. Indeed, its unity is more complete, since the artist tries to purge his work of all the irrelevancies which infest his mind, so that although his mind is no doubt greater than his work, his work is more perfect than his mind. Not only so, but by putting his mental content into the form of beauty, he multiplies the range of his vision, so that his mind at the conclusion of his work of creation is enormously greater than it was at the beginning. His mental growth and the perfection of his work act and react on one another, producing the vision of a world immensely more significant than the/

the one we usually know.

The value of the artistic method of creating beauty is so obvious that it is impossible to ignore it. Writers on aesthetics and general philosophers treat of it as if it were the only form of humanly created beauty. Even in our ordinary thought we naturally conceive of creation in general as conforming to the artistic type. God himself is imagined as a perfect artist who has planned the whole history of the universe down to the smallest detail. The doctrine of predestination, whenever it rises above the idea of an arbitrary command, naturally implies the artistic point of view, and the existence of evil gives acute difficulty only when it is regarded as part of a deliberate scheme of perfection.

We can take it for granted, then, that the conception of artistic creation is a familiar part of our ordinary mental furniture, and pass on to the second type of humanly created beauty, the Game.

V. GAMES.

The theory of the Game has been strangely neglected. Indeed, our whole attitude to games is mysterious. They have a massive hold upon the affections of humanity that Art can scarcely equal. Nor is their attraction confined to any one class. They are followed with such passion by the working classes that we sometimes think of them as the special property of the uneducated, but we must not forget that Oxford and Cambridge foster games almost as much as learning, and very much more than Art, while Greece, the home of Art and learning, was equally the home of Games. Yet the attitude of the ordinary game-lover to the object of his devotion is curiously apologetic. He seems always anxious to assure the world that he does not consider games really important. He gives all sorts of utilitarian reasons for playing them, such as health, mental relaxation, social intercourse, and the like. You must not think that a mere game can touch his soul. Similarly, philosophers and aestheticians treat the fully developed game as beneath their serious notice, though they are willing to theorise about play, the common primitive ancestor of both Art and games.

Yet is is obvious that the attraction of games is essentially aesthetic. The game is a completely self-contained whole, and the source of a joy which has the

inexplicable but visible intelligibility which is characteristic of beauty. It is a form of beauty co-ordinate with the work of art, though of a different type. The chief differences I take to be the following.

In the first place, a game is not completely prepared for perception before it is enjoyed. The perceiver takes part in its creation, and enjoys it while it is still in progress. After the game is finished its enjoyment dies away, or declines into a mere pleasure of memory.

Secondly, a game is not the product of a single mind, but of a conflict of minds. The antagonism of the players is of course artificial, being based upon the common purpose of enjoyment, and agreement about the rules of play, but the enjoyment is to be reached through conflict, and the rules are designed to give intensity to it. The keener the conflict, the more enjoyable the game. The game, therefore, cannot have the same unity that we find in a work of art. It does not bear the impress of a single purpose. But it has a unity of its own. There is a central point of dispute to which every move of the game is relevant, or at least passionately intended to be relevant, and it may be contended that the fierce relevance developed by the game produces at least as close a unity as the deliberately arranged mutual relevance/

relevance of the various parts of a work of art.

Thirdly, it is essential to the keenness of the game conflict that each player should have a chance of winning. That is to say, there must be a real uncertainty about the result. Any suspicion of predestination is abhorrent to the spirit of the game. Moreover, the uncertainty which the game demands does not consist in mere ignorance of the result. An element of genuine luck is assumed. Even in what are known as games of pure skill, provided that their possibilities have not been exhausted by analysis, the element of luck is not excluded. An inferior chess player may beat a superior, since a combination of which neither can foresee the end may work out in favour of the inferior. The best type of game is that which rewards skill enough to encourage the faith of the stronger without extinguishing the hope of the weaker.

Fourthly, since a player's skill is always liable to be frustrated by opposing skill or by luck, it follows that we cannot expect a game to have the perfection of a work of art. Artistic beauty shines with a steady flame, whereas the beauty of a game is constantly fluctuating. Sometimes it flashes out brilliantly, but at others it dies down to a feeble flicker. At its best, however, the beauty of the game is dazzling. In the game conflict, as in the Darwinian/

Darwinian struggle for existence, the result is the survival of the fittest. It is the inferior combinations which are frustrated by the adversary. Those of the highest order will succeed. Perhaps it is the necessity of passing through this ordeal by fire which gives to the beauty of the game, when it does occur, its peculiar air of reality. An artist has things all his own way. He can make everything turn out as he pleases, with nothing to check him but his own artistic conscience, which even in the greatest artist is not quite so searching as the opposition of a passionate antagonist of equal stature. The result is that a flash of beauty occurring in a game gives a more intense satisfaction than anything in a pure work of art, and will console a player for many comparatively dull patches.

Fifthly, over and above those flashes of beauty which we have described, and which, being due to the genius of individual players, have an affinity with artistic beauty, there is a kind of aesthetic enjoyment peculiar to the game which we may call "interest." It proceeds, not from the individual antagonists, but from the game as a whole, and has a power of attraction rarely possessed by a work of art. Apparently a game systematises a larger mental content than a work of art. This statement may appear paradoxical. Dante treats of Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven. Football is concerned/

concerned with the kicking of a ball between two upright posts. Yet the mental activities brought into play in reading Dante are not so varied as those employed in playing football. In art, we deliberately suppress many of our mental activities in order to increase the range of the others, whereas in games we deliberately restrict the range of the separate activities in order to bring as many as possible into play at once. The result is that the whole weight of our mental nature, active as well as receptive, is engrossed in games, thus producing a richness of psychic texture which has no parallel in art. This is to some extent true even for spectators. To enjoy a game thoroughly as a spectator you must become a whole-hearted partisan. You must sympathetically share the emotions of your side, their hopes and fears, their designs and efforts, and even in some reflected way their physical actions.

Sixthly, we may notice that the beauty of a game is not so consciously present to the mind as that of a work of art. When a player is thoroughly engrossed in a game, he is too preoccupied to consider whether he is enjoying it or not. If he is conscious of his own feelings at all, he may believe that he is simply disappointed or exasperated, though it is obvious to an observer that he is really having the time of his life. The realisation of enjoyment, though not the enjoyment itself, comes when the game is over.

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Finally, we must own that while a game is a thing of beauty, it is not, as a rule, a joy for ever. Its immortality is not individual, but generic. When we finish one game, we begin another. Instead of the eternal, timeless permanence of art, we have an endless, time-filling succession of births and deaths. It is of the essence of the game that the passing of time should be regarded as real. While we are enjoying the characteristic joy of the game, we live in its time. We do not, as in Art, stand outside of its time scheme and regard it as a whole. When playing a game, we must live intensely in the present, have more or less faded memories of the past, and be ignorant of the future. The game lover, therefore, will not listen with any patience to theories of the transcendence of time by eternity.

VI. THE FIGHT.

At this point I may be told: "Your theory that the game is a primary aesthetic type is obviously untenable. The mainspring of the game is merely the combative instinct, which is plainly utilitarian in its origin. Rationally considered, conflict is essentially evil and disagreeable, but in the struggle for existence races which had an inclination for fighting displaced those which had not, so that it is now ingrained in the natures of the survivors. We must recognise its existence, and use it with discretion, but we need not exalt it into an ideal."

To this we might reply that the same argument applies also to artistic beauty, whose utility in sexual selection gives it a survival value, but as I do not myself believe in this argument, I shall not pursue it further. I prefer to take the line that the value of life itself is derivative. Beauty does not exist for the sake of life, but life for the sake of beauty. We are not gifted with an original, irrational impulse to live, in the service of which we develop the feeling for beauty. The impulse to live itself depends upon our finding life beautiful. The principles of beauty are not created by the conditions of life; the conditions of life are prescribed by the principles of beauty. In order that life as we know it may have any object in persisting/

persisting, two conditions are necessary. The artistic beauty of the world must be great enough to give us pleasure in belonging to it, and the struggle to maintain our separate individualities in it must have enough of the interest of the game to tempt us to take part in it. That is to say, the game is the mainspring of the combative instinct.

It is true that the fight in itself is not a form of beauty. It has an end external to itself. We fight for victory, and the fruits of victory. But if the conditions of the fight approximate to those of a game, if it has a clear-cut issue, is governed by simple and definite rules, and provides facilities for the organisation of mental activity, it may have the joy of a game, and may even be practised really, though not ostensibly, for the sake of that joy. In such a case we may regard the fight as a game played for heavy stakes, and so with heightened interest, though it may not be entered upon deliberately as a game.

Nor do I admit that conflict is necessarily evil or disagreeable. We are accustomed to think so because we usually take as our standard type of conflict, not the game, but the fight, and that form of the fight which is most remote from the game, the fight inspired, not by joy, but by hate, greed, and fear. The mainspring of the game is certainly individual self-assertion, but this is exerted not merely for our own sake, but for that of our opponent

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as well. In fact, if we neglected to put forth our whole combative strength, the first person to complain would be our opponent. He has a right to demand that we shall do our utmost against him.

The game, then, is a more fundamental form than the fight, and it is neither utilitarian nor evil.

VII. THE GAME AS AN AID TO VISION.

It may be objected, again, that the game does not possess both of the fundamental characteristics of beauty from which we started. It may be a source of joy, but it is not an aid to mental vision.

This objection compels us to explain more fully what we mean by mental vision. All that I originally meant was that an object which possessed beauty was more easily and completely grasped by the mind than one which did not. Mozart once said that it was difficult to remember bad music. The mind is baffled in its attempt both to take it in and to retain it. In this sense, the beauty of a game is an aid to the mental vision of it. We have an intense consciousness of the whole course of a game which is not present in the ordinary activities of life. The conditions are such that everything is relevant to a clearly understood centre of interest. It is true that we do not, to the same extent as in art, see our object steadily and see it whole. Our vision is more intensely concentrated at the focus of attention. It resembles rather the fierce glare of a moving searchlight which beats in succession upon every part of the field of vision than the all-comprehensive light of the sun. The work of art and the game, then, are both in their own different ways, visions lighted up by their beauty.

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There is, however, another sense in which beauty may be considered an aid to vision, and perhaps this is the one which we have more often in mind. In the more imitative arts, the beauty of the artistic imitation may throw light, not only upon the imitation itself, but upon the thing imitated. For instance, the beauty of Holbein's portrait of Erasmus may be held to illuminate, not only the picture, but Erasmus himself. In some cases this may be so. If the portrait really resembles Erasmus, then the clearer our vision of the portrait is, the clearer will be our vision of Erasmus. In so far, however, as the portrait does not resemble Erasmus its beauty will be a powerful instrument in distorting our vision of the real person. Thus Scott's Fortunes of Nigel has been blamed for giving us a picture of James I.which is untrue to fact, but which is nevertheless so vivid that we cannot rid our minds of it. In this sense, games throw no light upon reality. They do not pretend to imitate anything. Chess has indeed been called an image of war, but this is only a pleasant fancy. I do not think that chess gives any aid whatever towards forming a true vision of war.

In still another sense, beauty is an aid to vision. Holbein's portrait of Erasmus may or may not throw light upon Erasmus, but it certainly throws light upon Holbein. This/

This is even more true of the non-imitative arts. The works of the great musicians seem to give us a direct insight into their souls. A game, however, not being the product of a single mind, gives no such vision. Yet in another way it has its own contribution to make. Dr. Johnson said that if you wish to study a man's true character, you should see him play a game. When a person is putting forth his last ounce of energy under conditions specially adapted for its free exertion, he lays bare something at the very foundation of his character which would not otherwise come to the surface. The game, therefore, is also an expression of the soul, but it is of the soul militant, not the soul triumphant.

But we have not yet reached the root of the matter. There seems to be some mystical connection between truth and beauty which eludes exact statement, but is of fundamental importance. A great work of art throws light upon both the artist and his object, but it does much more. It seems to give some clue to the nature of God and the universe. In the last sonatas and string quartets of Beethoven, for instance, we seem to have a genuine revelation of divinity, though one quite inexpressible in intellectual terms. The truth of such artistic revelations is a matter of faith, but not altogether without rational grounds. We have seen that things can be grasped/

grasped under the form of beauty which would otherwise remain invisible, and it is therefore reasonable to suppose that we can have fuller and truer visions of God and the universe through beauty than in any other way. Moreover, if we suppose that the world is a self-contained whole it will be most appropriately expressed by a form of self-contained beauty.

It is in this last sense, I think, that we are meant to understand the objection that the game is not an aid to vision. It seems to lack the profound symbolic quality which gives art its first-rate importance. But I believe that a little consideration will convince us that the game form gives as true an expression of the nature of the universe as the art form. We may suppose that cosmic history is merely the public performance, so to speak, of an artistic design already completely finished in the mind of God, but may we not suppose with equal plausibility that the world is being continually created as it goes along, after the manner of a game? If the world gives the satisfaction of a harmonious whole, does it not also have the interest of a conflict? If it gives us a feeling of security to believe that all things are predestined for the best, is it not also stimulating to believe that room is left for free action? If much of the structure of the world shows the fine organisation of art, does it not also suggest the imperfections/

imperfections of the game, its accidents, frustrations, disappointments, and fluctuations of interest, its endless repetitions, its waste of effort, and its uncertainty of final success? The problem of evil gives less trouble if the world is regarded as a game. The evils of the world are so great that to regard them as artistically planned discords is to put a severe strain upon our faith. We are apt to feel outraged when we are told that they are only apparent, and elements in a higher perfection. They are only excusable if they are unintentional, like the misfortunes of a game.

I therefore submit that in any sense whatever, the game may be as great an aid to vision as the work of art.

If our account of the game be correct, its neglect by philosophers seems intelligible. The game exalts just those qualities which philosophers have decried. Time, finitude, contingency, uncertainty and conflict are regarded not only as real, but as positively valuable, while of the absolute virtues, some, like infinity and eternity, are simply ignored, while others, like omnipotence, infallibility, omniscience, immutability, and necessity, are violently repudiated. The affinities of the game are not with philosophy, which seeks what is eternally and necessarily true, but with history, which seeks what is concretely and circumstantially true. But since philosophers, Croce for instance, are taking an increasingly historical view of truth, they must be/

be as ready to apply the game type of beauty to their conceptions as the art type.

VIII. THE ILLUSION OF THE GAME IN ART.

We have hitherto, for the sake of simplicity, treated the art and game types of beauty as if they were distinct, but in actual fact they often influence one another. Many games of chess have almost all the characteristics of a work of art, and this is even more true of chess problems. But much more important than the art element in the game is the game element in Art. The kind of interest that the game arouses has such a powerful attraction that artists have constantly attempted to appropriate a share of it.

Even in the spatial arts, the game element appears to some extent. Instead of aiming at an effect of harmonious perfection, a picture may represent the climax of a momentous action, like Michelangelo's Last Judgment, or arouse a feeling of puzzled uncertainty, like the Monna Lisa. A piece of sculpture, like the Laocoon can represent a conflict which arouses emotions of hope and fear. A Gothic Cathedral produces the impression of a conflict of stresses and strains, and a sense of aspiration and effort.

In the temporal arts, the game element is more pronounced. Even in pure instrumental music it may be very prominent. Many of Beethoven's works give the sense of a keen and exciting contest. We have an apparent struggle/

struggle for supremacy between themes of diverse characters, a feeling of strenuous combative energy, violent fluctuations of interest, suspense, apprehension, surprise, climax, and triumph. At the same time, however, the underlying artistic structure is so perfect that the illusion of freedom is never complete.

The game element is present in a more subtle form in the Elizabethan madrigal. Here the artistic design is looser, and the different voices have more independence. Each singer feels that he is making his own individual contribution to the whole without being submerged in it, and the design is so full of conflicting cross accents that he must assert himself emphatically to keep his part from being overpowered by the others. He has thus a feeling of spontaneous freedom, which is not altogether an illusion, and it is to this feeling, as much as to the design of the piece, that the charm of madrigal singing is due.

IX. THE ILLUSION OF THE GAME IN THE DRAMA.

But it is in literature, and above all in the Drama, that we get the illusion of the game. We know, of course, that all the events of a play have been predestined, but a skilful dramatist can almost persuade us that a conflict between free agents towards an uncertain issue is going on before our eyes. We have the same anxious hopes and fears, the same sense of accident, frustrated effort, and perhaps ultimate defeat, the same fierce glare as of a moving searchlight, and the same passionate partisanship. The joy of an exciting play, moreover, has the same veiled, underground quality that we get in a game. On the surface, we may feel overwhelmed with grief, rage, and horror, but beneath it all we have a profound consciousness of intense exhilaration.

For the interest aroused by the illusion of the game, the dramatist must pay a price. He loses to some extent the eternity of the pure work of art. The game interest of a play can only be fully enjoyed once. Afterwards, we know beforehand what is going to happen, so that the exhilarating feeling of free combat is replaced by a rather depressing sense of an inexorable fate. It is only by forgetting previous performances that we can recapture fully the game interest of a play.

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But a still heavier price must be paid. The drama has an initial handicap to overcome which the real game has not. There is always a certain resentment in the mind of a spectator against any game whose result has been prearranged. In seeing a play, he is therefore on the watch for any attempt on the part of the dramatist to fake the result. If any such attempt is observed, the whole illusion is shattered. The spectator is particularly suspicious of happy endings. He knows that he likes them, and that the dramatist desires to give him what he likes. On the surface, moreover, he is usually willing enough that the dramatist should give him what he likes, whether the illusion is shattered or not. If, then, the dramatist wishes to preserve the illusion of the game rather than provide the satisfaction of a happy ending, he must adopt heroic measures. He must sacrifice the happy ending, and embrace tragedy. That is to say, he must temper the joy of the game with the bitterness of defeat. And since the joy of the game is fleeting and the tragedy permanent, the play, if it is to be immortal, can support its burden of unhappiness only by supreme artistic beauty.

The dramatist, however, has this compensation. If the peculiar excitement of the game is fleeting, its whole beauty is not. As we have seen, part of the beauty of a game is akin to that of art. Some recorded games of chess, for instance/

instance, have a beauty which is as permanent as that of any work of art. The tragic conflict may therefore have a permanent as well as a fleeting beauty.

X. THE REALITY OF THE GAME IN THE DRAMA.

Hitherto we have treated the game element in the drama as if it were entirely an illusion deliberately produced by the dramatist. But is it? May there not be a real game element in the drama? I believe that there is, and that it is essential to great drama.

The objection at once occurs that we are obscuring the fundamental distinction between the game and the work of art. A play is certainly the deliberate production of a single mind, not the spontaneous outcome of a conflict of minds. But what is a single mind? What is the ground of its unity? Is it the unity of the work of art, or the unity of the game? I think both are present. About the artistic element there is no question. The unity of the mind is at least to some extent due to its effort, partially successful, to secure that harmonious order which is characteristic of art. Philosophers and moralists generally, from Plato downwards, have insisted upon the supreme value of serene mental harmony under the absolute control of a thoroughly enlightened will. Milton expressed this ideal exactly when he declared that the life of a poet should be a poem. But it seems equally certain that conflict does in fact exist within the mind, and that it is capable of giving the joy of the game. Not only so. I believe that it is partly this joy which holds/

holds the mind together. The unity of mind, like the impulse to self-preservation, is not an ultimate fact, but one to be accounted for. The mind maintains its unity because it enjoys its beauty, whether this beauty comes from harmony or conflict. Even in the single mind, therefore, there is a game element of positive value which we must take into account in considering the process of dramatic creation.

From this point of view, then, we must regard a drama as to some extent a game played within the mind of the dramatist, which is afterwards repeated in the minds of the spectators. It is not a conjuring entertainment in which the cunning of the performer deceives the mind of the beholder, but a real spiritual adventure which the dramatist allows his audience to share with him.

There is a further question which may give us some trouble. Granting the existence of a genuine conflict in the mind of the dramatist, which reflects itself in the drama, is this conflict a true game, or merely a fight? Since it is a source of joy, it clearly cannot belong to any type of fight which has not also the character of a game, but the possibility still remains that it may have started as a fight and become a game by accident. The question is complicated by the fadt that the drama has also an artistic element which is deliberate, and which tries to use the game element for its/

its own purposes. But the conflict is only deliberate in so far as it is an illusion. In so far as it is real, it is unpremeditated, and therefore a fight. The special conditions which bring this fight into the sphere of the game are therefore not to be simply assumed as part of the dramatist's design, but arise out of factors in his nature which are not under his control, and which will require to be accounted for when we have acquired a fuller knowledge of the conditions of dramatic creation.

In the meantime we shall suppose that there are two sources of aesthetic joy in the drama, its artistic beauty, deliberately produced by the dramatist, and the beauty and interest of the game, arising under special conditions out of a genuine and unpremeditated conflict within the mind of the dramatist.

XI. THE FREE WILL OF THE CHARACTERS.

In so far as the dramatic conflict is real, it is not under the dramatist's control. His characters have a real freedom of will which is independent of, and may even conflict with his own. Indeed, though in one sense the drama is created by the dramatist, in another it is spontaneously created by the characters. The dramatist can only stand by and let them fight out the issue for themselves. In creating them he has given them a freedom of action which he cannot violate without destroying them.

Nor is the dramatist's impotence to be accounted a defect in him. The more inspired he is, the more his characters will take the decision of affairs out of his hands. His first duty, in so far as he is possessed by the game spirit, is to abdicate in favour of his children. The consequences may be disastrous, but he must take the risk. Of course, it is always open to the artist to intervene, and work a miracle. When the game playing conscience slackens for a moment this sometimes happens, but in general the artist is kept sternly in his place, and the dramatist will submit to the heaviest defeat rather than win illegitimately.

At the same time, we must remember that though the actions of the characters may not be the consequences of the dramatist's will, they are the consequences of his nature. The/

The characters are what they are because the dramatist is what he is. This statement, however, is liable to be taken too simply. Coleridge, for instance, often gives the impression that Shakespeare's characters are fragments of himself, as if his mind, like a primitive living cell, had subdivided itself into a multitude of derived minds, each with its own share of the parental qualities. But because Shakespeare imagined Regan, it does not follow that to some extent he <u>was</u> Regan. A dramatist's characters are derived from his nature, but they are not necessarily parts of his essence.

XII. DREAMS.

The involuntary element in dramatic creation is strikingly illustrated by the analogy of dreams. Our dreams are the creations of our own minds, but certainly not according to our wills. Our dream images are generally indifferent to our wishes, and sometimes violently hostile. The illusion of independent reality in our dream characters is so perfect that we are tempted to wonder whether it is altogether an illusion. Is it quite impossible to suppose that these wayward creatures have some kind of consciousness of their own? Do our minds somehow generate little subordinate centres of conscious life? I once had an odd dream in which I tried to investigate the matter. I was conversing with a lady whom even in my dream I knew to be dead. I said to her: "I know you are dead, so you can't be real. I must be only dreaming about you. But since you are here, perhaps you can tell me this. Have you really got any feelings of your own, or am I just imagining the whole thing?" She answered not a word, but grew so alarmingly angry that I saw I had mortally affronted her. Of course all this proves nothing, but it illustrates what I mean. Dream creatures react to us like real personalities, and certainly seem to exhibit what psychologists call "behaviour." They have a vitality which in our waking moments it is beyond our power to give them.

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The similarity between the dream and the drama is so remarkable that many ingenious attempts have recently been made to establish an essential connection between them, according to which a dramatist's fundamental characteristic would be his power of dreaming with his waking mind. The attempts are chiefly made by psychologists of the Freudean school, and are based on the theory that both the dream and the drama - and indeed art in general - are the symbolic expression of unconscious wishes arising from the great fundamental complexes of our nature, especially that of sex. Hamlet, for instance, would illustrate the Oedipus complex. This method of interpretation is still new, and, I think, crudely applied. Its arguments seem to me unconvincing, and its results monstrous. In the meantime I shall leave it alone, and follow my own line.

But even without adopting any theory of the unconscious, Freudean or otherwise, it is easy to see why the dream should have much in common with the drama. In dreams, the imagination is supreme, and since it is unchecked by contact with the external world, it is comparatively free and self-contained. Images are formed out of materials gathered from the stores of memory, but they are not under its direct control. Moreover, since the steady pressure of the utilitarian purposes of life is relaxed, the imagination can/

can follow its own natural laws, and produce without interference its own visions. That is to say, the imagination in the dream works with something like the purity which we are trying to find in the drama.

The difference between the dreaming and the waking mind is too complex to be discussed here. I shall only say that whereas in the dream greater imaginative purity is obtained by the partial paralysis of the disturbing elements, in the drama it is obtained by controlling and organising them.

XIII. CREATIVE IMAGINATION IN ART.

It is evident that the efficient process in dramatic creation is the imagination, whatever may be the controlling forces behind it. Let us therefore consider the conditions under which it works.

In the first place, we may note that the imagination is to some extent under the control of the will. In one sense, indeed, we can imagine anything we wish to. If we wish to imagine any special kind of triangle, for instance, we can do so without any difficulty. But our instructions to the imagination must be quite explicit. If we give only a general description of the object we want, say a friend's face, the imagination may respond reluctantly and imperfectly, and if our description includes creation, as when we ask it to produce a new melody, it may not respond at all. In particular, it is extremely difficult to make the imagination obey a negative command. If we ask it not to produce any particular kind of image, or to produce no images at all, it will probably defy us on the instant.

Again, the imagination is to a large extent influenced by the material it already contains. Other things equal, it is easier to develop what it has, than to begin afresh from the beginning, though if an impasse occurs, the/

the latter course may be necessary. The imagery in possession has therefore a kind of inertia which gives continuity to the imagination.

Both these influences, however, are controlling rather than creative. The fundamental impulse in imaginative creation is aesthetic. Our theory that beauty is an aid to vision applies as much to creative as to perceptive vision. A beautiful image will in general form itself in the mind more easily, and persist more tenaciously, than one which is not.

The application of this principle to Art is obvious. There is a certain spontaneous imaginative activity in the mind which, as far as I can see, must be taken as a primitive fact, like variability in the theory of natural selection. If this activity is given free play, it will create forms of beauty by preference. The business of the artist is therefore to keep watch over the freedom of the imagination, and preserve it from all illegitimate external interference until a beautiful image has appeared and driven its less beautiful rivals from the field. He must then stop the play, and record the result. If the result must be of some required pattern, like a five act tragedy, he must either gently manipulate his creation, or set his imagination again to work until it supplies something more suitable. Sometimes, as in the case of Mozart, the imagination is swift and/

and ~~and~~ docile, giving what is required almost at once. Sometimes, as in the case of Beethoven, it is stubborn, and requires a great deal of coaxing and redirection.

From this account it might seem that if an artist has an active imagination, he has only to exercise care, judgment, and patience to produce a work of perfect beauty. But though the imagination prefers beautiful images, some of the conditions of its working are hostile to beauty. Not only beauty, but the defects of beauty, are easily grasped by the mind. For instance, a circle is grasped at once, but if the circle is broken at one point, the mind has no sooner perceived the circle than it is acutely conscious of the break. Or if a noble character has a fault, the mind, after recognising the nobility, immediately fastens upon the fault.

This tendency of the imagination can sometimes be used artistically, by putting some point to which special attention is to be drawn in the form of an apparent defect, as in the famous return of the principal theme in the first movement of the Eroica Symphony. But the result of a defect in beauty may be poisonous and devastating. If criticism can be held in chedk till the defect is remedied, all may be well. But the imagination cannot be held at rest except by fully satisfying it. A destructive image can only be countered by a constructive one, and this cannot always be done/

done in time to prevent disaster. It is the presence of this destructive element in the imagination which gives rise to the conflict in which we find the beauty of the game.

XIV. CONFLICT IN THE IMAGINATION.

We have seen that the mental conflict which appears in the drama, in so far as it is genuine, is unintended. We can now see the conditions under which the conflict takes place, and how it acquires the beauty of the game.

The motive of the conflict is the effort of a beautiful image to maintain itself in the mind against the destructive attacks of hostile criticism, directed against a suspected defect, at some particular point. The question at issue is therefore clearly defined, and the artist is present to see that no irrelevant influences are allowed to interfere with the free play of the imagination. Moreover, if the beauty is great enough to fill the mind, all the mental energy will be rallied to its defence. The conditions of the game will then be all present. They are not arbitrarily fixed by the dramatist, but forced upon him by the nature of the imagination.

We might describe the conflict as a fight between Love and Fear. Love is the emotion which beauty inspires towards the object in which it appears, including not only joy in its actual presence, but exhilaration at the obscure premonition of its dawning (Freud's unconscious wish), and passionate desire for its continuance. This last desire is/

is naturally attended by Fear, which arises from the acute perception of those weaknesses in the beloved object which expose it to hostile criticism and destructive attack. While Love is still creative, Fear has no power, but when once the vision of beauty has taken shape, Love takes the defensive, and the initiative passes to Fear. The inertia of the imagination favours Love, who is in possession, but the essential positiveness of the imagination favours Fear. Since Love desires nothing better than to be left alone, she is only interested in issuing negative commands, which are worse than useless. When Fear suggests any destructive image, it is easier to imagine it happening than simply not happening. While, therefore, aggressive Love can always overcome Fear, defensive Love, though she may offer a stout resistance, can triumph permanently only if her defences are impregnable. If a loophole is left, images of destruction will sooner or later enter in, and capture the citadel.

According to this account, there is no need to interpret Fear as Desire in disguise, as the Freudean theory requires. Fear appears in the mind as a genuine enemy, and its effects, so far as we can see, may be simply evil. It may happen, however, that they may be indirectly beneficial. By destroying one vision of beauty, they may prepare the way/

way for another of a higher order. A rational ideal, for instance, may make way for a supra-rational one. Such a position would have some resemblance to that contemplated by Freud. Our fear on behalf of the ideal in possession would be mingled with a less clearly recognized exhilaration at the approach of the one about to supersede it.

The effect of the conflict between Love and Fear is to make the imaginative vision more vivid. Fear suggests circumstances in which possibilities of evil may be realised in the vision which Love has set up. Love is compelled to review its own position more narrowly, and strengthen its weak points so as to exclude the suggested possibilities. Fear in turn makes a still more rigorous scrutiny, and presses its suggestions home with a greater wealth of detail. And so the fight goes on, until the vision either perfects itself or collapses, each fresh move adding both to its richness and its clearness.

If the contest is keen, and Love gains the victory, we have a double satisfaction. The beautiful conception of the artist is perfected, and we have the joy of the game in addition. If Love loses her vision, only to be ultimately consoled with one more beautiful, the artist gains, and the game player, though defeated, has again the joy of the game. But if Fear is irretrievably victorious, our feelings are divided. It is intolerable to behold the wreck of divine beauty/

beauty, and heartbreaking to be defeated when so much is at stake. Yet just because the stake has been so great, we have fought with the whole might of our being, and the joy of the game has been proportionately profound. We would not have chosen it deliberately, no doubt, but it comes to us unasked, and perhaps outweighs, not only the unhappiness of loss and defeat, but the joy that might have come from an easier triumph.

XV. THE HERO.

If the foregoing account is correct, it follows that the famous impartiality of Shakespeare, which raises him above the dramatic conflict, belongs to him only in so far as he is an artist. In so far as he is a game player, taking part in a genuine fight, his interest in it is partisan. The question now arises whether we are to regard this partisan interest as that of an actual player, or merely that of a sympathetic spectator.

The final form of dramatic representation on the stage, where all the characters are on the same objective plane, would suggest the latter alternative. But to what extent is the dramatist's imagination governed by the final form of representation? To what extent does he think in terms of his medium? When Shakespeare, for instance, sees the witches greeting Macbeth, does he see them upon a blasted heath, or upon the boards of the Globe Theatre? I think he does both. In so far as he is an artist designing a work of art perfectly expressible in its proper medium, he must have his eye upon the stage from first to last. But in so far as he is engaged in a real struggle, his imagination will move in a larger world of reality. In the earlier stages of creation, where a vivid sense of reality is most important, the game player predominates, but later, when the claims of the finished product become pressing, the artist takes hold/

hold, and concentrates his vision on what it requires. We shall suppose, then, that while the dramatic conflict is still real, the dramatist's imagination is not bound by the form of representation, and that we are accordingly free to consider the possibility that the dramatist's combative interest is more than that of a mere spectator.

We have noticed the analogy between the drama and the dream. Now dreams are almost invariably autobiographical. We take not only a part, but the principal part, in them. We may therefore suspect that when the idea of a drama begins to form in the dramatist's mind, it appears first as a personal dream in which he himself is the hero. Of course the dramatist has to adopt the position, bodily form, and even to some extent the mental characteristics prescribed to him by the nature of the drama. He imagines how he would act if he were placed in certain hypothetical circumstances. Often, however, it happens that the rules of the game require his hypothetical self to act in a manner which provokes the disapproval of his real self. The two selves therefore diverge until the hypothetical self acquires sufficient independence to appear as a distinct character. The personal dream then takes the form of an impersonal drama. The process by which this change comes about can be studied best in actual dramas, and I shall not detail it further at present.

In the meantime we may notice that the severance

between/

between the dramatist and the hero is never quite complete. To some extent the dramatist continues to the end to see the play through the eyes of the hero, and regard him with feelings more appropriate to onself than to another person. Accordingly, though we seem to know the hero more intimately than any of the other characters, he is much more difficult to visualise as a whole. He does not appear before our mind's eye with the same clear cut vividness as the heroine. Much of the difficulty of Hamlet, for instance, is due to the fact that Shakespeare to some extent does not see Hamlet, but sees the play through him.

From this it follows that the audience never see the play quite as the dramatist sees it. The hero appears to them, formally at least, as in the same plane of being as the other characters. As a rule, however, the partisan spirit of the dramatist is infectious, so that the spectator automatically identifies himself with the hero, and sees the play through his eyes, in spite of his external objective presence on the stage. But though in the excitement of the game the spectator instinctively takes the proper attitude to the hero, the critic who analyses the play in cold blood is apt to forget his peculiar nature and treat him like the other characters.

The heroine and the villain have also their own peculiarities/

peculiarities, but we shall postpone their discussion till we meet them in actual plays. In the meantime I shall only say that the heroine is the incarnation of the ideal of supra-rational beauty, and the villain the incarnation of the destructive power of Fear. The dramatic conflict can take many forms, but the most popular, and perhaps the most typical, is the struggle for the heroine between the hero and the villain.

XVI. DRAMATIC SERIES.

In the long conflict between Love and Fear a single battle is not final. Though the heroine be slain in one play, her memory remains. Another dramatic world gathers about her, and the battle is renewed on another field. On the other hand, if the dramatist is victorious, he cannot afford to take his ease. Until he has created a world whose perfection is flawless and unassailable, he must always be ready to meet the assault of fresh forces of destruction. The dramatist's life will not be simply a series of isolated battles, but a protracted campaign, in which the tide of success will ebb and flow.

The beginning of the campaign will always be obscure. Even in the case of our ideal abstract dramatist, who creates, so to speak, in vacuo, the beginning of his creation will be utterly mysterious, and can hardly be distinguished from a creation out of nothing. In the beginning, we must suppose a kind of imaginative chaos, with no recognisable images, but only a restless imaginative activity, which cannot grasp or retain the forms it creates, and has no continuous consciousness of them. At length an image appears which has some distinct element of beauty. It is grasped with delight, exhibits a power of cohesion and persistence, and forms the nucleus of a small world of related/

related images. But when the beauty of this little world has come into clear view, and been enjoyed, the attention swings round to its defects. If the fire of hostile criticism can be silenced or evaded, the imaginative world will grow in richness and beauty, but sooner or later the forces of destruction get the upper hand, and the world disappears, leaving behind nothing but a vague ideal and a hope, which suggest the building of a new world. Or perhaps only part of the old world is destroyed, the remainder being successfully defended. Or perhaps the forces of destruction may only prepare the way for a new world, more beautiful than the old.

What the end of the compaign would be in the case of our ideal dramatist is doubtful. A world of perfect beauty might be established which was absolutely immune from attack. Or his world might be totally destroyed, and all his ideals poisoned, so that he had no hope of building a new one. Or he might be worn out by the increasing labour of creation, and abandon the struggle. Or again, the strife might be eternal, without any end at all.

The possibilities are so varied, and depend upon such complex conditions that it seems unprofitable to attempt to explore them further by abstract reasoning alone. We shall therefore turn to Shakespeare, in whom we hope to find the/

the nearest approach to our ideal dramatist, and try, in the light of the foregoing theory, to follow the course of the dramatic campaign as it appears in his plays.

XVII. SHAKESPEARE.

The abstract drama we have just described has at best only the same sort of resemblance to the actual Shakesperean drama, as the rigid, weightless straight line which in theoretical mechanics we call a lever has to a real iron crowbar. There are a multitude of disturbing factors in the real which are left out of account in the ideal, and it is only when these are relatively small that our results have any value. In the non-Shakesperean types of drama with which I am acquainted the disturbing factors are so great as to make the application of any general abstract theory unprofitable, but when Shakespeare has got into his stride his mind works with such dramatic purity that the operation of the ideal can be distinctly followed. The exceptional purity of his dramatic genius seems due to the following causes.

In the first place, Shakespeare's mind is extraordinarily homogeneous. Its structure is characterised by the same simplicity and uniformity of material that we find in Euclid, Raphael, Newton, Mozart, or Hegel. Shakespeare takes as his material the persons and things of ordinary life, but only in so far as they can be easily imagined. In a sense, he never thinks; he only sees. His mental work is all done on the intuitive plane, never on the symbolic.

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He certainly generalises a great deal, but always with an eye on the concrete world. He is never more than one remove distant from the visible. The consequence is that the world of abstract ideals and theoretical constructions is either reduced to concrete terms and visible imagery or ignored altogether. The minds of his characters are all similarly limited. They all react to life directly and intuitively, not according to systematic theories. Thus he could not understand a man like Spinoza or Don Quixote. When he has to deal with such a man, he represents him as really controlled by "human" motives.

The consequences of this mental dispssition are entirely favourable to the kind of drama we are seeking. The instinct for what is easily imagined, which is simply the instinct for beauty, supplies at once the artistic point of view, while the homogeneity of material provides just that simplification of the conditions of conflict which the beauty of the game requires. The limitations of the Shakesperean material, moreover, find ample compensation in the vast development within its own sphere which is thus made possible.

In the second place, Shakespeare's mind is receptive rather than active. He is more inclined to observe and record the activities of his imagination than to harness it to the service of a central practical purpose. In one sense, of course/

course, this is not quite true. He successfully harnessed it to the purpose of producing actable and acceptable plays. But he achieved his object by first giving his imagination its freedom. If his fundamental purpose had been political, he might have imagined a much more practicable utopia than that of Plato. If he had fallen under the spell of theology, he might have created an infinitely more credible vision of God than that of Milton. As it was, he refrained from interfering with the freedom of the dramatic game until its result was decided. Only then did he record the result and put it to practical use.

In the third place, he seems to have had no outstanding peculiarities in his personal character or life, such as might interfere with the purity of his art. It can scarcely be due to mere chance that we have so little information about him. A great genius has usually either a very decided character which makes a marked impression on all who surround him, or a very neutral character which makes practically no impression at all. We all know Socrates, but who knows Aristotle? We have very decided impressions of Michelangelo and Beethoven, but who can say anything of Raphael or Mozart except that they were "gentle?" Apart from his actual work, no one ever discerned in Haydn any sign that he was a great genius. It may be that even if we had known Shakespeare intimately we should have perceived nothing/

nothing specially remarkable about him. A vast, simple, self-contained genius often seems to leave no external mark, and to be unaffected by external influences. Of course, we can scarcely suppose that Shakespeare's work was altogether unaffected by his life. After all, his material, unlike a musician's, was derived from his experience. But beyond supplying him with his raw material, I do not think his life can be shown to have affected his work at all.

Finally, Shakespeare was remarkably free from the pressure of any fixed dramatic conventions. The Elizabethan drama was not yet fully formed, and all sorts of experiments were still being made. The public were still willing to consider with an open mind whatever he might put before them. They did not, like the French public at a later time, insist on the observance of traditional rules. All that he was required to do was to represent some interesting story on the stage, and the conditions of the Elizabethan theatre allowed him unusual freedom in his method of doing so. Nor did he apparently impose any conventions upon himself. He did not work according to any dramatic theory. In fact he seems to have been impervious to theory of any kind. He put into shape what his imagination bodied forth, and then judged whether it was good or not.

There is one characteristic, however, of Shakespeare's method/

method of composition which at first sight seems likely to interfere with dramatic purity. He had a habit of taking his plots wholesale from other authors, both historical and inventive. This practice seems scarcely consistent with the imaginative autonomy upon which I have insisted. I think, however, that Shakespeare rarely allowed these aids to his invention to alter the course it would have followed in any case. Like Jeanie Deans on the road to London, he did not disdain any conveyance which would carry him towards his destination. He took it when it suited him and left it when it was no longer going his way. The general result was the saving of imaginative energy for other purposes, but occasionally the lack of perfect appropriateness in his labour-saving devices had disturbing effects which we may need to take into account.

XVIII. SHAKESPEARE'S INTERESTS.

We have seen that Shakespeare's mind was unusually unaffected by external disturbance. It was also unusually free from internal disproportion. His main interests are just those which our ideal dramatist ought to have. Two themes dominated his mind from the beginning to the end of his career, the attraction of kingship and the attraction of woman.

His interest in kings and reigning dukes has often been stigmatised as snobbish, but this criticism is uncalled for. The king has a natural claim on the sympathy of the artist. He is doing in the external world what the artist does in the internal. His task is to bring order into an unruly world, and protect it from the attacks of its enemies. Shakespeare in particular, whose artistic world consisted of human beings, with independent wills of their own, whom he had somehow to bring under his control, must have had an instinctive understanding of the supreme importance and glory of kingship. It was the symbol of absolute controlling power visibly realised. Accordingly we find that in his dramas he regards kingship with a kind of fascinated awe which is apt, if we forget what it stands for, to make us impatient. He takes his kings very seriously. They may be wicked, weak, pathetic, or foolish, but they are never comic. When they appear on the scene, his language becomes swelling/

swelling and dignified, and he is acutely sensitive to their triumphs and misfortunes.

Shakespeare's interest in woman seems to stand in less need of explanation, If we are of the male sex, we feel that we understand it thoroughly. But there is something more in Shakespeare's interest than in the ordinary man's. Woman represents that beauty in the imagination which is supra-rational, and therefore not subject to kingly control. It cannot be produced by command or design. The imagination seems to find it rather than make it. It is eternally and incurably rebellious against rational government, and yet it sometimes seems in some mysterious way to respond to treatment. Shakespeare has often been praised for his understanding of women, but I doubt whether he created them through his understanding at all. His imagination, working according to its own laws, raised them up under the pressure of Love and Fear. They do not act according to his ideas of fitness and probability, but according to his apprehension of what will most charm him, humiliate him, or torture him. Woman has the waywardness and magic of the dream. Shakespeare always treats her with entire seriousness. His heroines, like his kings, may be weak or wicked, but they are never comic. Indeed, even when we have passed the romantic age, we find very few comic/

comic women in Shakespeare. When we have named Mistress Quickley and Juliet's nurse, who else is there? It is not that comic women are really rare, as Dickens and Jane Austen have abundantly shown. But women are too near the centre of Shakespeare's nature for him to play lightly with them.

One or both of these two motives, the rational love of kingship and the supra-rational love of woman, can be found in practically all the plays. I think Timon of Athens is the only one from which both are absent. In a few, such as the Comedy of Errors or the Merry Wives of Windsor, they play a subordinate part, but as a rule they supply the leading interest of the play.

Shakespeare had another interest, of a different order, which I think has been greatly underrated. I believe that he was passionately interested in his own work.

The general impression seems to be that Shakespeare 's genius was unusually unconscious and negligent, an enormous reservoir of talent undirected by any decided personal preferences, which drifted into its work by a kind of blind instinct, followed always the line of least resistance, and dealt successfully, because it could not help it, with any task that came its way. Some critics go even further, and represent Shakespeare as a public entertainer of genius, worldly and mercenary, with a shrewd finger on the pulse of his audiences, and a sharp eye on the box office.

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I dare say there may have been great artists whose attitude slightly suggests some such picture. Haydn, for instance, when asked why he had never written a string quintet, replied that no one had ever given him an order for one. But I can scarcely think that Shakespeare's alert mind and keen emotions would permit of such docility. He was no doubt sensitive to the world about him, and bound to a great extent by the customs of his stage, but, as I hope to show, the conceptions of his plays are so systematically linked together as to make it plain that he was following the order of his own ideas without much reference to external considerations.

The idea that Shakespeare was uninterested in his work is due partly to the imperfections of his art, and partly to his indifference to the publication of his plays. If Shakespeare were a pure artist, these considerations would have weight, but we must bear in mind the powerful game element in the plays. Their imperfections are those of the game, which, as we have seen, does not admit of the perfection of art. The game, moreover, does not make the same demand for immortality as the work of art. Living intensely in the present, it is comparatively indifferent to the future. I imagine that while Shakespeare was actually creating a play he was intensely excited about it/

it, but that when it was finished, his interest began to fade, so that he was unwilling to take the trouble either of polishing or printing it. Perhaps if he had been allowed to publish it while it was still fresh, he might have been glad to do so, but this was contrary to the interests of his company. By the time it was permissible to publish it, his mood had changed, and he had transferred his interest to something else. Beethoven, who was certainly interested in his own art, had a similar distaste for work that he had outgrown. As Shakespeare's plays had much more of the game in them than Beethoven's music, it seems likely that in his case the fading of interest would be correspondingly more rapid and complete. The publication of his poems, to which the foregoing considerations do not apply, shows that he was capable of an author's pride, and quite willing to pay his court to posterity.

I shall assume, then, that Shakespeare made his home in the dramatic world of his creation, and lived strenuously in it from moment to moment, though without the pure artist's overwhelming desire to make each separate moment perfect and permanent.

XIX. SHAKESPEARE'S MORALITY.

There is one point in which the Shakesperean drama seems to differ from the drama of our abstract theory. In the latter the conflicting forces were aesthetic. The forces which created and maintained beauty were ranged against those which attacked and destroyed it. But, in the Shakesperean drama, at least in its most striking examples, the contending powers are Good and Evil. The combat is fought upon the moral rather than the aesthetic plane.

On the other hand, the two planes approach so closely that we pass from the one to the other without a jerk. For instance, the conduct of Claudius in murdering his brother was clearly wicked, while that of the Queen, if we assume that she had no part in the murder, was merely ugly. Yet Hamlet took the ugliness to heart even more than the wickedness. Again, Angelo's attempt against the chastity of Isabella was wicked, while that of Caliban against Miranda was loathsome, but without any real moral quality. Yet I think Shakespeare was at least as much revolted by Caliban as by Angelo.

Apparently Shakespeare reacted morally, as he did aesthetically, with his eye directly upon the object. He waited till his imagination presented him with a concrete case, and then made his judgment upon it by intuition. He had/

had no moral principles, and no moral initiative. Nor had he apparently any visible source of moral strength within him upon which he could draw at will. He did not seem to know what was meant by resisting temptation. His characters either remain beyond the reach of temptation, or fall before it. Their moral strength lies in their nature, not in their will. In fact, the Shakesperean morality follows so closely the aesthetic pattern, that Kant would probably have refused to recognise it as morality at all.

This blending of the moral and aesthetic worlds into a homogeneous whole is an important factor in the simplification of the dramatic conflict which produces the beauty of the game. I think it is also theoretically justified. All good can ultimately be reduced to that which creates or maintains beauty, and evil to that which destroys it. Moreover, since the existence of an imaginatively created world ultimately depends on its beauty, anything that promotes or threatens its beauty also promotes or threatens its existence. The morality of the imaginative creator, therefore, who actually sees the powers of evil advancing to destroy his workd, and who has to battle with all the might of his soul in its defence, must be more luminous and strenuous than that of those who supplement their lack of direct vision by tradition, faith, or deductive reasoning. The Shakesperean morality is thus not only exactly appropriate

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to its purpose, but intrinsically fundamental.

Having now sketched our dramatic theory, and given prima facie reason for our belief that Shakespeare approximates to the pure dramatic type, we shall now try to trace the working of the creative process in the actual plays.

PART II.

THE HISTORIES AND COMEDIES.

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I. THE HISTORIC IDEAL.

As we have seen, every creative process is obscure in its beginnings, and the Shakesperean drama is no exception. We shall therefore not expect the same degree of certainty and definiteness in our early accounts as we hope to reach later. A rough and general agreement between our theory and the facts collected by Shakesperean scholars is all that we can look for. Unfortunately, the facts themselves are so scanty that they give little help in checking the theory. However, I shall try to make my account of Shakespeare's dramatic birth coherent and plausible, though it cannot be more than hypothetical.

On the whole, it seems probable that the first play in which Shakespeare's hand is definitely recognisable is either one of the parts of King Henry VI, or one of the two predecessors of Parts 2 and 3. It would therefore appear that Shakespeare's first dramatic interest was in History.

Of course, it is quite possible that this fact has no special significance. Shakespeare had to begin somewhere, and it may have been mere accident that led him first to History rather than Comedy or Tragedy. Still, in view of our conclusions with respect to Shakespeare's attitude to his plays, there is a presumption, though perhaps not a very strong one, that he turned to History first because/

because it attracted him most. As this presumption falls in with my theory, I shall adopt it.

Now, why should History attract Shakespeare? Of all the varieties of the Shakesperean drama, the History is probably the one that nowadays attracts us least. In particular, Henry VI has become dull. Few people read it for pleasure. Why, then, did Shakespeare bestow upon it the first fruits of his genius?

It may help us to answer this question if we ask another. Why did Marlowe, after writing Tamburlaineand Faustus, write Edward II, a more carefully constructed play, but one which seems somehow to cramp his characteristic style? Evidently some power has clipped his soaring wings, and put his fiery genius into harness. He is now tamed and disciplined. Peele and Green have also been caught by the same infection. What powerful influence has produced such remarkable results?

The familiar answer seems satisfactory. The historical events which culminated in the defeat of the Spanish Armada produced a vivid realisation of the greatness of England, which penetrated all classes of the people. The poets were both inspired and sobered. They were caught up in one of those waves of exhilaration which visit a country only once or twice in its history, and saw visions of glory hitherto/

hitherto beyond their imaginative reach. At the same time they realised the magnitude of the danger they had just escaped. They had been irresponsibly strutting and prancing on the edge of an abyss, which would have engulfed them but for the wisdom and vigilance of the queen and her ministers, and the valour and loyalty of her people. Being men of speech rather than action, they could not advance the glory of their country in deeds, but they could at least celebrate it in song. Is it remarkable that even Marlowe subdued his towering spirit to its service?

Shakespeare also, we must suppose, was touched by the general enthusiasm for History, but something in his own spirit gave it a special welcome. We can picture him entering upon his dramatic career with a vast, vivid, tumultuous imagination which he passionately strove to reduce to order. He had a spirit as aspiring as Marlowe's, but his superior sense of reality would not allow him to be satisfied with the simple, boyish day-dreams in which Marlowe indulged. He possibly envied Marlowe's single-minded concentration, but he could not share it. He was confused by the conflicting energies of his mind, and for the time could see no way out of chaos.

The concentration of his contemporaries upon History seemed to supply just what he needed. History appealed to his feeling for reality, giving him a firm foothold/

foothold upon the solid earth. It appealed also to his aspirations after sublimity. Outside the theological sphere, which did not attract his concrete imagination, what could be more worthy of treatment by a great dramatist than the affairs of the realm of England? It appealed, too, to his sympathetic interest in the struggles of kings to maintain their power. Were not their difficulties an external reflection of his own?

Above all, History was a barrier against the intrusion of Woman. At this time, I imagine, Shakespeare both despised and feared her. It is possible to find reasons for this attitude in his personal life, but unnecessary. As an artist trying to evolve order out of chaos, he could not but feel that the irrational charm of Woman is the chief rallying point for all the forces of disorder. He would have taken seriously Meredith's dictum that Woman is the last thing that will be civilised by Man. Yet her fascination is so potent that it constantly threatens to shatter all that male wisdom can contrive. Under its spell a wise and honourable man can become a fool and a knave, capable of betraying all that he normally holds most dear. History, however, is primarily the affair of men. Woman has her part, but it is subsidiary. Moreover, when she does enter the world of History, it is possible to see her clearly, shorn of her glamour.

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I take it, then, that Shakespeare embraced History in no casual spirit, but with eagerness and determination. It was the appearance of the rational ideal, the emergence of the dry land after the parting of the waters.

II. THE HENRY VI. GROUP.

It is now more easy to understand Shakespeare's beginning with Henry VI. The three parts of Henry VI, together with Richard III, which was written immediately afterwards, represent no less an event than the creation of Shakespeare's England, the emergence of the ordered Tudor government out of the chaos of the Wars of the Roses. After the passing of three centuries we can look back upon the Tudor dynasty with calmness, but to Shakespeare the coming of the Tudors must have seemed almost like the Advent of the Messiah. It was they who shook off the Pope, humbled Spain, colonised the New World, established Law, reintroduced civilisation, and gave England her soul. Next to the birth of Christ, the Battle of Bosworth must have seemed to Shakespeare the most beneficent event in history, and our group of plays gives his vision of the manner in which it came about.

His design is almost Biblical in its conception. We see no steady upward march from chaos to cosmos. In the first part of Henry VI we do indeed find ourselves in a welter of strife and confusion which might well represent chaos, but in the succeeding plays chaos gives place more and more to positive organised evil, till Richard Crookback, a veritable Antichrist, rises to a diabolical supremacy, stills the forces of confusion, and creates a kind of inverted order/

order and unity. Finally evil collapses under its own weight, making way for the New Kingdom.

The glow of the final triumph lights up the whole scheme. Even the arch villain Richard cannot be regarded with a wholly unkindly eye. We can hardly help feeling that his regime is an improvement upon what went before. In his own drastic way he made a clean sweep of the smaller villains, and tidied up the country. He had a genuine, though distorted, artistic sense. The sulphurous light which emanates from him is really a kind of light. He does not, like Iago, commit the unpardonable sin of blaspheming against the Holy Ghost, for the Holy Ghost has not yet appeared. We can almost say that the very magnitude of his wickedness is beneficent. He gives evil a single neck, so that Richmond can cut off its head at one blow. When he is slain, we feel that the Devil is dead, and that England can live happy ever after.

Shakespeare's triumph is not purely patriotic. It is personal also. While depicting the coming of unity and order into England, he has at the same time created them in his own soul. His vision, too, by rising into beauty, has become enlarged. A vaster, richer, more significant world opens before him. Chaos and old Night have retired, and he has found his vocation.

Perhaps we may now hazard a conjecture as to the manner/

manner in which the Henry VI group was written. I imagine that King Henry VI, Part 1, The First Part of the Contention, and The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York, were originally written by Marlowe, Peele, and Greene, jointly or severally, in unknown proportions. I should like to believe that there was some actual collaboration. It is likely enough that they chose the reign of Henry VI because it was full of stirring incidents that could be turned to dramatic account, but they may also have had some idea of contrasting its turmoil with the wisdom and strength of Elizabeth's government.

Shakespeare had probably no part in the original design, but was either asked, as a practical player, to help in preparing it for stage production, or revised the manuscripts afterwards on behalf of his Company. Again I prefer the idea of collaboration. Shakespeare saw the possibilities of the scheme, and his imagination took fire. Enthusiastically following up his great idea, he absent-mindedly elbowed out the original authors, to the great indignation of at least one of them, and took over the whole enterprise. He revised Part 1, re-wrote the Contention and the True Tragedy, calling them the Second and Third Parts of King Henry VI, and finally added Richard III on his own initiative.

Henry/

Henry VI has faded with the ebbing of the great wave of enthusiasm for History, but the fresh glow and emphatic energy of Shakespeare's aspiring youthful genius still casts a spell over Richard III which enables it to hold its place as one of the most popular of all stage plays.

III. REBELLION OF COMEDY.

When Shakespeare finished Richard III, he had learned his craft, and expressed through it what at the moment was the best he had to say. But as he became more and more at home in History, he began more and more to feel its limitations, of which we may note the following.

In the first place, History affords no proper outlet for the spirit of the game. Since the dramatist must work to a predetermined plan, the game element, as far as he is concerned, must be an illusion. The pageant of events is spectacular rather than truly dramatic. Accordingly, Shakespeare's imagination, which had at first been steadied by having to work to a given design, soon began to chafe against the external restraint imposed upon it.

In the second place, Shakespeare's conception of the dignity of kingship, and the seriousness with which he applied himself to the task of expressing it worthily, committed him to a persistent inflation of style which was not always justified by the sublimity of the matter, and therefore had to be maintained by a deliberate exertion of artistic skill. This continual striving after majesty was quite sincere, but since it was artificial, it was repugnant to Shakespeare's ingrained sense of natural fitness.

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In the third place, History gave no outlet for Shakespeare's profound interest in woman. Probably at the time he considered this an advantage. He wished to shake himself free from an attraction which threatened to be overwhelming. But though his reason approved of this course, his imagination was discontented, and continually sought to dally with the forbidden theme. Venus and Adonis, which was probably composed before the Henry VI group was finished, illustrates both Shakespeare's deliberate attitude, and the trend of his imagination. He calls up an ideal vision of resistance to woman, but it is evidently a relief to his imagination to picture woman on any terms.

Shakespeare's attitude to woman needs no external explanation, but in actual fact it was probably partly due to the influence of Marlowe. That Marlowe felt the fascination of woman is abundantly clear, but she seems to have made little spiritual appeal to him. He felt even more decidedly than Shakespeare, who even at this time had doubts, that woman was a being of an inferior spiritual order, intended by nature to be the delight of man, but generally a stumbling-block in his upward path. His Aeneas, with his revolt against "this female drudgery," is almost as emphatic as Shakespeare's Adonis, and much more explicit. In fact, I am inclined to believe that it was Marlowe's impetuous impulse towards high masculine seriousness/

seriousness which swept Peele and Greene, and latterly Shakespeare, into the domain of History. Shakespeare followed him with sincere intellectual conviction, but with some diffidence as to his power to live permanently in such a rarified atmosphere.

We see, then, that though the dominance of History is supported by the aspiration of Shakespeare's soul towards what it conscientiously believes to be its highest ideal, there are powerful forces in his mind which are antagonistic to it. While it is still a growing vision with unmeasured possibilities, its enemies remain quiescent and expectant, but as soon as it takes definite shape, they prepare for rebellion. The result is the Shakesperean Comedy.

The genesis of Shakesperean Comedy explains its anomalous nature. It is not a pure dramatic type, whose object is the single-minded desire to produce laughter. The ridiculous does indeed occur plentifully in it, but usually without premeditation, and more often than not Shakespeare is its victim rather than its author. Shakesperean Comedy does not arise out of any single impulse, but from a number of influences which for the time are united in an offensive alliance. These have already been indicated, but we shall try to define them more precisely.

The first is the impulse towards freedom, that is to/

to say, the tendency of the imagination to follow the internal laws of its own nature, which are in the long run simply the laws of beauty. It attacks History, not as an ideal, but as a fixed scheme imposed from without.

The second is the destructive spirit, the tendency of the imagination to fix upon the defects of any object which has established its position as a thing of beauty. It is not concerned with the externality of History, but attacks it as an ideal of greatness and truth. It brings ruthlessly to light anything about it that is stilted and artificial.

The third is the attraction of woman. Being itself a positive manifestation of the love of beauty, it has no innate antagonism to History itself. It merely resents its claim to supremacy. It wishes to supplant it, not destroy it.

Of these three assailants, the only one which attacks History on its merits is the destructive spirit, which therefore leads the assault. Its alliance with the other two not only strengthens its power, but veils the virulence of its nature, so that Shakespeare cannot treat it entirely as an enemy. He dreads its effect upon an ideal to which he is loyal and grateful, but his insubordinate imagination welcomes it with joy as delivering it from an irksome tyranny, and preparing the way for a more beautiful vision.

The alliance of the destructive spirit with woman, however, is less complete than that with freedom.

The attraction of woman, being fundamentally constructive, must sooner or later come into collision with the destructive spirit. While, therefore, they combine vigorously against the common enemy, they have always an afterthought of suspicion towards one another. The spirits of freedom and destruction, on the other hand, though their interests are not identical, have no such latent antagonism, and compound themselves for the time into that remarkable impulse, clearly destructive, yet joyous and apparently beneficent, which we call the Comic Spirit.

We may say, then, that the two main powers which raise the standard of rebellion are the Comic Spirit and Woman, the former giving its name to the movement, but contributing only part of its strength. They strike their first blow in Love's Labour's Lost.

IV. LOVE'S LABOUR'S LOST.

It seems remarkable that while most Shakesperean commentators have felt a symbolic significance in the Tempest, no one, so far as I know, has seen any corresponding symbolism in Love's Labour's Lost. Yet the one seems to me as obvious as the other. Love's Labour's Lost is nothing less than Comedy's Declaration of Independence.

Consider the plot, which, like that of the Tempest, has the rare distinction of being Shakespeare's own. The king and his three friends, in whom it is perhaps not too fanciful to recognise Marlowe and his collaborators, Shakespeare of course being Biron, in a fit of high seriousness, resolve to devote themselves to severe study, and take a vow to abandon for a period all frivolous pursuits and distracting influences, especially the society of women. But they find it impossible to keep their vow. The queen and her women penetrate their defences, banish their seriousness, mock their dignity, and subdue their hearts. At the same time there is an incursion into the play, through the gates opened by the women, of all the undignified, rustic, foolish, frivolous, inconsequent beings who were to have been excluded from the king's earnest world. The result is a riot of liberated animal spirits which the king and his friends enjoy, though with some shame and misgiving. At first their descent is encouraged by the women, but they soon find that they/

they are despised both for having made their vow and for having broken it. Finally they are sent back to their serious life, but told to pursue it with more common sense and humanity. Charmed and humbled, they obey.

Could the birth of Shakesperean Comedy have been more accurately described? Could any parable illustrate more aptly the revolt of the repressed elements of the imaginative world against an exclusive devotion to a high but narrow ideal?

History is not yet attacked directly. Comedy is at present chiefly concerned to assert its own position. It wages a war of liberation, not of destruction or conquest. Yet there are indications that it will not long be satisfied with an agreement to live and let live. There is throughout the play a disposition to ridicule everything unnatural and bombastic, everything that attempts to confine the activity of the spirit within the limits of an artificial dignity. In the burlesque of the Nine Worthies the great names of history are taken in vain. The mental atmosphere in which History flourishes is systematically vitiated.

Most significant is the attitude taken up by Woman. She is not content to be simply Marlowe's creature of overpowering physical beauty and attraction, an inferior being who cannot understand the great spiritual purposes of/

of man. On the contrary, after casting Man into the dust, she assumes a high moral platform, and criticises his ideals, not for being excessive, but for being insufficient. She points out that his solemn enthusiasm is not really serious enough to deal adequately with the serious facts of life. Without suggesting any definite counter-ideal, she leaves him to infer that there is one somewhere which she understands better than he. In fact, she gives voice to those divinations of Shakespeare's mind which have not yet come into the light of clear vision, but give shadowy intimations of themselves in fleeting forms of beauty.

The attack of Comedy is thus dangerous enough to awaken the spirit of the game to a far greater extent than History could do. Shakespeare is no longer merely presenting a spectacle of interesting and important events. His whole attitude is being called in question, and he has to defend himself. The struggle becomes decidedly partisan, and he views the play through the eyes of the hero. The opposing characters have the vivid objectivity and intractable perversity of dream figures. They are no longer artistic puppets, but autonomous and even threatening personalities.

The attack is so sudden and bewildering that Shakespeare puts up a rather feeble resistance. Biron and his comrades surrender with ridiculous ease. Nevertheless, the/

the triumph of Comedy is not so great as it appears. Shakespeare's belief in his own rational point of view is so great that the vision of its collapse strikes him as an amusing fantasy which need not be taken seriously. In his descent into the comic world, he feels like a prince in disguise, whose position subjects him to some awkward embarrassments, but who is always consoled by the knowledge of his own real superiority. Thus the four discomfited lovers in the play find some compensation for their own humiliation in an almost indecent exultation over the inferiority of the minor comic characters. Even towards the women their ingrained sense of superiority persists. That their tormentors should have taken up a higher spiritual and mental ground seems a quaint paradox due to the odd circumstances of the case.

On the whole, the result of Love's Labour's Lost is to enfranchise Comedy, and undermine the outworks of History, but without seriously shaking the citadel itself.

V. COMEDY OF ERRORS.

Comedy having now been recognised as an independent power, Shakespeare has to adjust its relations with History. He still considers History to be his serious work, but consents to give himself a reasonable amount of relaxation. He accordingly enters upon a sort of artistic double life, sometimes remaining a dignified, conscientious Dr Jekyll, and sometimes letting himself loose as an irresponsible Mr Hyde. Such a system of alternating personalities of course involves some difficult and precarious mental juggling, which often produces awkward tangles. Since he can see no way of escaping from his dubious position, he turns his attention to regulating it. If he must needs write Comedy, he may as well do so in a neat, workmanlike manner. He therefore takes a lesson from Plautus, and writes the elaborately constructed Comedy of Errors.

This is no disconcerting outbreak of lawlessness like its predecessor, but a carefully controlled work of art. Its structure is much more complex than that of the Menaechmi, and its emotional material far richer, yet its craftmanship is at least as perfect. Indeed, it is too perfect. It shows an amount of premeditation which is inconsistent with the freedom of Shakesperean Comedy. The game spirit never gets loose. In fact, the play is as firmly bound by an externally imposed/

imposed scheme as any History, and therefore shares in the dramatic defects of History, as well as its artistic merits.

Having thus accounted for Shakespeare's choice of dramatic type, can we go further, and account for his choice of theme? That it lends itself admirably to his technical purpose is clear enough. To anyone aiming at structural elaboration the confusion caused by two pairs of indistinguishable twins can be a source of endless complication. Many critics, indeed, have looked upon the play as simply a skilful technical exercise upon a subject specially selected for the purpose.

When I had only connected it with the Menaechmi, this explanation seemed to cover all the ground, but on reading the Amphitryon, another occurred to me which seems so fanciful that I hesitate to put it forward. But consider the situation in the Amphitryon. The hero finds himself ousted from his rightful position by a mysterious supernatural being indistinguishable from himself in appearance, but altogether different in spirit, who makes free with his home and his wife. The alternation of personalities is handled ingeniously enough, but the misery caused by it to the hero is only assuaged by the discovery that his visitor is divine. The analogy with Shakespeare's own situation seems clear. It is a short step from the substitution/

substitution of a strange person to the substitution of a strange artistic personality. I think that in some way Shakespeare himself must have felt the analogy. It is true that the Comedy of Errors comes much closer to the Menaechmi than to Amphitryon, yet some of its features, such as the likeness of the Dromios, are plainly derived from the latter, and Shakespeare's general conception may have been coloured by it. I think it is quite possible, therefore, that in writing his play he was haunted by the idea that the entanglements of the action were somehow analogous to the game of hide and seek which his two dramatic selves were playing in his own mind.

This explanation would account for some features of the play which seem rather out of key with its main design. Many critics, for instance, have wondered why Shakespeare allowed Egeon to cast his dark shadow over what was obviously meant to be a play of merriment. But if our theory is correct, Shakespeare has never surrendered himself whole-heartedly to Comedy. He regards it as a temporary relief which must ultimately be brought into satisfactory relation with his serious ideals. From this point of view Egeon, instead of being an incongruous superfluity, becomes the centre of the symbolism of the play. Let us identify him with the spirit of History, and look at the play from his point of view. Searching for his/

his son, who has left him and gone astray, he enters the land of Comedy, where he finds himself in deadly peril. He thinks he recognises his son, and appeals to him for help, but the son on whom he calls is an inhabitant of the country, and a stranger to him. Egeon is repudiated and left to his fate. Meanwhile the son he is seeking, who has also entered the country, is being driven almost to distraction through being confused with his brother. At last the tangles are straightened out, there is a general reconciliation, and Egeon's danger is over. Not only does the comic world cease to be hostile, but the Woman problem is solved. The serious son finds a bride with a becomingly modest view of woman's sphere. The turbulent wife of the comic son listens to reason, and repents. Egeon himself discovers his long lost wife in a venerable abbess.

Of course, I do not suppose that Shakespeare interpreted the play explicitly to himself in this way. As far as I can judge, Shakespeare is seldom, if ever, deliberately symbolical. My idea is rather that when a vision of beauty is forming in an artist's mind, it is generally easier for it to use the material already there than to create from the beginning out of nothing. That is to say, the existing state of Shakespeare's dramatic mind will determine to a great extent what sort of vision he will find beautiful. The vision which absorbs into its texture/

texture his ideals and purposes will gain access to his mind more readily than one which does not. His dramas may thus express his mental situation without any deliberate intention on his part. An ideal may embody itself in an objective image long before it is recognised as an abstract principle.

It is in this sense that I suggest that the Comedy of Errors is the dream of an alliance between the spirits of History and Comedy, in which History will abandon its exclusive pretensions, and Comedy will recognise the seniority of History and confine its activities to its own legitimate field.

VI. THE TWO GENTLEMEN OF VERONA.

Comedy, however, has no intention of accepting any such compromise. It refuses to be bridled or domesticated, or to respect the claims of any ideal whatever. The Two Gentlemen of Verona is an emphatic and even violent assertion of its untamable freedom.

The play is a comedy of humiliation, based upon two main themes, the inconstancy of the sex attraction in man, and its power to corrupt friendship. Of these, the latter seems to trouble Shakespeare most. To be an emotional turncoat is distressing and ridiculous enough, but to betray a friend is utterly despicable. Shakespeare at this time was clearly of opinion that friendship between man and man, rationally based upon mutual esteem, was a nobler thing than love between man and woman, which has too much resemblance to a mere fever of the blood. Friendship belongs to the serious and ideal side of man's nature. It fosters the cultivation of all great excellencies, and promotes the execution of all high enterprises. Love, on the other hand, is fundamentally irrational. It makes a man neglect his soul and his work, Under its influence he usually behaves foolishly, and sometimes wickedly. That love should corrupt friendship is therefore a monstrous horror.

Nevertheless/

Nevertheless, Shakespeare is disturbed by the memory of Love's Labour's Lost. The doubt occurs to him: "Could I, under the influence of woman's attraction, betray all that my rational soul holds sacred — friendship, honour, and the high ideals and enterprises of man?" He tries to repel the idea, but his imagination persists in picturing circumstances in which he might yield to temptation. The more he struggles against the nightmare, the more vivid it becomes. Finally, following a suggestion from Montemayor, his vision takes coherent shape, and he finds himself, as Proteus, pursuing a course of conduct which his spirit abhors. He falls abjectly in love with a mistress who treats him with disdain, lies to his father, forsakes his own love and courts the mistress of his friend, is covered with ridicule by the behaviour of his servant, conspires treacherously against his friend and his patron, and acts like a beast to his new mistress. He finds that his old mistress has been a witness of his inconstancy, and to crown his shame, his friend not only forgives him, but offers to sacrifice his love to his friendship. The vision is loathsome, but he cannot categorically deny its possibility. There is probably no other play of Shakespeare in which the comic imagination is so destructive.

But we must observe that this destructiveness acts upon Shakespeare's imaginative world rather than upon his/

his own spirit, and indeed produces a strong emotional reaction. The more vividly his imagination represents him as Proteus, the more difficult it is for him to repudiate the connection, but at the same time the more anxious he is to do so. While unable to deny absolutely his responsibility for the acts of Proteus, he grows more restive under it. He feels himself more shamefully betrayed than either Julia or Valentine. The same feeling is reflected in Proteus himself. He can scarcely believe that it is his real self that is guilty of the acts he abhors. There is nothing in all his villainy so sincere as his recovery from it. Both he and Shakespeare feel as if they had awakened from a hateful nightmare.

Again, though Comedy has tried to wreck the ideal of friendship, its success is only apparent. Just when friendship seems to have been irretrievably shattered by the treachery of Proteus, it is vindicated with what to modern eyes is quite unnecessary thoroughness by Valentine, and as Valentine is imagined objectively, without that distorting mist which obscures the soul's vision of itself, his action is more significant than that of Proteus.

Finally, the activity of Woman in the play is not entirely destructive. She is still the formidable disturber of man's dignity, character, and happiness, but she is now

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a little more. In order to make her destructive charm credible, it was necessary for the imagination to make it visible, and in order to make inconstancy to her appear most shameful, it was necessary to make her suffer. Moreover, her own constancy had to be taken for granted. The imagination must therefore, even for its hostile purpose, represent her as lovable, pathetic, and faithful. Accordingly we find that Julia is a distinct improvement upon the mocking women of Love's Labour's Lost.

While, therefore, the immediate effect of The Two Gentlemen of Verona is to wreck Shakespeare's imaginative world, it strengthens the ideals from which it may ultimately be reconstructed.

VII. THE VALLEY OF HUMILIATION.

Unfortunately, the destructive effects of Comedy's attack made themselves felt first, and while he was still suffering from them, Shakespeare passed through a period of fear and unhappiness.

It was at this time that he wrote his Lucreece, a nightmare of lust and treachery even more oppressive than The Two Gentlemen, and provoking an even stronger moral reaction.

At this time, also, I think we must suppose him to have touched that abominable play, Titus Andronicus, if we cannot bring ourselves to disbelieve the testimony of Meres and the Folio Editors that he had a hand in it.

The Sonnets, too, seem to have been mostly written during this period. Since they are not dramatic, they do not, strictly speaking, fall within my province, but the view we take of Shakespeare depends so much on the view we take of the Sonnets that anyone who propounds a theory of Shakespeare is almost bound to say how he stands with regard to them, and in particular, how far he considers them autobiographical. Sir Sidney Lee argues strenuously for their impersonality, and produces a mass of evidence to prove that Shakespeare, even when he seems most personal, was merely following the common conventions of current sonneteering practice. He points out that in order to conform to these/

these conventions, Shakespeare sometimes distorts known facts, representing himself, for instance, as much older than he was. Most critics, however, think that this explanation does not cover the ground. They often feel the presence of a personal note which refuses to be resolved into mere convention, and they urge that the facts indicated by the more intimate sonnets are not of the kind that a poet with a purely literary purpose would be likely to invent.

My own impression is that the Sonnets begin quite conventionally, but that as they proceed, the following of the form and its conventions becomes more and more mechanical, so that Shakespeare's mind is left more free to attend to what interests it. But I am not at all sure that what interests it must be autobiographical, If our view of Shakespeare is correct, he was much more interested in his work than in his life. In his life he was constantly thinking about his work, whereas in his work he seldom thought about his life. In a sense different from Milton's, his life was his poetry. I therefore think it likely that when his own interests appear in the Sonnets, they belong to his imaginative, not his personal life.

From this point of view, the course of Shakespeare's thought in the Sonnets would be somewhat as follows. He begins with a complimentary address to his patron, praising his beauty in conventional style, and urging him to perpetuate it/

it by begetting children. This theme naturally suggests the ideal of friendship, which occupied him in The Two Gentlemen. Being now in the mood of emotional reaction, he is anxious to rebuild his faith in the strength of friendship, and its power to triumph over the fascination of sex. He tries to realise the attitude of a perfect friend, turning the situation this way and that in his mind, considering how his attachment would be unaffected by absence or jealousy, how magnanimously he would forgive his friend's lapses, and how contritely he would ask forgiveness for his own. With this ideal union of minds he contrasts the irrational love of woman, justified neither by worth, fidelity, nor even beauty. He dwells on her devastating effect on himself, remembering how she has wrecked his world and made him false to his vows. Sometimes he escapes from his preoccupation with friendship and love, and thinks discontentedly of his art, and its effect upon his soul. In short, I take the Sonnets, when they rise above convention, as showing Shakespeare's efforts to restore the vision which has been perverted by The Two Gentlemen of Verona.

Finally, to this period belongs that most despondent of Shakespeare's Histories, Richard II. Here the miseries of the king, though of course determined in detail by Shakespeare's historical sources, are essentially the/

the reflection of his own dismay at the rebellion of his imaginative kingdom. He is troubled, not so much by the actual images which comedy forces upon him, though these are disconcerting enough, as by the mere fact that he cannot control them. Instead of the triumphant progress from chaos to order which he joyously took for granted in the Henry VI group, he is now faced with the dissolution of his ideal world. The usurper whom he tried to banish has returned to overwhelm him. The unhappiness of his position justifies the profuse lamentations which in Richard seem rather ignoble. It is no personal disaster which Shakespeare bemoans, but the impending destruction of a noble vision.

But though the forces of destruction seem now to have reached their maximum, in reality the reaction against them is in full swing. The intensity of dismay and fear with which Shakespeare sees the impending ruin of his kingdom gives his vision a unity which it has hitherto lacked. The very ideal whose fate he is bewailing has become clear and strong under his hands. Indeed, the historic ideal is realised with greater purity in Richard II than in any of the other Histories. It has not the energy and optimism of the Henry VI group, and in particular, it has not the tremendous gusto which makes Richard III still

a/

a favourite on the stage, but it has to a far greater extent the dignity and seriousness at which Shakespeare aimed. It has not the richness of the later Histories, but it has not suffered, like them, from the disturbing effects of the Comic Invasion. Its beauty, lacking the interest of the game, is rather pale and slender, but wonderfully perfect of its kind. Nowhere else do we get so profound a sense of the divinity of kingship, of the sacredness of one's own land, or of the dignity of man's world. The play is our first illustration of the miracle of Tragedy, where the spirit of a world is purified and exalted by the sacrifice of its personal incarnation. Accordingly, Shakespeare rises from Richard II chastened and thoughtful, but filled with the profound joy of restored ideals and purposes.

VIII. A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM.

Having regained his kingdom and renewed his courage, Shakespeare proceeds at once to deal with the rebellion of Comedy, and in particular to extract the sting from the Two Gentlemen. The result is A Midsummer Night's Dream.

This play appears to have been revised at least once, and probably twice. I take it that the original play centred mainly about the lovers, Oberon, and Bottom with the ass's head, whereas later, when the play had been adapted for performance at some wedding festivities, Theseus and Bottom's Interlude became more prominent. Since, however, the alterations seem to have been of emphasis rather than of substance, I shall deal with the play as we now have it.

At first sight it seems a mistake to look for any serious purpose in this play. It looks like a dazzling freak, showing Shakespeare's elemental genius in its most miraculous flight, but moving in a fantastic world far removed from that of the serious dramatist. Here, if anywhere, we have "sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy's child," unencumbered with the harness of reflective thought.

Nevertheless, I think that any such view is quite inadequate. The play shows abundant evidence of consideration and care. The craftsmanship is as deft, and almost as intricate/

intricate as that of the Comedy of Errors. It has none of the light-hearted happy-go-lucky looseness of Love's Labour's Lost. All the characters except Bottom and Puck are entirely serious, and often sententious. As in the Comedy of Errors the shadow of death hangs over the whole action. Moreover, Shakespeare shows here more signs of hard reflective thinking upon the nature of his art than in all the other plays put together. Nowhere else, not even in Hamlet, does he come so near to stating an aesthetic theory. I therefore feel encouraged to hope that the indications of purpose I find in A Midsummer Night's Dream are not due to mere coincidence.

I imagine, then, that Shakespeare, compelled by various puzzling features in the behaviour of his dramatic world, especially the disconcerting events in The Two Gentlemen, to give some attention to the conditions of his art, entered upon a course of very un-Aristotelian ruminations, and arrived at a position something like the following.

In the dramatic world there are two kingdoms.

The first is the daylight realm of reality and cool reason, presided over by the historic hero Theseus, a soldier and statesman, thoroughly manly in his occupations and recreations, who indulges in comedy with condescending magnanimity, and stands no nonsense from woman. He has won the warrior queen Hippolyta with his sword, and gently but firmly/

firmly overbears her expressed wishes on all occasions. He is quite clear that women are the property of their creators, and should obey them in all things.

The second is the realm of phantasy, governed by Oberon, the King of Shadows, and peopled by the moonlit shapes of desire and fear that imagination creates out of airy nothing. This is the domain of the lover, the lunatic, and the poet, of romantic tragedy and fantastic comedy. Oberon himself is a kindly and responsible spirit, whose work is always done with precision when he can give it his personal attention. But mishaps happen in his kingdom from two causes, the ungovernable female spirit of Titania, and the mischievous comic spirit of Puck. There is no serious difficulty with Puck. He is unreliable, but does not intend to be disobedient. Titania is more troublesome, and is at first quite unmanageable, bringing plagues upon the world. Finally, however, Oberon subdues her with the help of Puck. He finds her in a preposterous alliance with Bottom, a comic figure supplied by Puck, and shames her into submission. Henceforth Oberon will also be supreme in his own kingdom, at least in so far as an irrational world can ever be brought under an orderly rule.

If now we regard the tale of the <u>Two Gentlemen</u> as having happened in Oberon's world it becomes a matter for amusement/

amusement rather than distress. Valentine and Silvia, the true lovers, become Lysander and Hermia. Proteus, who deserted his own love and pursued that of his friend, reappears as Demetrius, while Helena, like Julia, resolutely follows him up. But as soon as we clearly see these poor mortals as the playthings of Puck and Oberon, we cease to be hurt by their inconstancies and treacheries. We recognise that the best in this kind are but shadows, and subject to the king thereof.

Reviewing the whole situation, then, Shakespeare's advice to himself is: "In History, be like Theseus. Order all things according to reason and manly dignity, but withal be genial, magnanimous and comprehensive. Give comedy its place, and keep woman in hers. In Phantasy, follow Oberon. Be guided by the same rules as far as you can, but do not be alarmed if you find your task more difficult. Reason alone will not carry you through, for imagination apprehends more than cool reason ever comprehends. You must yourself use patience and imaginative tact. In any event, mishaps need not grieve your spirit, or bruise your ideals, for after all, you are dealing with dreams. The world of phantasy is a lovely playground for the poet, but it is only a shadow of the world of history."

IX. LOVE'S LABOUR WON.

A Midsummer Night's Dream is one of the turning points of Shakespeare's dramatic life, both in History and Comedy.

In History, he realises that the elevation of stories of the fate of kings does not quite compensate for their bareness. He sees the need of greater variety of interest, and particularly of comic relief. The change appears first in King John. The new method is almost too successful. The pathos of Arthur, the passion of Constance, and the humour of Falconbridge give the drama, in spite of its lack of game interest, a richness and liveliness which History has hitherto lacked, but Falconbridge comes perilously near to being the hero the play, and only John's defiance of the Pope keeps him from being entirely overshadowed. There is clearly a danger in allowing Comedy to obtain a foothold in History, a danger which, as we shall see, becomes acute in Henry IV.

In Comedy, the effect of A Midsummer Night's Dream is to banish permanently the greater of the two terrors which have distressed Shakespeare's imagination. Two themes have from the first haunted both his poems and his comedies, the Adonis motive, which pictures him as besieged by the love of a woman whom he has resolved to avoid, and the Tarquin/

Tarquin motive, which pictures him as acting treacherously under the influence of sex fascination. The former is the more profound and persistent, and was the first to appear, but the latter, being much more terrible, soon becaome predominant. Now, however, Shakespeare has convinced himself that he is really incapable of treachery, and refuses to credit any vision which represents him as guilty of it. The Tarquin motive, therefore, having lost its terror, vanishes.

The Adonis motive is more obstinate. Shakespeare has certainly done his best to crush it also. In A Midsummer Night's Dream he allows the light of cold reason to beat pitilessly upon love and woman. Woman is declared to be the property of her creator. Hippolyta is conquered by the sword, and ruled with a velvet-gloved hand. Oberon meanly conspires with his comic servant against his wife. Love is represented as capable of being turned off and on like a water tap.

But the most deeply affronted person is Helena. She is nobly derived, the reincarnation of Julia. Yet her pursuit of Demetrius is stripped of all seemliness, and becomes merely disgusting. She is the only woman in Shakespeare who betrays a friend. Finally, she is expected to be content with a love which is simply the artificial product of a magic spell.

If/

If Shakespeare's anti-chivalric attitude were as profoundly sincere as it is deliberate, there would be an immediate end of Adonis' persecution. But his imagination apprehends more than his reason comprehends. Though the reflections of the Sonnets have convinced his mind, his soul of beauty knows better. He has a fearful suspicion that in taking the comic view of love as a distemper of the blood, he has blasphemed a mighty and sacred power, which will avenge the insults he has heaped upon Woman, and especially upon the wronged Helena.

At once the Adonis motive becomes virulent. Shakespeare's imagination haunts him with visions of Helena, not the debased creature of A Midsummer Night's Dream, but a radiant being, with all the virtues and graces, beautiful, constant, wise, and accomplished, who is resolutely determined to possess him wholly, body and soul. He struggles, but cannot shake her off. He seeks safety with the king, but she follows him to the Court, and uses the king against him. He turns to the friendship of a warlike comrade, but the man whom he took to be a Falconbridge turns out to be a Parolles. He finally takes refuge with another woman, and finds himself caught in the very arms of his pursuer. Covered with ridicule and shame, he surrenders.

This theme, with details borrowed from Boccaccio

or/

or elsewhere, is the subject of the first draft of All's Well that Ends Well, which I take to be the play called by Meres Love's Labour Won. The original play has not come down to us, and cannot be reconstructed with any certainty, but I fancy that it was more amusing than our present version. Helena would be less lovable and more formidable, Bertram less disagreeable and more pitiable, Parolles less contemptible and more humorous. Our sympathies would be more with the hunted man, and less with the pursuing woman. Bertram would be the victim of a comic nightmare, and when we saw him finally pinned down we should feel a thrill of comic pity and terror.

Helena's success, of course, is to a great extent illusory. She has stormed Shakespeare's imagination, but not captured his heart. Before she achieves this final triumph, she has still to fight many battles in many dramas. Puck has changed his coat again, and is now fighting on her side against his old master, but the comic alliance is not altogether to her advantage. It enables her to force her way into Shakespeare's imagination, which she is not yet strong enough to do by her own power, but it is clear that so long as she serves under the banner of Comedy she will never win his heart. Comedy is essentially destructive, whereas Shakespeare's inmost soul longs/

longs for construction. Moreover, though the Comic Spirit is willing to use her in his efforts to dethrone the historic ideal, he has no intention of putting her in the vacant seat. He accordingly takes every opportunity of representing her as an inferior being, whose attraction is subrational and even animal, a view only too congenial to Shakespeare's present way of thinking. It is evident, therefore, that the comic alliance is becoming unstable, and that Helena will denounce it as soon as she sees a favourable opportunity.

Meanwhile, she has secured a foothold in Shakespeare's imagination, which she must patiently endeavour to strengthen. Her hope is, that underneath his official comic view of her, he has begun to devine that her attraction is a greater and more sacred thing than he has yet realised. At present, this obscure perception increases his fear, but at the same time qualifies it. He feels with dismay that Helena may have a friend within the citadel.

But whatever his fears may be, something in the depths of Shakespeare's dramatic soul has begun to sing again with joy. The spirit of the game, which has slept since the battle of the Two Gentlemen is once more blowing through the dramatic world.

X. ROMEO AND JULIET.

After Shakespeare has awakened from the nightmare of Love's Labour Won, he does not lose his head, but, fortified by the lesson of A Midsummer Night's Dream, considers how he can meet Helena's assault. He has now Puck against him as well as Titania, but he relies on his power to counter shadows with shadows. Three lines of defence suggest themselves.

Firstly, he may reply by constructing a picture in which he is represented as mastering woman with a firm hand like Theseus, and plotting against her with his comic servant like Oberon. This design he carries out in The Taming of the Shrew, but the result, though amusing enough, does not quite answer his purpose. Helena refuses to be identified with the defeated Katharine, and resembles rather the triumphant Bianca. Even if we accept Katherine as Helena's representative, her subjugation is not very credible. The last line of the play: "'Tis a wonder, by your leave, she will be tamed so," seems to express Shakespeare's own opinion.

Secondly, Helena may be discredited by being shown inconstant. Accordingly Shakespeare begins the first draft of Troilus and Cressida, a play whose style often shows traces of this period. But this idea also is soon seen to be unsatisfactory. Inconstancy appeals to the imagination as/

as a positive event only when it is an actual breach of faith, but to Shakespeare at present the inconstancy of woman means only that she shall give up troubling him, a purely negative act which cannot counterbalance Helena's positive aggression.

Abandoning Troilus and Cressida, therefore, he falls back upon his third line of defence. He resolves to meet Helena with her own weapons. Instead of running away from her, and allowing himself to be ignominiously hounded down, he will himself take the initiative. He will conjure up a vision of himself as an ardent and tempestuous lover, carrying off a willing but comparatively passive bride in defiance of hostile relatives and rivals, and finally dying heroically for her. As the vision will be only a dream fantasy, he will not really surrender his soul, but he will have provided himself with a triumphant answer to Helena's nightmares. This scheme he proceeds, with the help of a poem by Arthur Brooke, to carry out in Romeo and Juliet.

Many critics, perhaps most, assign a much earlier date to this play than I have done, and as the success of their arguments would damage my theory, I shall notice them briefly.

In the first place, the Nurse's statement: "'Tis since the earthquake now eleven years," is taken as referring to the earthquake of 1580, and thence it is inferred that the play, or part of it, was written in 1591. But why must we suppose/

suppose that Shakespeare imagined the Nurse as speaking exactly at the time he was writing? It seems to me more likely that he heard the Nurse's prototype make the remark in 1591, and that his omnivorous memory retained the phrase, and afterwards reproduced it.

In the second place, it is maintained that the lyrical characteristics of the metre indicate a very early date. But if I am correct in supposing that Shakespeare intended the play to be an attractive and soothing refuge for his imagination, its lyricism would be appropriate and deliberate.

In the third place, it is supposed that the play, being a tragedy, must belong to a preliminary experimental stage in Shakespeare's career, before he settled down to his Comic Period. But it is absurd to say that the play, in any version we have or can reconstruct, is an experiment. Romeo and Juliet is the finest play Shakespeare wrote before the appearance of Falstaff, and one of the most beautiful and perfect he wrote at any time. Until critics felt the necessity of sorting out the plays into chronological compartments, it was universally recognised as one of Shakespeare's major works. There seems no justification at all for the idea that it is out of place among the comedies. The traditional distinction between tragedy and/

and comedy, which seems so fundamental to us, had no effect upon Shakespeare's practice. The only distinction of dramatic species which he recognises is that between Histories and non-histories. The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet and the Comedy of A Midsummer Night's Dream are brothers, but between the Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet and the Tragedy of Richard II there is a great gulf.

Nor is it quite clear that Romeo and Juliet is genuinely tragic. It is not only the most beautiful of the early plays. It is actually the most pleasant. In spite of the constant presence of death and strife, the atmosphere of direct enjoyment is more pervasive than in most of the professed comedies. We like Romeo, and love, or very nearly love, Juliet, but we grieve surprisingly little over their deaths. Mercutio's death we do indeed bewail, but chiefly because it occurs in the middle of the play instead of at the end. I cannot call to mind any other play in which death has so little sting. The usual explanation, and the one indicated by Shakespeare himself, is that our satisfaction is due to the final closing of the feud between the rival houses. This, however, does not carry us very far. Both Romeo and Juliet are only children, so that their deaths bring to an end not only the feud, but the houses themselves. The true explanation evidently lies deeper, and we shall consider it further when we have examined the play/

play from our own point of view. In the meantime I shall assume that there is no fatal objection to the position I have given it in the series.

We have sketched Shakespeare's plan of action. It remains to be seen what attitude the other dramatic powers will take up towards it.

The Comic Spirit is quite pleased. If Shakespeare chooses to entangle himself with the sex instinct, he will certainly do nothing to discourage the enterprise. He recognises, of course, that the brunt of the battle will fall upon Helena, but on his own behalf he attaches Mercutio to Romeo, and the Nurse to Juliet, to ensure that the comic view of love will never be overlooked.

Helena also welcomes the plan. Indeed, we may suspect that it was partly inspired by a disguised partisan of hers within the citadel. Evidently the more Shakespeare is induced to think about love, the closer he will be brought to her. Shakespeare's conception, it is true, has been somewhat egotistical. He has given to his representative Romeo all the cream of the play, all the planning and fighting, and most of the talking, and left nothing to Juliet except to fall in meekly with his arrangements. Juliet herself he makes as young, passive, and featureless as possible. She is actually only fourteen years old, two years younger than in Brooke's poem. Helena, however, submits/

submits to Shakespeare's conditions, puts as much of her spirit into Juliet as the girl's nature will allow, and entirely transforms the situation. Instead of a spectacular triumph Romeo finds a battlefield, in which he has to bestir himself to the utmost to keep the initiative. Though Juliet is never aggressive, her love is as ardent and her spirit as enterprising as his own, and she follows his lead with such eager swiftness that he almost feels hustled. However, by using the advantages of position with which Shakespeare has provided him, he just manages to hold his own. He pursues the course marked out for him at an ever increasing pace, reducing the time of Brooke's poem from weeks to days, till finally death, which was originally intended to be a heroic gesture, brings him rest and safety. A long married life with Juliet was never part of Shakespeare's vision, but now it appeals to his imagination less than ever. His head has been in the lion's mouth, and he is glad to get it out again.

The result of the engagement is not wholly favourable to any of the parties. The Comic Spirit is least affected. After making a brave show at the beginning of the play, he soon finds the others too preoccupied to attend to him, and retires into the background. Mercutio is killed, and the Nurse drawn into the intrigue. He is not greatly concerned, however, as the battle is not primarily/

primarily his affair.

Shakespeare, again, though not defeated, has received a check. Juliet has proved unexpectedly and inexplicably formidable. He wonders if the vision which was to express his own self-assertion has not entangled him further in the toils of the enemy. His alarm is increased by the recollection of his sacrifice of Mercutio. In the Two Gentlemen, the betrayal of Valentine was the most important and oppressive event in the play, but here Shakespeare in his preoccupation with Juliet allows Mercutio to be killed almost casually. Apparently the very ideal of friendship is in danger. Altogether, Shakespeare's adventure on the field of love, exhilarating though it was at the time, does not encourage him to challenge Helena again.

Helena has thus gained her immediate point. Positively, however, she has not made much headway. Attractive though Juliet is, she has had little opportunity of unfolding her qualities. She is rather the incarnation of instinctive female love than a completely realised woman. The feminine ideal has scarcely advanced beyond the ambiguous stage where it is impossible to say whether it is above reason or below it.

Helena's greatest advantage comes from a source which none of the parties could foresee. Since Shakespeare has designed his vision so that all its details serve a central purpose/

purpose, the play has the beauty of a work of art, and since Helena within the limits of this design has resisted Shakespeare's purpose and compelled Romeo to exert himself to the utmost, it has also the beauty of the game. As the struggle is only for position in what is at bottom only a make-believe phantasy, in which death is only one of the tactical moves, it has not the painful intensity of genuine tragedy, where the soul's salvation is at stake. The conflict is keen enough to sweep away serious irrelevancies of structure, but not desperate enough to strip off all decorative ornament. In fact all the conditions of the play conspire to make it beautiful, interesting, impressive, and enjoyable, though without either the greatness or the agony of the later tragedies.

The consequence is that Juliet, who appears to Shakespeare as the visible centre of the magic of the play, is bathed in a warm, soft beauty, which, unlike her own intrinsic attractiveness, is manifestly of the ideal type. While, therefore, Shakespeare still distrusts and fears Helena, his dawning idea that her attraction is not simply instinctive, but genuinely mental, has gained strength.

XI. THE MERCHANT OF VENICE.

Realising that he has treated the ideal of friendship with scant respect both in Love's Labour Won and Romeo and Juliet, Shakespeare resolves to vindicate it in The Merchant of Venice.

Though I agree with most critics in placing this play after Romeo and Juliet, there is evidence that Shakespeare handled the subject earlier. The history of the play seems to be somewhat as follows. Before Shakespeare began writing, there was already in existence a play called The Jew, which dealt both with the casket theme and that of the pound of flesh. In 1594, the trial of Lopez, Elizabeth's Jewish physician, aroused a sudden interest in Jew plays. Marlowe's Jew of Malta was frequently performed, and Shakespeare was called upon to touch up The Jew for production by his company. He did so, but hastily, so that his imagination had not time to recreate the play from its foundations. Afterwards, in his reaction from Romeo and Juliet, when he wanted a play about friendship, he returned to The Jew, and recast it again for his own purposes under the name of The Merchant of Venice. I shall suppose that the main bulk of Shakespeare's imaginative work was done at this second revision.

In recreating the play, Shakespeare's first intention seems to have been, as the title indicates, to make Antonio the hero. Shylock being undoubtedly the villain/

villain, Antonio is his natural antagonist. It is he who contracts the bond, and incurs the danger. It is he also who gives the heroic demonstration of friendship which it is the object of the play to exhibit. Shakespeare, however, has another less obvious reason. Bassanio has to marry Portia, whose feminine activities Shakespeare wishes to restrict as far as possible. Of course she has her part to play in the story, but he intends as far as he can to confine her to her legitimate business and sternly repress any incursions into sentiment or moonshine. Bassanio and she must therefore remain in the background till they are required, allowing the main interest of the play to centre round the duel between Antonio and Shylock.

Accordingly, the play opens with a discussion of Antonio's sadness, which is evidently intended to fix interest upon his mind, and prepare us for the agony and heroism we are to see there. Bassanio, on the other hand, is rather lightly treated. His courtship of Portia has a commercial air which is scarcely decent, and since he draws her by lot, he does not even have to make love to her. Evidently he is to be no Romeo, and will give Portia no chance to be a Juliet. In short, Shakespeare has done everything to disqualify him for the position of hero that can be done without also disqualifying him for the friendship of Antonio.

But/

But the structure of the story is too much for Shakespeare's purpose. Antonio's part is too inactive to let him remain the centre of interest, whereas Bassanio is never far from the scene of action. Moreover, in spite of Shakespeare's desire to keep Portia at arm's length, as soon as she appears she begins to draw the play towards herself and Bassanio. She is as clearly the heroine as Shylock is the villain. Bassanio, therefore, inevitably drifts into the part of the hero, and Shakespeare sees the play from his point of view.

The effect of this change is to make Shylock more remote. He is no longer Shakespeare's personal antagonist. At the same time, it makes him more real and terrible. Shakespeare is still sensitive about his sacrifice of Mercutio. Now, apparently, he is about to bring his friend into deadly peril for his own selfish purposes. His friend's danger thus makes a more opportune appeal to his imagination than his own would have done. Accordingly, Shylock, who at the beginning of the play was conceived on melodramatic lines, is now realised with the fearful clearness of the nightmare, and has the nightmare's oppressive air of inevitability. His hatred of Antonio, too, has the true nightmare quality, amply justified, but transcending its justification.

Perhaps/

Perhaps Shakespeare's imagination might have compelled him to abandon the happy ending of the old play, had not a more insistent terror attacked him from another quarter. Bassanio's marriage with Portia is not the placid matter of fact affair which Shakespeare tried to make it. Helena has become militant. Irritated by the restrictions within which the fiery spirit of Juliet was confined, and outraged by Bassanio's cavalier treatment of Portia, she once more renews her alliance with the Comic Spirit, and prepares to assert herself. She sees her opportunity in Antonio's danger. At one stroke she will both save Antonio, and play a huge practical joke upon her husband, which will demolish that lordly male's complacent superiority.

Shakespeare is in a dilemma. He sees clearly what Portia's success will mean. She will make Bassanio look supremely foolish, and leave him not a rag of dignity. And by the same act, monstrous as it may seem, she will have established a compelling claim upon his gratitude. Her position will be incomparably stronger than that of Helena when she cured the king. Bassanio will be trapped far more effectually than Bertram ever was. There is thus in Shakespeare's imagination a conflict between his tragic fear of Shylock and his comic fear of Portia. The former is the more serious, but the latter touches him more closely. The invasion of his dramatic world by woman is a more pressing/

pressing danger at the moment than the malignity of man. The terror of Portia therefore casts out the terror of Shylock.

The victory of Comedy threatens to destroy the emotional balance of the play. When Shylock ceases to be terrible, he becomes pitiable. Shakespeare has even a grain of sympathy with him as a fellow victim of Portia. The great trial scene is in danger of missing fire. Shakespeare the artist does his best to retrieve the situation by forcing the attention upon the malignity of Shylock and bringing him to the very point of triumph, but with incomplete success. We feel our sympathies continually trying to carry us in the wrong direction. It may be objected that our pity for Shylock is purely modern, and would have been unintelligible to an Elizabethan audience, but this only means that we have now risen above temporary prejudices, and can see the play as it intrinsically is. It may be that Shakespeare appealed to these prejudices, and perhaps shared them, but the Shakespeare who did so is not the pure dramatist with whom we are dealing. Our account seems to indicate that our feeling towards Shylock is the reflection of what Shakespeare the dramatist himself felt.

Portia, having won her victory, proceeds to gather in its fruits. Now, unless we have followed the movement of Shakespeare's imagination, we may think that the joke about the/

the rings is too slight to occupy part of the fourth act and almost the whole of the fifth. But to Shakespeare it has become the most important part of the play. The memory of Love's Labour Won has given it an ominous symbolical significance. There, Bertram had promised Helena his love if she got his ring from him, and Helena got it by an impersonation. Portia, in less dubious circumstances, repeats the same trick, and with the same result, except that Bassanio is morally as well as technically bound. He is finally brought to heel.

But Shakespeare himself is not. Portia is certainly a marvellous and dazzling creature, but he does not yet love her. She is too formidable. There is no suspicion now of her attraction being sub-rational. It is clearly spiritual. But there is something uncanny and overwhelming about her. With the Comic Spirit at her back, she has an inhuman and unfair power of getting the upper hand. What chance has poor Bassanio, that unfortunate hero for whom no critic has a good word, against one who can command the aid of the comic nightmare? Of course, Bassanio did not have a fair chance. He was handicapped by Shakespeare at the beginning. But could any other comic hero have done better? Certainly not Biron, nor Proteus, nor Bertram, nor even Romeo. Theseus and Oberon could cope with their women, but neither of these had the Comic Spirit against them.

They/

They had remained outside of the game. Shakespeare feels his position in the comic world becoming more and more precarious, yet he has not surrendered his tenacious belief in the innate dignity and heroism of male man. Rather than give up this faith, he is prepared to abandon comedy altogether.

XII. PRINCE HENRY.

Shakespeare is now compelled to consider his position very seriously. The double-life compromise suggested in the Comedy of Errors, and elaborated more fully in A Midsummer Night's Dream, has failed. Mr Hyde is steadily dominating Dr. Jekyll, and is himself steadily deteriorating. Or, to use Shakespeare's own imagery, Oberon is displacing Theseus, and being himself overwhelmed by the more lawless denizens of the World of Shadows. In sober truth, it is undeniable that though Shakespeare still considers History to be his serious work, and Comedy his relaxation, he has been expending a far greater amount of mental energy upon Comedy than upon History. King John is a perfunctory performance compared with Romeo and Juliet or the Merchant of Venice. How is this downward movement to be accounted for?

I do not think that Shakespeare ever really doubted the vastness of his own genius. I believe he saw it even more clearly than his most enthusiastic worshippers. He fully appreciated the beauty of his Phantasies, but he felt sure that he ought to be doing something greater, something more splendid and heroic. Comparatively speaking, he was wasting his time and debauching his imagination.

The only explanation by which he could reconcile

his/

his present conduct with his high destiny was that his aberrations were due to the exuberance of youth, and would be cast off when his genius matured. From this point of view it was natural, and perhaps desirable, that his imagination should try its powers freely before submitting to the discipline necessary for first rate work. Pruning is most successful where there has been a luxuriant natural growth. Did not Henry V, the most glorious of the English kings, spend the greater part of his youth in unbridled frivolity? And it might well be that his glory was achieved, not in spite of his early dissipation, but largely because of it. The experience of low life which he thus acquired, so unusual in a king, enriched his own nature, and added to his knowledge of his people. The parallel appealed to Shakespeare. He saw in Prince Henry a symbolical representation of himself.

The Henry V group of plays, therefore, serves two purposes. In its own right, it is intended to be Shakespeare's crowning achievement in the field of History, the picture of a heroic king, who first rules his spirit, and then takes kingdoms. But it is also Shakespeare's declaration that he himself has come of age, and is preparing to fulfil his own destiny. His imagination occupies itself with the former aspect, but most of the emotional driving power comes from the latter.

If/

If we keep both these aspects in mind we can account for some features in Henry's character which have given trouble to the critics. On the one hand, it is abundantly clear that Shakespeare sympathises with Henry and wishes him to be admired. But it is also so clear that much of Henry's character is not really admirable, that it is difficult to believe that Shakespeare can have admired it as much as has been thought. The truth seems to me to be that Henry, taken simply as he appears in the plays, does not produce the same effect as he does when seen as Shakespeare's representative. Accordingly, critics who are sensitive to Shakespeare's point of view tend to overlook Henry's unpleasant points, while the more independent feel irritated by them, and argue, in spite of the whole feeling of the plays, especially of the choruses in Henry V, that Shakespeare's own vision of them was quite ruthless, and unclouded by any mist of idealism.

For instance, the deliberateness of Henry's assumption of wildness has a jarring effect, but before judging it we must relate it to Shakespeare's belief that he was squandering his own genius upon Comedy. Now in one sense this was not deliberate. The Comic Spirit invaded Shakespeare's imagination against his will. Yet Shakespeare naturally felt responsible for giving way to the comic impulse. Indeed, if he had not felt that his lapse was voluntary/

voluntary, he could not have hoped to retrieve it by a voluntary effort. As Shakespeare's representative, this should also be Henry's position. But the two cases are not quite similar. To control conduct is a much simpler thing than to control the imagination. There is really nothing to prevent Henry from being a dutiful son if he pleases. His relation to Shakespeare therefore places him in a false position. His conduct has an appearance of cold calculation which his guiding spirit does not intend or anticipate.

Again, Henry's triumph over Hotspur seems both improbable and unfair. It is surely monstrous to suppose that a habitual frequenter of London taverns will be able, at a moment's notice, to vanquish in war a man who has diligently and enthusiastically cultivated a natural aptitude for it. Unless we have an acute sensitiveness to Shakespeare's feeling, we cannot but sympathise with Hotspur. Yet Shakespeare's underlying idea is reasonable enough. He believes that when he turns again to History after a course of comic dissipation, he will write better History than he would have done if he had never left the historic fold, or than Marlowe, whose heroic spirit had scarcely a touch of comedy, could ever have written. Here again Henry represents Shakespeare's position, but without getting the benefit of its reasonableness.

Similarly/

Similarly we shall find all through the Henry V group, that Shakespeare's imagination, following its own laws, is constantly misrepresenting to some extent his symbolical scheme, with results generally unfavourable to Henry. These discrepancies are all the more difficult to observe and correct, as the scheme is rather an inspiring motive than the subject of a deliberate allegory. We must therefore be gentle in our criticism of Henry. He carries Shakespeare's burden as well as his own.

XIII. THE REJECTION OF FALSTAFF.

In Henry's career, as imagined by Shakespeare, there are three stages. First we are shown his youthful dalliance with comedy, then his decisive rejection of it, and finally his emergence into the full glory of kingship.

Shakespeare's first step must therefore be to create within his historical framework a subsidiary comic world, attractive enough to explain Henry's mixing with it, but base enough to justify his rejection of it. As the historical setting does not allow of the intrusion of Woman, Helena has no part in the scheme, so that Shakespeare's challenge is to the Comic Spirit alone. The result is the creation of Falstaff.

As in Romeo and Juliet Shakespeare tried to foil Helena by making his heroine as innocuous as possible, so now he tries to foil the Comic Spirit by making Falstaff's baseness so glaring as to remove all danger of his diverting our interest from Henry. As soon as he appears we are made aware that he is a glutton, a wine-bibber, a lecher, a braggart, a liar, a coward, and a thief. Nor has he any compensating outward graces. He is elderly, and disgustingly fat. Shakespeare's original intention was apparently to use him as a butt for Henry, who adopts towards him the condeseending attitude of Theseus towards Bottom.

But/

But the Comic Spirit, as Helena did in Romeo and Juliet, takes a hand in the game, and without in any way altering Shakespeare's specifications, transforms Falstaff into the most formidable antagonist Shakespeare has ever had, or, with the exception of Iago, ever will have.

At first everything seems to go well. Henry appears to hold his own easily with Falstaff. His large varied mind appears to comprehend Falstaff as Theseus comprehends Bottom. Even in wit he is at first superior. He is the stage manager of the comedy, while Falstaff, on the whole, is its victim, though when at bay he has the elusive ingenuity of a lunatic or a dream figure. In the running away episode Henry has decidedly the upper hand.

But in the scene where Falstaff presents the king, Henry is outclassed. Falstaff is no longer merely an ingenious and amusing freak. He is a finished artist. Henry's wit is seen to be little more than sharp-tongued cleverness, while Falstaff's has the whole weight of a world vision behind it. It becomes clear that Henry will never match Falstaff in his own field. He must depend upon the superior attractiveness of his whole character. Yet even with all the advantages that Shakespeare has given him, he is apparently going to have difficulty in maintaining his position against Falstaff. Even in general attractiveness Falstaff threatens to be superior to Henry.

How/

How are we to account for this miracle?

Paradoxical as it may seem, I think Falstaff's attractiveness is due to the thorough consistency of his baseness. His mental world is so self-contained and homogeneous that it is easy for the imagination to give it the form of beauty. Let us try to see more in detail how this comes about.

Falstaff's baseness lies in the fact that his mental world is open to external influences only from one direction. All the windows of his soul look downwards. To all intimations or commands from the supra-rational world he is deaf. Patriotism, loyalty, dignity, honour and honesty mean nothing to him, and the concern of others about them seems to him quaintly irrational. On this side he is entirely rational and self-dependent. To communications from the lower denizens of his body, on the other hand, he is quite accessible. Eating, drinking, lechery, and the sheer exuberance of animal spirits are the prime certainties of his nature.

This drastic limitation of Falstaff's nature, though intended by Shakespeare as a handicap, has some unexpected consequences.

The first is that Falstaff's world is comparatively self-contained. It is exposed to only one class of external influences, and these the least disturbing.

Supra-/

Supra-rational ideals, unless they completely dominate the mind, and mould it to their own pattern, confuse and agitate it, whereas the subrational bodily pleasures and impulses, though manufactured outside of the mind, enter it as material for its shaping, so that the mind formally dominates and moulds them. As far as its form and structure are concerned, therefore, Falstaff's world is self-contained.

Again, since all the material of Falstaff's world comes from one source, it is unusually homogeneous. Since the mind is freed from all conflict between the flesh and the spirit, it can order its affairs in unruffled serenity. The joy of battle is absent, it is true, but so also is the internal friction and waste of effort that usually accompanies it. Every part of Falstaff's mind is at home with every other part.

Again, since the material of Falstaff's mind is simple and sensuous, it is easily expressible in concrete imagery. Its appeal to the imagination is therefore very direct and irresistible.

The Falstaffian world, then, being self-contained, homogeneous, simple, and concrete, has the qualities which make for clear mental vision. It is also backed by the nightmare energy of the Comic Spirit. Since it is aimed at the weak spot in Henry's armour, it inevitably attracts Shakespeare's anxious attention, and the more he tries to avoid/

avoid it, the more firmly it fixes itself in his imagination.

The result is that Falstaff's world has a beauty of form which makes the ugliness of its material evaporate. Falstaff has a clear vision of it, a serene command over it, and a large, simple, unruffled joy in it, which can only be parallelled in music and mathematics. His control over his world is so complete that he can take it up in his hands and play with it, but behind his lightest play there is an entire world vision.

Nor is this all. If we are correct in supposing that morality flows from beauty, we should expect to find that Falstaff's delight in the beauty of his mental world would be accompanied by a corresponding moral feeling. And indeed, this is just what we do find. Like all genuine lovers of beauty, Falstaff is loyal to his own ideal and anxious to share it. It is a point of honour with him, and his only one, to compel everything that enters his experience to submit to his point of view and form part of his own peculiar vision. And though in ordinary matters he has no consideration for the rights or feelings of others, there is genuine kindliness and sympathy in his desire to make all who are in contact with him partake in his delight in his own vision. He has pity as well as contempt for the man who cannot laugh. It is, I think, this touch of expansive and selfless enthusiasm which finally makes us feel drawn to the man.

Such, then, is the figute that the Comic Spirit raises up in answer to Shakespeare's challenge. He quickly dominates the first part of Henry IV, and threatens to upset the emotional balance of Shakespeare's whole scheme.

In the second part, Shakespeare begins to be seriously alarmed. He accordingly emphasises Falstaff's baseness so that there may be no possibility of condoning it. His tactics are a little belated, for the picture of Falstaff has now taken firm hold of the imagination. Still, he does what he can to make Falstaff disgusting, and not altogether without effect. He also brings Henry much less into contact with him, so that we may not be always comparing them on the ground where Falstaff is supreme. At length he thinks it safe to bring matters to a head. Henry becomes king, and casts off Falstaff without pity or apology.

But here again Shakespeare's symbolic interest in the issue makes him miscalculate the purely imaginative effect of Henry's conduct. That he himself should cast out from his work the ignoble attitude of comedy was no doubt entirely praiseworthy, and he had a right to do so as abruptly and pitilessly as he pleased. But it is not safe to do in the outer world what you can do in the inner. You cannot treat a man as you would a sin. In the world of imagination, Henry's rejection of Falstaff cannot but appear/

appear as self-righteous, treacherous, and cruel. Falstaff might have been base, but he had not been base to him. To say that he had been a misleader of Henry's youth was absurd, however true it might have been that he had misled Shakespeare's. Even on the moral plane, where Henry's nobility of character was to show up Falstaff for the vile thing he was, he is as inferior to Falstaff as he was in wit. After living a life of undignified idleness, and grieving his father by a hypocritically assumed depravity, he breaks the heart of a kindly old man whose one passion in life was to make the world laugh. And worse than the deed itself is his manner of doing it. Could anything be more repulsive than that sudden coldly calculated blow delivered with such insufferable Olympian complacency?

That Shakespeare felt that something had gone wrong with his design seems clear from the fact that he abandoned his original intention of taking Falstaff to the French war, and made him die at once of a broken heart. But once more his policy seems doubtful. He was probably right in thinking that Falstaff was too dangerous to be left at large, but why give him so pathetic a death? Surely it needed only this to rivet our sympathy firmly to the old knight?

To answer this question we must keep steadily before us Shakespeare's own interest in the situation. Falstaff/

Falstaff was not merely a man, but the incarnation of the Comic Spirit, the internal enemy who threatened to debase his soul and the world of his creation. Simply to reject him was not enough. He was too deadly for half measures. He must acknowledge defeat, abandon the religion of laughter and the comic view of the workd, lose heart, and die. Unfortunately, when the scheme is worked out imaginatively, it casts a disagreeable light upon Henry. Once more this unlucky hero has to carry Shakespeare's burden.

If tradition is correct, it was an external suggestion that prompted Shakespeare's final effort to discredit Falstaff. Following the tactics of A Midsummer Night's Dream, where Puck is called in to help in the subjugation of Titania, Shakespeare, in The Merry Wives of Windsor, calls in the women to help in the humiliation of Falstaff. As before, the plan is apparently successful. When Mrs Ford, Mrs Page and Anne Page are done with him, he is no longer the master of comedy, but its sadly discomfited victim.

Whether Shakespeare has really gained his point is not so clear. The critics are divided as to whether the Falstaff of the Merry Wives is the same man as the Falstaff of Henry IV, or an inferior imitation. I believe that Shakespeare intended the former view to be taken, but that the latter is the true one. The Falstaff of the Merry/

Merry Wives is a deliberate slander intended to belittle the memory of a dreaded enemy. Shakespeare has done his best to throw dust in the eyes of his audiences, and perhaps also in his own, but in spite of his efforts Falstaff obstinately remains in the imagination as the shining figure of Henry IV, Part 1.

XIV. HENRY V.

Having thus, at a great cost, removed Falstaff from his path, Shakespeare proceeds to execute what he intended to be his masterpiece. Henry V was to be an ideal play with an ideal hero. It was to represent the highest point of England's glory, and the highest type of English manhood. With such a theme, he could overtop the work of all other poets. Now that his genius was purged of its base alloy, there was nothing it could not achieve. In fact, Shakespeare was in the kind of mood in which Beethoven composed his Eroica symphony. He was challenging the world with the ripe fruit of an unprecedented genius.

If the drama had been a purely artistic product, he might have succeeded, as Beethoven did, or very nearly did. In music, perhaps, the Kingdom of Heaven may be taken by storm, but the dramatic muse will not suffer violence. The spirit of the game, which is the soul of the drama, is free, and will not submit to stage-management. It is always liable to be weak in historical plays, but in Henry V, the very strength of Shakespeare's artistic purpose crushes it almost out of existence. He has cleared the way so thoroughly for his hero's triumphal progress that there is no major character left to contend with him. All the conflict in the play is military. Dramatically, it is utterly tame.

Even/

Even as a spectacular hero, Henry is not satisfactory. Owing to the lack of any effective opposition or searching criticism, he is not compelled to purge his spirit of all vagueness and incoherence. Accordingly we find that his character does not seem to be visualised as a unity. It is honeycombed with inconsistencies. He is very scrupulous about his title to the French crown, though he knows quite well that his title to the English crown is bad. He is very penitent on his father's behalf for having robbed Richard, but not at all on his own for having received the stolen goods. He apologises for his trick of bragging, and blames the French atmosphere, though his most Marlowesque bragging had been done before he left England. He beseeches Harfleur to surrender in order to avoid the horrors of war, though he had already threatened to inflict all these horrors in return for the Dauphin's pleasantry about the tennis balls. He is full of patriotism, yet he says that he "never valued this poor seat of England." He declares that he covets honour, yet backs out of a quarrel which he has definitely promised to carry through. He professes that his public acts are dictated by his duty as king of England, not by his private feelings, yet he is willing to give up the fruits of a bloody war for the sake of a love not strong enough to warm his blood. At Agincourt he wishes to reduce his numbers in order that there may be greater glory in winning/

winning, and then tarnishes that glory by ordering a massacre of prisoners because he does not think he has sufficient numbers to hold them securely. Such glory as remains he ascribes, with dubious humility, entirely to God.

It is, of course, possible for a real character, and even a fine character, to have many inconsistencies, but Henry's incoherence indicates something more radical. There seems to be an instability in Shakespeare's way of visualising him. Shakespeare's interest in Henry is vehemently personal and partisan, but since there is no game spirit, there is nothing in the play to arouse the appropriate partisan feeling. Shakespeare is therefore compelled to an unusual extent to see his hero in the play, instead of seeing the play through his hero. He therefore oscillates between an objective spectacular vision of him and a sympathetic feeling for him. Now he is a lineal descendant of the magnificent Tamburlaine, threatening the world in high astounding terms, and then he suddenly becomes a modest, apologetic young man, very earnest and interested in himself, and rather nervously anxious that his conduct shall seem exactly right.

It is perhaps not too fanciful to connect Henry's unusual religiousness with the absence of the game spirit. He seems to feel that he is taking part in a pre-arranged programme. When he ascribes his victory at Agincourt entirely to God, he may possibly be speaking not simply from/

from modesty, but from a feeling that his success is really due to the Creator of the Drama in which he is playing his appointed part. So, too, his constant need to justify all his actions may arise from a sense that he is representing an ideal which he must keep spotless.

He is particularly anxious to justify his prosaic coolness as a lover. His position here is difficult. A certain amount of warmth is expected in a lover, and it is graceful to be a little reckless. On the other hand, Shakespeare is too much afraid of Helena to allow Henry to have a real passion. He must be the triumphant conqueror in love as well as in war. Accordingly, he goes through the motions of wooing with an unruffled self-confidence which is rather irritating. One is almost inclined to prefer poor Proteus, dragged through the mire as he was by the violence of his passions, to this tepid wooer with his complacent mock-humility. It is significant that while Henry makes war in poetry he makes love in prose. His own explanation is that he prefers to think of himself as a soldier rather than a lover. It is the authentic voice of History.

On the whole, I think we must conclude that even Shakespeare's genius, strenuously exerted, was unable to overcome the inherent difficulties of Henry's position. The play is a splendid failure. It contains much fine poetry, but as a drama, it falls flat.

XV. THE DEATH OF HISTORY.

Shakespeare realised very quickly, I think, that his masterpiece had failed, and the bitterness of his disappointment was the most painful thing he had yet experienced in life. What could be the cause of the fiasco?

We can hardly expect that the aesthetic explanation we have given would occur to Shakespeare's imaginative mind. His way of accounting for his mysterious failure would be much more concrete. Some malign paralysing influence had been at work all the time he was creating the play. What this influence was, he knew well. It was the ghost of Falstaff.

In all Henry's self-justification, he never once refers to his treatment of Falstaff. He has resolutely closed his mind to all thought of him. But what Henry will not do for himself Fluellen does for him, and his manner of doing it is ominous. He compares Henry's rejection of Falstaff to Alexander's murder of Cleitus. He explains, of course, that the two incidents are to be contrasted, but the fact that they were connected at all in Shakespeare's mind is significant. Not that Shakespeare doubted for a moment that the rejection of Falstaff was thoroughly justified. But its apparent treacherousness and its crushing effect on its victim preyed upon his imagination. Though his rational consciousness acquitted

him/

him, the memory of the dead man haunted him, and accused him of murder. He could look the ghost in the face and deny the charge, but its reproachful presence seemed to sap his vitality.

It was not only Falstaff's reproach that Shakespeare had to face, but his criticism. How could he preserve intact the divinity that doth hedge a king, with Falstaff looking over his shoulder and parodying everything he wrote? Whenever he launched out into anything like Marlowe's great and thundering speech, he would catch Falstaff's eye and become uneasy. By sheer determination he might maintain for a time the traditional royal manner, but sooner or later the consciousness of Falstaff's irreverent appreciation would bring him down to earth. The tables are now turned upon Henry. He is conquered by the Comic Spirit, and can never again be taken seriously as a king of the historic pattern.

The ghost has yet another weapon of attack. Falstaff had gained the affections of the people, and even now they cannot forget him. They receive Henry rather coldly, and clamour for another Falstaff play, headed by the queen herself. We have noticed how Shakespeare, in responding to the demand, tried to deface Falstaff's image, but even so he is still preferred to Henry.

Shakespeare/

Shakespeare sees that the game is lost, and gives in. On behalf of History, he has challenged Comedy to a pitched battle, and Comedy has prevailed. The traditional historic ideal cannot stand against comic criticism and comic rivalry. Though Falstaff is killed, his spirit walks abroad and avenges him by the death of History.

XVI. JULIUS CAESAR.

The failure of Henry and the death of History bring Shakespeare nearer than ever before to the black pit of real tragedy. Hitherto he has taken it for granted that the constitution of his world, in spite of many absurd and distressing aberrations, is fundamentally sound. Now it begins to appear out of joint. In a pitched battle, where he has himself selected the ground and arranged the conditions, the nobler cause has been vanquished by the baser.

He begins to feel that he mas made disastrous errors in judgment. He should have suppressed Falstaff before his power became too great. He should never have been his familiar friend. When he did kill him, he should have avoided all appearance of treachery. He should have given no excuse for the ghost's reproachful accusations. He should not have allowed Falstaff's friends to report how he died.

Again, were Henry's motives, and his own, really pure? Did he reject Falstaff from a simple love of righteousness, or was he moved partly by vain-glory? Could it be that the historic ideal itself was tainted with vanity, and that in attacking it Falstaff had some right on his side?

Shakespeare's broodings over any question that troubled/

troubled him naturally tended to take visible shape in his imagination. If his mind had received no suggestions from without, he might have given us a direct symbolical manifesto like Love's Labour's Lost. As it was, he read Plutarch's Life of Brutus, or some play founded thereon, and gave us Julius Caesar.

This play was apparently written soon after Henry V, and was perhaps begun while Henry's failure was only a fear, and not yet an admitted fact. It would then have some of the excitement of an undecided conflict, though founded upon fixed historical fact. It might be called "The Tragedy of King Henry V, with the Murder of Sir John Falstaff, and the Revenge of his Ghost."

To connect the murder of Caesar with the rejection of Falstaff may seem fantastic, but consider the position. Caesar is the personal friend of Brutus, but now threatens to dominate him. He has captured the affections of the fun-loving populace, and made them forget Pompey, the true representative of the old Roman state. The facts of history make it impossible to represent him as essentially base, but commentators have all noticed how Shakespeare has debased him as much as he can without making him unrecognisable. He is a braggart, whose courage and deeds do not make good his pretensions. If he cannot be himself Falstaffian, his preferences are. He likes fat/

fat, pleasure loving men, who laugh, sleep well, and do not think too much. Brutus decides that he is a public danger, and resolves to remove him. While forming this decision, he listens to the promptings of Cassius, the spirit of vanity and self-assertion, who cannot bear to see the popular upstart bestriding the world like a Colossus. The Cassius faction are responsible for the treachery and cruelty of the final blow, but Brutus concurs in the design, and shares the responsibility. His rational conscience justifies him, yet when Caesar singles him out for special reproach, and dies broken-hearted, his emotional imagination is stricken, and never recovers. At first he does not understand how deeply he has been wounded. He is confident that when his motives are understood he can carry the people with him. For a short time he does so, till the mirth-loving Antony, now transformed into a minister of vengeance, gives a moving picture of his master's death, and revives his memory. Brutus is cast out by the people, and hounded down by the representatives of Caesar. He discovers the gulf between his ideals and those of Cassius, and in a violent revulsion of feeling, tries to break away from him. Caesar's ghost haunts him, paralyses all his efforts, and finally drives him to his death. He believes to the last in the purity of his motives, but he is crushed by a more powerful spirit/

spirit than his own. The old heroic ideal of patriotic history dies, and its enemies reign undisputed in the dramatic world.

The parallel seems as complete as the intractable nature of historical material can be expected to permit, and is confirmed by the feeling of the play. Though sad and solemn, it has not the uncomprehending pain nor the intense combative spirit of the great tragedies. Its tone, like that of Richard II, is elegiac. We are mourning something already dead, rather than seeing something killed before our eyes. Shakespeare is not so much occupied with the bitterness of Brutus' failure, as in trying to put his conduct in the most favourable light. He appeals to us to deal tenderly with the memory of the dead champion of a lost cause.

But the ways of the dramatic imagination are paradoxical. When Shakespeare was striving with all his might to establish the heroic ideal, he failed. When he simply recorded and mourned his failure, he redeemed it. Though Henry triumphed personally, the ideal that he represented failed, whereas the personal failure of Brutus, like that of Richard II, somehow revives the ideal which seemed to have been lost. Several causes contribute to this unexpected result.

In the first place, though Caesar may symbolically represent/

represent Falstaff, he is not a fair equivalent in the field of imagination for that fascinating person. It is only in appearance that Brutus has a more formidable antagonist than Henry. It is really much easier to secure sympathy against Caesar than against Falstaff.

Again, Brutus has now differentiated himself from Cassius. Henry, owing to his position as a hero of History, had represented both the spirit of righteousness and the spirit of vain-glory, and both of these had influenced his treatment of Falstaff. Now the two motives are separated. Brutus represents only the nobler motives which inspire the conspirators, leaving those of vanity, envy, and self-interest to Cassius. By so doing, he abandons the self-assertive dignity characteristic of the kings of traditional History, and exhibits in its purity the heroic ideal which really attracted Shakespeare. The death of History has therefore not killed the heroic ideal, but purified it. The tragic hero has taken the place of the historic.

Finally, in this play the tactics of the Comic Spirit are turned against his own children. When Brutus triumphs over Caesar, all criticism is directed against Brutus and all pity extended to Caesar. But when Antony and the Spirit of Caesar triumph over Brutus, the tables are turned. Our sympathy flows once more towards Brutus.

He/

He may have made more mistakes, but his sufferings have been out of all proportion to them. His ghost now becomes as active against the victorious Antony as Caesar's has been against himself. When next they meet, Antony will be represented by King Claudius, and the spirit of Brutus will incite young Hamlet against him.

But in this next conflict, Shakespeare's first genuine tragic battle, there will be more varied issues at stake. While we have been tracing Comedy's invasion of History, much has been happening in Comedy's own kingdom, and much has still to happen before Tragedy is prepared to take the field. To Comedy, therefore, we now return.

XVII. MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

For about three years, while the war between History and Comedy was still in progress, Shakespeare wrote no new comedies, except the Merry Wives, which was part of the campaign, and in any case was probably not written on his own initiative. Evidently Shakespeare's resolution to suppress Comedy was to be carried out literally as well as symbolically. As the comic impulse was a genuine part of his own nature, its suppression was probably difficult, and perhaps rather painful, and it may be that the tremendous comic vitality of Falstaff was due to the absence of Shakespeare's usual safety valve.

After the victory of Falstaff, the ban upon Comedy was removed, the door of Shakespeare's imagination was thrown open, and a crowd of comic images which had been clamouring for admission, rushed eagerly in.

That Shakespeare was really glad to receive them, I have no doubt. His imagination could once more work freely and joyously. Yet he could not quite give them his deliberate approval. They came in triumph over Pompey's blood. Accordingly, the titles of the next three comedies, "Much Ado about Nothing," "As you like it," and "Twelfth Night, or What you will," seem to indicate that he wished to think of them as trifles of slight importance. He is fleeting/

fleeting the time carelessly until he sees his way to return to a heroic ideal. As a matter of fact, these plays, as we shall see, are of first-rate importance, and in the last comedy of the series, "All's well that ends well," the title recognises that a dramatic era has been brought to a satisfactory culmination.

Much Ado about Nothing being the first of the group to burst into Shakespeare's mind, is the most exuberant, the most crowded and unbalanced, probably on the whole the least pleasant, and perhaps the most important. It is here that Comedy, after some restless vacillations of mood, settles down to its new direction. The old combatants once more take the field, but since Shakespeare has no longer the historic ideal in the background to support him, the balance of parties is changed, and has to readjust itself. Let us review the position.

Helena, unlike the Comic Spirit, who found his outlet in Falstaff, has had no representative since Portia of Belmont. Anne Page scarcely counts, as the scheme of the Merry Wives confines her to a subordinate part. She is therefore brimming over with repressed energy, so that Beatrice, her latest incarnation, is the most fiery and dazzling of all Shakespeare's heroines. But though she is the most formidable in appearance she is really less destructive than many of her predecessors. Helena is not essentially/

essentially destructive at all, and now that she has no serious rival to remove, she would much prefer to exert her energy in establishing a constructive position.

The Comic Spirit, again, comes into the field flushed with triumph, but he, too, finds no effective opposition. His old enemy is beaten, and no new power has risen high enough to challenge his attention. He therefore relaxes into a lighter mood, and casts his shafts about carelessly at anything that provokes his fancy.

Shakespeare himself has no very definite object to pursue. He has the artist's inextinguishable desire to put his world in order, but he has no clear idea of the kind of order he would like. Though he has an incurable distrust of the Comic Spirit, he has at present no fortress to defend against him. He therefore calls a truce with him, and finds him playful rather than virulent. He is still troubled by the irrational element in Helena, but as she is no longer attacking ideals which he feels bound to defend, and has just given him aid agsinst Falstaff, he is not disposed to treat her as an irreconcilable enemy.

With such abundance of energy on every side, and no clear issue on which it can expend itself, it might well seem that the play will justify its title. To outline the course of its growth in Shakespeare's mind is almost impossible/

impossible, and I have no doubt that the following sketch, confused as it is, is still much too linear.

Shakespeare's first idea, I imagine, was to effect a cautious reconciliation with Helena on his own terms. He sees the course of events thus. He has been attracted by Helena, has won her, has doubted her character, has cast her off without warning when almost on the point of union, has believed that he has killed her, and now, finding her alive again, is prepared to take her back. But he stipulates that she must not come to overwhelm and humiliate him, like Portia. She must be as passive as Juliet, and more gentle and unassertive. He wants a King Log, not a King Stork. Helena complies, and sends him Hero. With the help of suggestions from Bandello, the idea begins to clothe itself with local habitations and names, Claudio acting as Shakespeare's representative.

But the other imaginative powers do not allow Shakespeare to carry out his scheme quite as he intended. First Benedick, on behalf of the Comic Spirit, presses the sub-rational view of love as persistently as Mercutio himself. Shakespeare, however, resorting again to the expedient of the Merry Wives, sets Beatrice upon him. Helena, to whom the comic view of love is an abomination, gives/

gives Beatrice all her pent up energy, which she was not allowed to bestow upon Hero. Benedick, after a sharp contest, is utterly routed.

A remarkable result follows. Benedick becomes human. He is now the victim of Comedy instead of its instrument. He has become the legitimate successor of Bassanio. Shakespeare becomes sympathetic to him, and begins to see the play to some extent through his eyes.

He is not satisfied, however, with drawing Benedick's sting. He is still more anxious to put the formidable Beatrice out of action. He therefore sets on foot, through Claudio and his friends, a plot to make both Beatrice and Benedick ridiculous by tricking them into falling in love with each other. The plot pleases the Comic Spirit, who is quite willing to exhibit love as governed by such trickery, but affronts Helena, who considers that it springs from a view of love much more insulting than Benedick's. She allows the scheme to pass, as she now sees possibilities in Benedick, but she does not forgive Claudio.

The plot succeeds perfectly, and again Shakespeare is surprised by the result. As soon as Beatrice is deceived she also becomes human. She no longer terrifies. Instead of Benedick's tormentor, she is now his fellow-victim. For the first time, Helena's soul is stripped of the nightmare quality/

quality which the comic alliance has thrown over it, and can be seen with direct vision as a thing of supreme beauty, spiritual and supra-rational. The perfection of her nature rises above faith or doubt. The mind, rising on tiptoe, can see it.

This momentous revelation at once transforms the whole emotional scheme of the play. To eyes that have seen the new vision, Claudio's rejection of Hero becomes incredibly shocking, incomparably worse than Henry's rejection of Falstaff. Benedick, on the other hand, instead of feeling the comic humiliation of Helena's former captives, gains for the first time, through his allegiance to Beatrice, the full dignity of his manhood, and never more so than when he turns against his friend. What a change from the days when love's worst sin was that it destroyed male friendship!

Claudio is the last of his race, as Henry was of his. Henceforth Shakespeare and his heroes love with humility and reverence, beholding with joy instead of uneasiness the beauty, transcending man's reason, of the soul of the beloved.

XVIII. AS YOU LIKE IT.

The next comedy, As You Like It, was probably written in the same year as Julius Caesar, when Shakespeare cleared his mind upon the History question. The restless activity of Much Ado has died down, and he has reduced his world to order. The powers of the imagination are for the moment at peace. The comic war has ended, and the tragic war has not yet begun. The consequence is that the play has a serene harmony which Shakespeare has never achieved before, and never will again, while at the same time there is an almost total absence of the game spirit. It is therefore a beautiful work of art, but not one of the supreme dramas.

Helena has consolidated her position, but has had to descend a little to do so. Rosalind dominates the play, and is certainly one of the most consistently charming of Shakespeare's heroines, yet she is never sublime. We never see in her the dazzling white flame which the call to battle kindles in the soul of Beatrice. The light of Rosalind's spirit is dimmed and softened by a comic veil, which allows us to see her more steadily, though not with such vivid intensity. If she has still a trace of the formidable qualities of the early heroines, it is now too slight to be unpleasant. Even her elaborate fooling of Orlando is so gentle and caressing that it can hardly humiliate.

Shakespeare/

Shakespeare makes Orlando his formal representative in the play, but as the game spirit is too weak to arouse any partisan feeling, his incarnation is very incomplete, so that Orlando, though an admirable young man, with none of the touchy vanity of his predecessors, never quite comes to life. This defect, however, though fatal in Henry V, where the interest is centred upon the hero, is of little importance here, where the main interest is in the heroine. Since the play is a work of art, not a game, Shakespeare can see Rosalind better through his own eyes than through Orlando's. It is true of her in a special sense, that she is fully known only to her creator.

The Comic Spirit, if for the moment we neglect Jacques, who is a new departure, is in his most genial mood. Any alarm he might feel at the prominence of Rosalind is allayed by her practical joke upon Orlando, which assures him that the old comic alliance still holds good. His presence in the play only heightens its feeling of joyous freedom. Even the touch of Falstaffian grossness, which emanates chiefly from Touchstone, and tinges the atmosphere of the play, and from which Rosalind herself is not free, seems merely to bring us closer to nature and reality.

There are signs, however, that the harmonious balance of the play is unstable. Though Duke Senior and his/

his circle profess to be content with their simple life, they regard it in their hearts as exile. They value the pastoral life not positively, for its own sake, but because it is free from the wickedness and artificiality of court life. There is always in the background of their minds the hope of a return to the kingly world under better conditions. The comic world may be delightful for a time, but it is not a permanent home.

The discontent of Jacques is vaguer and deeper. It is the first symptom of the souring of the Comic Spirit, which will soon produce tragedy. Some critics have thought that they have heard Shakespeare's voice speaking through Jacques, but since the play is a work of art rather than a game, Shakespeare's authentic voice is only heard in the play as a whole. Even if we take into account the antagonism latent in it, I think Jacques belongs to the enemy's camp. The Comic Spirit himself is taking his ease after his labours, but Jacques is his scout, his prophetic eye, his never-satisfied Alexander crying for new worlds to pull to pieces. He feels an atmosphere of beauty and idealism about him which challenges his activities, but cannot locate its source. There is a mutual antipathy between him and the lovers, but he still despises love too much to take it seriously. In the meantime he gibes at large against the general scheme of things. His criticisms have a new note of/

of sharpness, though they are not yet malignant. His chief significance for us at present is that the Comic Spirit is becoming uneasy, and cannot be much longer in deciding that Helena is his next object of attack.

XIX. TWELFTH NIGHT.

In Twelfth Night Helena quietly and finally drops out of the comic alliance. She can no longer play the part of a figure of fear in a comic nightmare. The last trace of the formidable quality of the comic heroines has gone from Viola and Olivia. When Comedy touches them, they are not accessories, but unwilling victims. Viola does, indeed, make Orsino look foolish, but it is against her will, and in any case it does not appear to hurt Orsino's pride at all.

Unfortunately, by abandoning her co-operation with the Comic Spirit, Helena loses his protection. The uncanny power and invulnerability which a figure of fear possesses in the imagination, and which enable Portia, for instance, to perform the most amazing exploits, are no longer at her command. On the contrary, by establishing herself in the imagination as a mature ideal, she provokes the Comic Spirit's determined criticism. Shakespeare's business will now be not to defend himself from her, but to defend her. He will have no need to fear her, but to fear for her.

It is not yet clear to Shakespeare, however, that Helena and the Comic Spirit are now at enmity. There has been no declaration of war, and no overt act of unfriendliness. He therefore, at least at the beginning of the play, sees/

sees no need of taking sides. He loves Helena, but sees no immediate harm in letting the Comic Spirit take any course he pleases. He does not recognise the play as a game, and when it develops into one, he is not called upon to take part. In fact, the object of the struggle is to make him choose his side. He therefore never really incarnates himself, so that Orsino is scarcely more than the formal hero. Shakespeare himself stands outside the play, watching developments.

The Comic Spirit at last recognises that Helena has taken the place of History as Shakespeare's ideal, and at once directs his hostility against her. Several plans of campaign suggest themselves.

In the first place, Viola and Olivia can be placed in ridiculous situations. Viola may be made to woo another woman on behalf of the man she loves, while Olivia may herself fall in love with another woman. These devices fail. The comic situations only enhance the charm of the women, and make Shakespeare sorry to see them so abused.

Or again, Viola may be matched against the ridiculous Sir Andrew, and humiliated by having to show abject cowardice before so contemptible an opponent. The only effect, however, is to make her pathetic and appealing. This alone would have been enough to make Shakespeare choose his side.

Again/

Again, Viola may be entangled in that atmosphere of grossness which is part of the comic view of love, and which has lightly touched former comic heroinces. Viola's position lays her peculiarly open to this form of attack, but her delicate purity never fails her. Once, indeed, in her banter with Feste, she is betrayed into some ambiguous expressions, but she is evidently trying, in a timid and gingerly manner, to support her assumed character. Possibly at this time there was nothing that Shakespeare resented so much as this form of attack.

Again, since Shakespeare is evidently inclining against all his traditions, training, and habits, towards some kind of puritanism, the Comic Spirit may laugh him out of it by exhibiting a caricature of the Puritan type, and making it supremely ridiculous. But though the joke is extremely amusing, it misses its mark in two ways. In the first place, it is not the puritanism of Malvolio that is made ridiculous, but his vanity, and in the second place, his punishment is too severe. The Comic Spirit allows his own dislike of puritanism to carry him too far, so that in the end Shakespeare's sympathy swings round, and Malvolio is allowed a real dignity.

Finally, the Comic Spirit may repeat the tactics which were so successful against Henry, and build a comic world which will outshine Helena's. He almost succeeds. Sir Toby is scarcely an inspired artist like Falstaff, but/

but the circle he gathers round him, Sir Andrew, Feste, Maria, and Malvolio, are a matchless comic crew. Many people, indeed, in recalling the play, think first of the comic underworld. Nevertheless, I am thoroughly convinced that this is a heresy, and that Shakespeare did not share it. Viola is made of finer stuff than Henry. Lightly and easily she rises above the enmity and rivalry of the baser world, and takes her place in the sky. She is now the sun which illumines Shakespeare's dramatic world, and all meaner lights acknowledge her sovereignty.

Shakespeare has chosen his side, and Helena has come into her kingdom.

XX. ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.

Twelfth Night really closes the series of comedies, but as a sort of final manifesto, Shakespeare retouched Love's Labour Won, and called it All's Well that Ends Well. The cynicism of the title has often been remarked upon, and if we consider the play by itself, this criticism is quite justified. If, however, we take the title as referring to the whole series of comedies summed up in the play, the cynicism vanishes. Shakespeare might well believe that all the struggles of Helena to establish her position are now justified by the final enthronement of Viola in his dramatic kingdom. He can only regard the result with reverent gratitude, and his own resistance to it with intolerant self-contempt.

I imagine, therefore, that the effect of his alterations of Love's Labour Won has been to exalt Helena and debase Bertram. Unfortunately, by doing so, he has destroyed the balance of the original play and made it intolerable. We can no longer sympathise with Bertram as the victim of a comic nightmare in which he sees himself hunted down by a woman whom he cannot escape. We see him, as Shakespeare in his present mood sees him, as a vain, empty-headed, ungrateful young cub, before whom a pearl of great price has been cast in vain.

Nor/

Nor is the effect on Helena much better. Her character has been exalted, but her actions remain the same, so that there is a jarring disagreement between them. She has no longer the privileges of a visionary figure of fear, acting under the direction of the Comic Spirit. She is now a reasonable soul, responsible for all her actions, responsible even for her choice of Bertram as an object of love.

The Comic Spirit has also taken a turn for the worse. The freshness of the original version has evaporated, and its baseness is emphasised. Parolles exaggerates all Falstaff's bad qualities, and has none of his good ones. Even his exposure seems a waste of energy. The clown has scarcely a trace of Touchstone's wit, and more than his animality. With Feste he cannot be compared at all. It is very significant, indeed, how the atmosphere of grossness, which doubtless seemed natural in the original play, is disgusting in this one. The slight touch of it which Shakespeare permitted to survive in Helena when she chats with Parolles about her virginity, is curiously repulsive.

As a play, then, All's Well that Ends Well is jarring. The new wine has burst the old bottles. But as an expression of the state of Shakespeare's imagination it is very instructive. We can see here, much more plainly than/

than in Twelfth Night, that the spirit of comedy is abhorrent to the feminine ideal. Helena militant may form a temporary alliance with it, but Helena triumphant discards it. She does not, like Henry, make a vain-glorious ceremony of rejection. Her hatred is too sincere and profound to need any such expression. She simply stands alone as soon as she is strong enough to do so. But the emotional tone of All's Well that Ends Well justifies us in regarding it not only as the symbolical record of Helena's struggles and victory, but as her declaration of independence.

XXI. THE FALL OF THE COMIC SPIRIT.

The definite triumph of the feminine ideal in Shakespeare's imagination has one momentous result. The Comic Spirit ceases to be comic. Though we have hitherto referred to the destructive tendency in the imagination as the Comic Spirit, it is only comic by accident. Destruction in itself does not give the comic joy. It is intrinsically painful. It gives joy only when it destroys obstructions to the growth of greater beauty. Even this joy in beneficent destruction need not be comic. It has the comic magic only when the destruction belongs to the rational world and the beneficence to the supra-rational. That is to say, comedy produces from materials which seem hostile to beauty, results which are felt to promote it, though we cannot explain how. The mechanism by which the results are effected lies in that upper region of beauty which is accessible to vision but not to analysis.

Hitherto, the state of Shakespeare's imagination endows the working of the destructive tendency with the comic joy. The Historic ideal, though it has elements of permanent value, is as a whole an artificial product of the rational mind, which stands in the way of the emergence of the higher feminine ideal which the imagination is spontaneously trying to create, but which is not yet recognised by the reason. Accordingly, when the destructive tendency/

tendency attacks the Historic ideal, its maleficence is obvious, while its beneficence is only felt in the increased freedom and activity of the creative powers, which are building up the new vision. When the old imperfect ideal is discarded, and the new vision establishes itself, the conditions under which destruction can be comic no longer hold. The feminine ideal is the true soul of Shakespeare's dramatic world, and any attack on it must be purely maleficent.

The feminine ideal, therefore, can never be hurt by ridicule. Anything that threatens to hurt it will appear, not ridiculous, but simply painful. We saw in Twelfth Night, for instance, that whenever the comic world laid its finger on Viola, it was no longer comic. Shakespeare therefore knows that he has no longer anything to fear from comedy, and when the comic terror is gone, comedy has no life.

The Comic Spirit, therefore, falls from Heaven, and becomes diabolic. Henceforth I shall refer to him as the Adversary.

PART III.

THE EARLIER TRAGEDIES.

-------oOo-------

I. HAMLET.

The first product of the new conditions is Hamlet.

In this play it is unusually difficult to keep within the bounds we have prescribed for ourselves. So many external influences have helped to shape it that it is not easy to disentangle the purely inward creative impulse with which alone we are concerned.

For instance, Shakespeare seems to have been influenced to an unusual extent by his "source". The story of the old play upon which he worked was exceptionally good, being a picturesque variant of the Orestes theme. Shakespeare could have made a very effective drama out of it by simply using his executive skill to fill up its outlines, without having to call upon his own special creative genius at all. Even in the play as it now stands, much of the attraction is due to the old story.

Again, it has been pointed out that much of the spirit which appears in the play may be due to events in Shakespeare's personal life at this time, and in particular, to the death of his father, the political troubles in which his friends were involved, the competition of the children's companies, or some unfortunate love affair which he is supposed to have had.

Again, we are asked to note that there was at

this/

this time a popular taste for studies of "humorous" characters, and especially of the melancholic temperament. Shakespeare would thus be merely supplying this demand when he produced in Hamlet a minutely careful delineation of a melancholiac.

That such external causes influenced Shakespeare in the creation of Hamlet I do not deny. Shakespeare was certainly assimilative as well as creative. But I think it is a mistake, even in Hamlet, to exalt such influences into prime causes. I believe that to find the essential creative motive of the play, we must connect it with the internal campaign whose course we have been following. The abundance of disturbing influences makes this task difficult, but not, as I hope to show, impossible.

Another reason for the difficulty of disentangling the internal motive of the play is that Shakespeare seems to have spent some time upon its elaboration. I imagine that he began work upon it soon after he finished Julius Caesar, and did not finish it till after the close of the comic period. During this time he passed through a dramatic crisis, so that while the play was taking shape in his mind his interest shifted from one aspect of it to another. First it centred on Hamlet's relation to Claudius, then on his relation to the Queen, and finally, though never completely/

completely, on his relation to Ophelia. Each of these phases has left its mark on the play as we now have it, and I think they may still be distinguished. I shall deal with each in turn.

II. HAMLET AND CLAUDIUS.

The main theme of the old story is Hamlet's resolve to avenge his father's murder, and the resulting duel with Claudius. Probably, therefore, it was this feature of the story that first caught Shakespeare's attention. What was the nature of its attraction for him? For what impulses in his mind did it seem to provide a suitable expression?

Assuming that Shakespeare began to create Hamlet soon after finishing Julius Caesar, let us try to imagine how his dramatic world appeared to him at that time. It had just been the scene of what was to him a terrible catastrophe. His imagination had for some time worked upon two planes, the Historic and the Comic, which he took to be respectively the higher and the lower. But the basest elements of the lower plane had invaded the higher plane, and wrecked it. The well meant rejection of Falstaff by Henry had not only proved ineffectual, but had been perverted into a crushing moral victory for Falstaff. This disaster had been imaginatively reconstructed in Julius Caesar, where Brutus, after his well meant treachery to Caesar, was similarly crushed by Antony, acting under the inspiration of the Ghost of Caesar. But here the moral victory is with Brutus. By his defeat and death he redeems his error, purifies his character, and becomes a new type of/

of hero.

It is at this point, I think, that Hamlet is born. Shakespeare, encouraged by the exaltation of the memory of Brutus, begins to dream of a spiritual son who shall succeed him, a kind of dramatic Messiah who shall destroy the lower plane, and restore the higher. He shall have the heroic purposes of Henry and Brutus, but shall avoid the pit into which they fell. He shall be a ruthless enemy to all that is base and vile, but his actions shall be as stainless as his motives. On no account shall he do anything that savours of treachery or ingratitude. He may kill in open war, but there must be no sudden stab at an unsuspecting and friendly victim. His material victory must not be followed by a moral defeat.

Shakespeare's imagination takes hold of the subject, and pictures the situation somewhat as follows. The hero we have described finds himself in a land where he is the rightful heir to the throne. The present king is a base usurper, a mirthful, pleasure-loving, drunken, gluttonous lecher, who has murdered the rightful king, the hero's spiritual father, a heroic warrior and statesman. The hero, inspired by the spirit of the late king, resolves to give battle to the vile usurper, slay him, regain his kingdom/

kingdom, and cleanse the land. The usurper, inspired by the Adversary, will defend himself. There will be a struggle, and the result will be decided in the play. The theme is now defined, and ready for a local habitation and a name. Shakespeare falls in with the old Hamlet story, and both are supplied.

Unfortunately, Shakespeare's immediate source is not extant, though some more remote have survived. It appears, however, that the duel between the original Hamlet and his uncle was conducted on quite straightforward and intelligible lines. Hamlet assumed the mask of madness to escape being put to death, and his cunning in foiling all attempts to penetrate it was very necessary. He killed his uncle as soon as he got the chance, which did not come till he had succeeded in lulling all suspicion. In the remoter sources, though perhaps not in the immediate one, his tactics are entirely successful. He kills his enemy without mishap to himself, and reigns in his stead.

A merely material success, however, is not what Shakespeare wants. Hamlet's triumph must be clearly moral, imaginatively as well as symbolically. It must be the visible triumph of nobility over baseness, whereas in the old story it is simply the triumph of one cunning man over another. The killing of Fengon there is just as treacherous as/

as the murder of Caesar. The story must therefore be modified so that Hamlet can never be accused of stooping to anything ignoble.

Accordingly, Shakespeare takes care to endow Hamlet with his own militant morality. Hamlet from the very first hates Claudius with an intense moral loathing, not simply for what he has done, but for what he is. When the ghost reveals the actual situation to him, his hatred is enlightened and directed, but scarcely increased. He enters upon his task in the spirit of a knight errant setting forth to slay a dragon. Whatever he may have become later, he was not at first imagined as a philosophic, introspective dreamer, but a fiery man of action, eager to drive the beast from the land.

But as soon as Shakespeare's imagination begins to form a clear picture of Hamlet's world, the Adversary takes a hand in the game.

His first move is unsuccessful, but produces a peculiar effect. When the ghost reveals the conduct of Claudius to Hamlet, one would almost think that the Adversary, who is at this date still comic, is moved to retaliate upon the spot. Accordingly, when the ghost moves underground, some imp in Shakespeare's imagination tries to turn the scene into comedy. Shakespeare, being on the whole deeply in earnest, crushes the attempt, but it leaves a ghastly, eerie/

eerie effect on the imagination, as if an insane dream were trying to realise itself. The serious atmosphere of the play reasserts itself, but the shadow of the distorted comic spirit is never far away, and from time to time chills our blood with its insane grimace.

The Adversary now falls back on his main strategic scheme. He addresses Shakespeare thus: "You are the creator of the dramatic world, and can order all its events according to your will. It is in your power to control the motions of your puppets so that Hamlet shall conquer Claudius. But what would such a victory be worth? Would it not be a mere lifeless spectacle? Let there be a genuine trial of strength. I have no faith in your ideal Hamlet, and if you allow me to take Claudius in hand, I undertake to beat Hamlet as I have already beaten Henry and Brutus. I shall accept the situation as you have outlined it, and fight you on the moral plane you have yourself selected."

The Adversary's challenge is accepted, and he immediately begins to carry out his plan of campaign. His first act is to restrain Claudius from displaying those Falstaffian characteristics which had first roused Hamlet's loathing. Accordingly, throughout the play, Hamlet's picture of Claudius, though never disowned, differs from that which we actually see. At the beginning of the play,

Hamlet/

Hamlet regards his uncle as the incarnation of the ignoble beastliness of Comedy. The revelation of his villainy comes as a shock to him. After the ghost has told his tale, what is uppermost in Hamlet's mind is wonder that a man who can smile like Claudius should be a serious villain. He is combining two incongruous forms of evil. It is usually supposed by commentators that his smile was of the oily, ingratiating kind, but this would give no ground for Hamlet's astonishment. Richard III had already murdered with his kind of smile. What confounded Hamlet was the association of virulent evil with the mirthful pleasure-loving smile. For the first time, the comic smile seemed to blast its objects. The Comic Spirit had descended into Hell. Hamlet felt that his instinctive loathing of Claudius was justified in a new and startling manner. In the play itself, however, we see none of the king's smiling. Nor does he display any of the drunkenness or general sensuality imputed to him by Hamlet. His demeanour is grave, dignified, courteous, and considerate. His behaviour to the queen indicates a genuine emotion of the mind, not a mere lust of the body. To Hamlet he is gracious and conciliatory, with a touch of wounded affection. He gives Hamlet no pretext for either attacking him as an enemy, or killing him like vermin.

Shakespeare is in a difficulty. The old story has taken an unexpected turn. Claudius will neither attack Hamlet/

Hamlet, nor give him any overt provocation. Hamlet could of course act on the information given by the ghost, but since it has been given to himself alone, it would not provide the public justification that Shakespeare desires. Hamlet is not only to be in the right, but to act a heroic part which will cover his antagonist with shame. He must conquer him in a pitched battle in which both sides have exerted all their strength. He cannot be allowed to attack an unresisting man who treats him with kindness and trust.

Accordingly, when Hamlet wishes to attack and kill Claudius out of hand, Shakespeare prevents him. Hamlet, of course, cannot be told that he is to be a perfect hero whose actions must be above criticism. He lives in the play, and knows nothing of Shakespeare's larger interests. His father's murder is to him a real murder, to be avenged upon a hateful enemy in any manner and in any circumstances. But he observes with dismay and bewilderment that his will has somehow been paralysed. He is not introspective by nature, but is driven to be so by the effort to reconcile his actions with his purposes.

He feels obscurely, however, that his hands are tied until Claudius can be provoked into attacking him. The consequence is that the duel in the old story is curiously inverted. Instead of Hamlet and Claudius seeking opportunities/

opportunities to attack one another they each deliberately lay themselves open to attack by the other. Both are urged from behind, and act without a complete understanding of what they are doing. Hamlet makes strenuous efforts to rationalise his conduct, but cannot pierce the boundaries of the dramatic world in which he has his being. Claudius, being a nightmare figure raised up by the Adversary, has no real soul. He is an instrument used by his master to wreck Shakespeare's scheme.

The course of the duel is somewhat as follows. Claudius invites Hamlet to live with him at Court instead of returning to the university. His object, however, is not to keep him under close surveillance, for he allows him every liberty, but by treating him as a son, to make it difficult for him to deliver his attack without the appearance of ingratitude and treachery.

Hamlet consents, but feigns madness, not, as in the original story, to avert suspicion and so escape being put to death, but to preserve his freedom of speech. If he remained sane, he would have to be either hypocritically friendly or openly hostile. As it is, he can insult and provoke Claudius so as to tempt him to make the first act of war. At the same time, Shakespeare arranges that the feigned madness flows so easily from Hamlet's real disposition that it avoids the reproach of cold-blooded calculation. We are to admire Hamlet's rash sincerity rather than his skilful/

skilful dissimulation.

Hamlet's device partly succeeds. Some of his remarks are so pointed that Claudius is compelled to take notice of them. He therefore makes inquiries into the reality of Hamlet's madness, not with the object of unmasking him, but of finding an excuse for conniving at the deception. Polonius, another creation of the Adversary, supplies this excuse by propounding the theory that Hamlet's wits have been deranged by the miscarrying of his love for Ophelia.

Failing to provoke the king in this way, Hamlet has recourse to another device. He produces a play before the king in which a crime very similar to his is represented. The explanation of his purpose which Hamlet gives himself is that he doubts the ghost's story, and wishes to confirm it by surprising the king into showing some sign of guilt. But if this were his intention, why the dumb show? Surely its only effect must be to put the king on his guard. The real purpose of Hamlet's scheme, known only to Shakespeare and the Adversary, is to force the king into action. After this exhibition, Claudius cannot with any plausibility either treat Hamlet as a harmless love-lorn lunatic, or publicly complain that he is being slandered on the authority of a mythical ghost. Apparently he must at last attack Hamlet.

But he does not. He has an agony of remorse,

during/

during which he prays to God, and in that position gives Hamlet a perfect opportunity of carrying out his revenge.

Hamlet is in an awkward dilemma. If he seizes the opportunity, his act will be incomparably more treacherous than that of Brutus, while if he does not, he makes it clear that he has less interest in executing his mission than in doing so in a spectacular manner, and though this may be true enough, it is not a truth designed by Shakespeare for publication. Hamlet's first impulse is to kill the king, but finding himself again inexplicably restrained, he hits upon the idea that to kill Claudius would be to send his soul to Heaven. Literally, he is wrong. Claudius would not have gone to Heaven. But figuratively, he comes very near to Shakespeare's own view. The Adversary would have claimed a martyr's halo for Claudius, and the moral victory for himself.

And now Shakespeare makes his first mistake. As we shall see later, the main interest of the play, both for Hamlet and Shakespeare, has now become centred on the Queen. After sparing Claudius, Hamlet goes to her chamber and has a very strenuous interview with her. While his feelings are worked up to a pitch of intense excitement, a voice is heard behind the arras. Swiftly Hamlet strikes at the unseen person, taking him for the king, and kills him, before Shakespeare/

Shakespeare, who is at the moment passionately identified with Hamlet, has time to return to the superdramatic point of view, and restrain him. As soon as the deed is done, a terrible fear strikes Shakespeare. He sees that the Adversary has forestalled him, and that the body will turn out not to be that of the king, but that of Polonius.

Hamlet himself does not see the consequences of his action, but Shakespeare does. It means that Hamlet must die. He has put himself in the wrong by killing a harmless old man, who after all was only doing his duty to his master by keeping watch on a madman. Hamlet's action, it is true, has only been reckless, not deliberate, but still he has been responsible for it. He has raised a hostile ghost, and, like Brutus, can only regain his moral position by his own death.

This moral triumph is now all that Shakespeare can hope for, but even for that he must make a stiff fight. The ghost therefore appears again and encourages Hamlet to persist in his purpose.

The Adversary, believing that Hamlet has delivered himself into his hands, immediately takes the offensive. Hamlet is packed off to England, not with any real intention, on the part of the Adversary of killing him there, but in order to get him out of the way till the plot against him develops. Laertes arrives upon the scene, and parodies Hamlet's/

Hamlet's mission. He also has a murdered father to avenge, and though we know that Hamlet's action was not deliberate, we know also that he mocked and insulted the old man both before and after his death. Again, if Hamlet had his mother to avenge, Laertes had his sister. Her death was certainly at Hamlet's door. He had killed her father, and cruelly insulted and wounded herself. Moreover, her songs while she was insane could not but arouse ugly suspicions against him. Laertes' behaviour, too,contrasted favourably with Hamlet's. He moved rapidly towards his revenge, raised the people against Claudius, and then, finding the true cause of his misfortunes, transferred his resentment to him.

Thus when Hamlet returns to Denmark, he finds everything against him, and his own behaviour does nothing to mend matters. He makes himself look slack and callous by chatting idly over what we know to be Ophelia's grave, and then makes himself ridiculous by struggling with Laertes there. Laertes' conduct was certainly exasperating, but rather to Shakespeare than to Hamlet. The Adversary was apparently trying either to supplant Hamlet as hero, or to burlesque him. Hamlet sympathetically catches Shakespeare's irritation, though he does not altogether comprehend its grounds. He only feels that Laertes' heroics, especially his gesture of suicide, are somehow intolerably offensive. When/

When he regains control of himself, he apologises to Laertes, and pleads his madness as an excuse. Here, I think, he is quite sincere. His conduct was really due to an uncontrollable influence from without.

In this part of the play, Hamlet is scarcely heroic, and if Laertes had been content to fight him fairly, he might have gained a large part of our sympathy, as Hotspur did when fighting Henry. But at last the inherent baseness of Claudius comes to Shakespeare's aid. Neither Claudius nor the Adversary desire a moral triumph for Laertes any more than for Hamlet. Accordingly the Adversary, having, as he thinks, wrecked Hamlet's chances, proceeds to ruin Laertes. Under the plea that any stick is good enough to beat Hamlet with, Claudius persuades Laertes to use poisoned weapons.

The Adversary, having now apparently compromised beyond redemption all the major characters of the play, feels that his work is done, and retires in triumph, leaving Claudius unsupported. Hamlet may now kill him without reproach as a manifest and treacherous enemy. The play ends in an undignified scramble, in which the queen, the king, Laertes and Hamlet all die. Hamlet achieves his object, but in a haphazard, unheroic way which gives Shakespeare no satisfaction. The symbolic scheme of the play has gone all to pieces, and the Adversary has apparently won all along the line. The/

The question why Hamlet is nevertheless a great play, we shall consider when we have dealt with its other aspects.

III. HAMLET AND THE QUEEN.

The duel between Hamlet and Claudius is tragic, but only to the extent that Julius Caesar is tragic. Indeed, there is an ironic cunning in the expedients by which the Adversary baffles Shakespeare which is not far removed from comedy. The real bitterness of the great tragic period enters the play only when Shakespeare brings his imagination to bear upon the part played by the queen.

In the original conception the queen was a subordinate character. She was no Clytemnestra. She had nothing to do with the murder, and apparently was not always thought of as an adulteress. Hamlet's main grounds of complaint against her are her impatient sensuality, and her bad taste in preferring his uncle to his father. These offences seem less serious than the murder of a king and a brother, and if Hamlet had been merely the successor of Henry V and Julius Caesar, no doubt they would have appeared so in Shakespeare's treatment. But Hamlet in its later stages is also the successor of Twelfth Night and All's Well, which have enthroned the ideal of womanhood in Shakespeare's soul, and at the same time made him loathe the alliance between Woman and Comedy. Such an alliance seems unnatural and incomprehensible. Surely the appropriate alliance for the feminine ideal is with the heroic ideal. Portia ought to belong/

belong to Brutus, not Bassanio. The alliance between Brutus and Portia does indeed give promise of a perfect partnership, but it remains only a promise. Brutus's Portia never achieves the overwhelming vitality of Bassanio's. This is all wrong, and must be altered.

Hamlet has therefore two symbolic tasks to achieve. He must vanquish the Comic Spirit, and he must deliver Woman from his influence, that is to say, he must kill Claudius and convert the queen. The second task appears later in Shakespeare's mind than the first, but when it does arrive, it comes with a greater freshness and intensity. Hamlet becomes more concerned about his mother than his father.

But when the play takes imaginative shape, it becomes evident that a cruel burden has been laid upon Hamlet. Being inside the play, he knows nothing, except by a vague sympathy with his creator, of the symbolism which gave it birth. He has to take the situation literally. He is therefore less impressed by the necessity of reclaiming his mother than by the loathsomeness of the facts which make it necessary. Shakespeare has given him his own fresh enthusiasm for the ideal of womanhood, and at the same time blasted it for him. The result is shattering. The joy of his life is blotted out, and the world becomes an unweeded garden. He is not even given any chance of fighting the horror. The catastrophe has happened before the play begins. He can do/

do nothing but brood over it. The task of reclaiming his mother seems a mockery. How can she be reclaimed? Can anything undo what has been done? Nevertheless, his indomitable fighting spirit asserts itself, and he resolves to do what he can.

His preoccupation with his mother affects his purpose towards Claudius in various ways. It increases his hatred for him as the cause of his mother's fall, but sometimes it crowds him out of his thoughts altogether. In brooding over his mother, he often actually forgets the king. Again, it adds to the reasons for his delay. From Shakespeare's point of view, if Hamlet is to deliver his mother from the power of Claudius, he must do so while Claudius is still alive. The ghost seems to be of the same opinion, for he waits till Hamlet is finishing his business with his mother, before reminding him of his mission of vengeance. Hamlet cannot follow these superdramatic reasons, but he feels that his mother's soul calls for more urgent attention than his uncle's life. Until he has settled with his mother he cannot give his full mind to his revenge.

Hamlet is only partly successful with his mother. There is a permanent change in her, but she does not break off her relations with Claudius. Hamlet has indeed cleft her in two. One half remains with him, and theother with the king. She will throw neither away. Hamlet has done his/

his best, but he is not the all-conquering hero for whom Shakespeare has been seeking. He has not delivered the princess from the dragon, but only a part of her, and the more completely the play is imagined, the less does that part become. Hamlet is more successful in the first quarto than in the second.

IV. HAMLET AND OPHELIA.

The Adversary has not yet finished with Hamlet. He poisons his relations with Ophelia.

What these relations were is not very clear. In the original story Ophelia was one of the party hostile to Hamlet, and traces of this position persist in the play as it now stands. But since Hamlet is one of the oldest inhabitants of Shakespeare's drama, he has an engrained suspicion of the Polonius family. Probably Shakespeare also was originally suspicious, but since then he has conceived Rosalind, Viola, and the later Helena. It was therefore natural that Ophelia should tend to be transfigured into their likeness, and became the heroine of the play. Hamlet accordingly receives notice that he is in love with Ophelia. Hamlet has now come to the end of his patience, but he cannot altogether help himself. In some sense he is really in love with Ophelia, though his love is contrary to his oldest instincts. He resents it, and does not know what to make of it. There is no sign in the play that it was ever anything but a torment to him. Ophelia acts in the interest of Claudius, whom he hates. She is the daughter of Polonius, whom he despises and detests. Above all, she is of the same sex as his mother, of whose conduct he can hardly bear to think, Her concurrence in the plot against him wounds him, her gentleness reproaches/

reproaches him, and her madness accuses him. He therefore shuts her out of his mind, never soliloquises about her, and never talks to Horatio about her. To herself he cannot speak without insult. Possibly he is never so near genuine madness as when he thinks of her.

Shakespeare can give him no help. The Adversary's blow has struck him also. He is dismayed by Hamlet's suspicions, but has no reply to them. Can Hamlet be right? Can it possibly be true that Ophelia, the incarnation of the Beloved, the successor of Viola, carries within her the seeds of the same evil that has poisoned the soul of the queen? He believes in his heart that Hamlet's suspicions are unfounded, but he cannot repel them with an assured certainty. At some future time the question must be thrashed out, but the present play cannot hold any more matter. It is already overburdened, and must stand as it is, ambiguous. Hamlet cries out for light, but his creator has none to give. His leap into Ophelia's grave is not wholly due to the conduct of Laertes. It is the momentary release of the pent up torture of his, and Shakespeare's, soul.

V. HAMLET AND SHAKESPEARE.

The foregoing account suggests that Shakespeare the artist has interfered to an unusual extent with the free action of the drama, and in particular with Hamlet himself. The umpire has taken too active a part in the game. But this is not all. Even Shakespeare the playwright and stage manager makes his presence felt. In the scene with the players he shamelessly makes Hamlet the mouthpiece of his own thoughts. Nor is this mere artistic carelessness, or a desire to express his aesthetic creed at all costs. His exposition, though extradramatic, has a thoroughly practical reference to the play. The comparative failure of Henry V rankled. He blamed it chiefly on Falstaff, but I think he also attributed part of the blame to the actors. Apparently the parts written in the high Marlowesque style were ranted. That Shakespeare still believed in the Marlowesque style is clear from his admiration of the passage recited by the chief player, but he recognised that it required discreet handling. He also had a special grudge against the clown, who apparently gagged or did comic business while serious matters were in progress. I wonder how much Shakespeare's resentment had to do with Kemp's leaving his company about this time. However this may be, Shakespeare was evidently determined that Hamlet should not fail through the actors or the public not understanding/

understanding his intentions. He therefore wove his instructions into the texture of the play, where they could not be ignored.

Shakespeare's anxiety for the success of his masterpiece is quite intelligible, but it is hard on Hamlet that he should be represented as absorbed in the aesthetics of the drama while matters of life and death are claiming his attention. Perhaps this more than anything else has led to Hamlet's being so often regarded as an intellectual dilettante, unfit for the mission imposed on him by the ghost. This idea is, I think, fundamentally false. Hamlet, in his own proper nature, is a born fighter, and thoroughly practical. If Shakespeare would let him alone, he would make very short work of Claudius. But he is subjected to so many inhibitions and supplementary impulses by Shakespeare the artist, that he is driven to introspection in self-defence. He is perpetually thwarted, baffled, vexed, and horrified by things he is not in a position to understand, but his combative mind rises to meet every problem, and usually arrives somewhere near the truth. His thought is never a substitute for action. It is a resolute attempt to find out what is hindering his action. The trouble is not that he is sluggish, but that he sometimes acts so quickly that Shakespeare has not time to stop him. His killing/

killing of Polonius was a tactical mistake, but it was an accomplished irreversible fact in Shakespeare's imagination before he had time to reflect upon it.

Similarly, Hamlet's appearance of genuine madness is not deliberate on Shakespeare's part. Sanity consists in being completely in touch with the world in which one lives. In a drama this means that a character's mind must live completely within the play. Now if we consider the number of extradramatic influences brought to bear upon Hamlet, the strength of his sanity is astonishing. He keeps a tenacious grip of his local habitation, and tries to state everything that happens to him in terms of its conditions. He never succumbs to mysticism. The walls of his prison never become translucent. He never thinks that he is living in a nightmare, where nothing is real. He never ignores or misconstrues plain facts. If towards the end of the play he has a quasi-religious feeling that his life is under the direct control of his maker, he is surmising no more than the truth. If he cannot always reduce the chaos of his motives to order, the fault is not his, but Shakespeare's. He does his best, and does very well.

I do not even think that he is melancholy. If he brooded over the horribleness of the world Shakespeare gave/

gave him to live in, and wondered whether life in it were worth living, he was entirely justified. If he decided to live, and do his duty in it, his courage is worthy of all admiration. If he was intolerably rude to Ophelia, we must make allowances for him. He was not taken into Shakespeare's confidence as we are. If his mind was always recurring to the same points of difficulty, it was always in a purposeful way, never covering the same ground twice, but always attacking his problem from a new side. He had every temptation to sink into melancholy, but the fierce buoyant energy of the born game-player never permitted him to go under.

Why, then, does Shakespeare, a pure dramatic genius at the height of his powers, allow himself to harass Hamlet with what we must call undue interference? I believe the reason is that Shakespeare has not yet learned the special technique of tragedy. In tragedy, the spirit of the game is much more strenuous than in either History or Comedy, and its rules must be more strictly observed. In History, the skeleton of the action is provided from without, so that dramatic freedom is circumscribed in any case. In Comedy, we do not battle for our life and soul, but only for our dignity. The struggle has always something rather fantastic and unreal about it, and the artist is given considerable latitude in reducing it to a practicable form. But/

But the tragic battle is fought in dead earnest. There must be a fair field and no favour, or if any favour is shown, it must be to the enemy. Any attempt by the dramatist to favour his own side either kills the play outright, or gives a moral advantage to the Adversary. All this, however, only becomes clear after the event. Shakespeare was breaking new ground, and could only find by experience the conditions that were to govern tragic creation. Accordingly, we find that though all the ingredients of tragedy are abundantly present in Hamlet, the play somehow does not move like a tragedy. It lacks sweep, concentration, and climax. The interference which baffles and paralyses Hamlet, baffles and paralyses the play as well.

How, then, does it come about that the play has always been so enormously successful? I think there are several reasons.

The first is that the indomitable personality of Hamlet saves the play in spite of Shakespeare. The restrictions imposed upon him drive him to such earnest searching of soul that we become more intimately acquainted with him than with any other character in Shakespeare. He is fighting single-handed for all that is noble and wholesome in life against the whole rottenness of Denmark, against Claudius and Polonius, against the queen, against Ophelia, against the players. He even fights blindly and uncomprehendingly against Shakespeare. And he fights so keenly

that he carries us with him in the hollow of his hand. Many persons have declared that they have felt Hamlet's nature to be identical with their own. I think they are mistaken. The identity we feel is not qualitative, but simply partisan. We throw ourselves imaginatively into his heart, and feel the conflict from his standpoint. Even our difficulty in understanding him is only a reflection of his difficulty in understanding himself.

Again, Shakespeare's inexperience in tragic technique cannot altogether nullify the effect of the enormous mental energy he has expended upon the play. Indeed, the unexpected nature of the opposition he encounters from the Adversary seems to produce in him an intense introspective activity not unlike that of Hamlet. He finds his artistic designs thwarted at every turn, and searches the depths of his dramatic soul to discover what has gone wrong. Is he a coward, afraid to follow where his free imagination leads? Or does he think too precisely on the event, instead of letting his imagination plunge blindly forward? Should he take the play firmly into his artistic grasp, and force it to follow the path he desires? Or should he throw aside the play altogether, escape from the dismal prison of Denmark, and shut out Hamlet for ever from his imagination? But even so, will he really escape? After he has shuffled off the present nightmare/

nightmare, what dreams may come? No. He will play out the play to the end and meet what comes as best he can. He cannot leave the gallant spirit he has created, with his soul half born. His view of his battlefield is much wider than Hamlet's, but it is just as much clouded. To see his way he has to put the most extreme strain upon his intellectual vision. Emotionally, he never quite gets into his swing, but nowhere else do we find him so intellectually alive.

Again, the relation between Shakespeare and Hamlet, though never perfectly dramatic, is remarkably interesting, especially from the theological point of view. The original identity between the two is never quite lost. Shakespeare projects himself into the world of the play, as Hamlet, but is desperately unwilling to burn the bridge between them. Hamlet strives manfully for complete spiritual independence, but Shakespeare cannot make up his mind to let him go. He constrains him as Jehovah constrained Jonah. At first Hamlet questions and resents this constraint, but towards the end of the play, he accepts it in something like a religious spirit. Hamlet's attitude here is often taken as the reflection of a similar religiousness in Shakespeare himself, but I am more inclined to regard it as a sense of his relation to his dramatic creator, It is surely more than/

than a coincidence that Henry and Hamlet, the two characters whom Shakespeare controls most anxiously, should be also the two who feel the presence of a divine providence most clearly. Henry, in whom the control is so strong as to sap his independence, accepts it as simply as King David accepts the direction of Jehovah, but to Hamlet's more self-contained mind it presents the same kind of problem as his daemon did to Socrates. He perceives and accepts, but is conscious of a mystery. Of course I do not suggest that such speculations are present to the minds of lovers of Hamlet, but I think they throw light on that touch of reluctant mysticism which is one of its greatest fascinations, and which has made it seem the expression of a vast latent philosophy.

VI. THE SECOND APPARITION OF CRESSIDA.

We have seen that the problem of Ophelia has been postponed. Is she of the same clay as the queen? If she is, and if she is really an incarnation of the Beloved, then Shakespeare's ideal of womanhood, which has come to embody for him the soul of all goodness in the world, is shattered. The fall of the queen has shaken his faith, but cannot destroy it. Horrible as it may be for a man to discover the frailty of his mother, he is not, after all, responsible for her. He has not chosen her as the object of his worship. When she falls, she does not drag down his soul along with her.

Moreover, the queen has not had a fair trial. Her guilt was fixed before the beginning of the play, and was not at first imagined vividly, since it was meant to be subordinate to that of the king. Before the ideal of womanhood can be undermined, the Adversary must accuse the Beloved herself, the successor of Viola, upon whom Shakespeare has staked his faith. She must be tried and condemned in the full light of his imagination, with justice, if without mercy. For such a trial there was no room in Hamlet, and even if there had been, it would not have been quite fair. Though Ophelia has stumbled into the position of heroine, she holds it insecurely, and as a sort of afterthought. Originally she was a temptress, and has

not/

not quite got rid of her dubious past. The Beloved must therefore be tried in a fresh play, and the Adversary accordingly again brings forward the vision of Cressida.

As we have seen, the image of Cressida had already entered Shakespeare's mind, but had been displaced by the more powerful figure of Helena. So long as woman was attacking him, he did not fear her inconstancy. The mouse does not fear the inconstancy of the cat. So we find that as long as Shakespeare's love of woman is mingled with fear, she is always constant. But as soon as the fear has been cast out by the love, the lurking doubt indicated by his everlasting jokes about horns and cuckoos, comes to life and becomes virulent. His comic terror of Helena gives place to his tragic terror of Cressida.

But even this second version of the Cressida theme is not, I think, identical with the play we now have. I believe, with Grant White and others, that the play was again revised towards the end of the tragic period. The Cressida theme seems to have haunted Shakespeare during the greater part of his dramatic career, though he never made a satisfactory play out of it. It was an essentially destructive vision, which harassed his imagination without inspiring it.

The play as it stands shows, I believe, traces of three strata, dating respectively from about 1595, 1603, and/

and 1607. These I shall try to distinguish.

First we may notice that the prose parts of the play are in one key, and almost all the verse parts in another. Practically all the hard, bitter cynicism which makes the play seem late, is contained in the former. If we omit them, and read the verse parts consecutively, we obtain a fairly coherent and homogeneous play with a different emotional tone. It is still bitter, but with the fresh, solemn, tragic bitterness of disillusioned youth, when the memory of the beauty that is lost is still vivid. If we now imagine the gaps in this play to be filled in with more congruous prose or verse, and some alterations made in the verse passages near the end, I think we shall have some idea of what the second version was like.

This second version, however, is still not quite homogeneous. There is an emotional break in the fourth act, where the play seems to take a new turn, and end with a different impulse from the one which set it going. The style also changes. In the first three and a half acts it is akin to that of A Midsummer Night's Dream, and Romeo and Juliet; afterwards it is more like that of Hamlet.

I shall suppose, therefore, that the second version followed the main lines of the first for about three-fourths of the play, and then broke away into a course which was emotionally new, though structurally not much changed. What happened/

happened, I think, was something like the following.

We have seen that Shakespeare, in reply to the determined invasion of his world by woman in Love's Labour Won, made several different attempts to defend himself, of which one was to discredit woman by bringing Cressida's story in evidence against her. But since at this period he had no fear of woman's faithlessness, he could not make Cressida a figure of fear in a nightmare. She must rather be an instructive warning, and the play must on the whole be expository rather than genuinely dramatic. It must be a vindication of order, and show the danger of allowing woman to upset it.

The play contains three great argumentative scenes. The first contains the dispute between Hector and Troilus about the surrender of Helen, in which the lover prevails over the rational statesman. The second contains the great speech of Ulysses on degree, in which he lays down the principles of orderly government on the kingly basis. The third contains the warning of Ulysses to Achilles on the danger of allowing heroic qualities to lie idle.

We have thus the picture of two opposing camps, one governed by passion, and represented by Troilus, and the other governed by reason, and represented by Ulysses. The crisis of the play occurs when Troilus and Ulysses together/

together watch the perfidy of Cressida. Troilus is confounded, and Troy with him. I imagine that in the original version Achilles kills him instead of Hector, not when he is physically disarmed, but when he is morally helpless. The first version would thus be part of Shakespeare's campaign in favour of History, which culminated in the rejection of Falstaff.

Why, then, was the first version shelved? Its scheme seems plausible and effective. I think it was Cressida herself who gave the trouble. In dealing with the problems of order Shakespeare's mind moved with ease, but when he came to represent Cressida's faithlessness, he found himself in a dilemma. If he made her the heroine of the play, she joined the family of Helena and Juliet, and refused Cressida's role. If he did not, she had not weight enough for his purpose. He tried to compromise, but on the whole his imagination found it more congenial to treat her as the heroine, with the result that when it came to the climax it began to halt and stumble. Cressida would not fit into his scheme without violence. She rebelled against Shakespeare as she had once tried to rebel against Chaucer. Shakespeare found himself faced with an unsatisfactory ending, and being at the same time occupied with Romeo and Juliet and The Merchant of Venice, he lost interest in the play, and laid it aside for/

for a time.

When Cressida reappears after the creation of Hamlet, the play takes a new turn. The thought of her infidelity has now become a real terror. It is no longer necessary for Shakespeare to encourage a reluctant imagination to conceive an inconstant heroine. The Adversary has interested himself in Cressida, and is trying to force her into Shakespeare's imagination with no encouragement at all. The end which in the first version was so unwilling to come is now only too eager to intrude.

In the second version, Shakespeare adopts almost without change the earlier parts of the first. They serve his purpose well enough, but he is now not much interested in them, and his imagination glides quickly over them. When he approaches the ending, however, the new nightmare seizes him. The careful beauty and magnificence of the first version vanishes, and in its stead we have the intense excitement of tragedy. The play becomes decidedly partisan. In the earlier portions Shakespeare's sympathies are fairly distributed between the Greeks and Trojans, but now the Greeks become hateful to him . Ulysses is too firmly established to lose his position, but the others, especially Achilles, are suddenly degraded.

Cressida herself, however, still remains intractable. The dilemma which formerly troubled Shakespeare now troubles the/

the Adversary. When Cressida is conceived as an incarnation of the Beloved, she refuses to fall, while if the Adversary substitutes anyone else, he does not prove his case. The most he can do is to work swiftly upon Shakespeare's fears, and storm his imagination with a vivid nightmare before he has time to weigh probabilities.

Circumstances favour the Adversary's scheme. The situation is already established in Shakespeare's imagination, and only awaits the ending. Even that is almost irresistibly suggested by the course of the original story. Moreover, Cressida has already been endowed with that likeness to the Beloved which was a stumbling-block to Shakespeare in the first version, but which the Adversary now requires in order to produce conviction.

Having found the scene already prepared for his catastrophe, the Adversary adds a few touches to make it more plausible. He makes Cressida persistently suggest her own falsity, with a negative intention, of course, but with a positive effect. A nervous, apprehensive note appears in her love speeches, which communicates itself to Troilus and Shakespeare. The effect upon her of the change of emotional tone in passing from the first to the second version is made to seem like instability of character. No direct attack, it will be observed, is made upon Cressida herself, but an atmosphere of foreboding is created in Shakespeare's/

Shakespeare's own mind.

Then, suddenly, the Adversary strikes. He conjures up an image of Cressida fallen. We see no process of decline, and are given no kind of explanation. We see nothing but a horrible picture appearing for a few moments of the night in the enemy's camp. The kissing scene might have prepared us, but though it is in verse, it has the tone of the prose of the third version, and, I think, belongs to it.

The ghastly vividness of the nightmare give it, for the moment, a sort of credibility, but even Troilus, who lives within the dream, is convinced that some deception has been practised. He refuses to believe that the phantom he has seen is his beloved. In the third version, where Shakespeare stands aloof from the play, the incredulity of Troilus is pathetic, and almost amusing, but in the second version, where Troilus is Shakespeare's representative, it seems to reflect the feeling of the dramatist as well as the hero.

Troilus, of course, has to yield to the facts of the play, but Shakespeare is under no such necessity. When he has awakened from his nightmare, it appears incomparably more incredible than it did to Troilus. In the first place, Cressida, even before her fall, cannot be plausibly represented as the successor of Rosalind/

Rosalind and Viola, and in the second place, she has had no trial. Her fall is presented as an accomplished fact, with no indication of the way in which it came about.

The achievement of the Adversary, therfore, comes to this, that with everything in his favour, the already imagined situation, with its suggested ending, the anxiety of Shakespeare at seeing the newly matured feminine ideal put to the test, and the suspicions aroused by Hamlet, he can only, by a sudden unprepared attack, produce a momentary apparition which even at the time is not convincing. The attack on the Beloved has failed.

VII. DESDEMONA.

But the failure of the attack upon the character of the Beloved does not leave her as it found her. It brings her far more vividly than ever before into the centre of Shakespeare's imagination.

She had certainly dominated the comedies, but her excellence had been accepted without criticism, and without much reverence or gratitude. Shakespeare was apparently less interested in the quality of her soul than in her effect upon himself, and from this point of view he was often more inclined to resent her excellence than to welcome it. She seemed to demand a place in his world which his rational convictions did not allow him to grant.

In the Histories she had always been secondary, and when History turned to Tragedy, in Julius Caesar and Hamlet, her subordinate position continued. But the indirect attack upon her character in Hamlet, and the direct one in Troilus and Cressida brought her soul under the fierce light of destructive criticism, and Shakespeare realised that to him it was the most important thing in the world. Like Copernicus, he made the discovery that he revolved about the sun, and not the sun about him.

Not only has the soul of the Beloved become the centre of Shakespeare's world. It is the thing he sees most clearly, very much more clearly than he does his own. He can only see himself/

himself by the shadows he casts, but her he can see with direct vision. His vision of her has grown in clearness from the early poems and comedies till now, and every trial to which she has been exposed has increased the intensity of his attention and the amount he has been able to see.

We may say, then, that the figure of the Beloved, who is about to be incarnated in Desdemona, is the first whom Shakespeare has looked at with the full power of his vision. Desdemona is in essence his perfect heroine, his ideal of beauty and goodness. Certain questionable characteristics appear, in her during the evolution of the play, but these are accidental. They belong to the plot, not to the character. In conception she is to be taken as beyond criticism. She is the nucleus round which, at this period, the Shakesperean dramatic world is built.

VIII. CREATION OF OTHELLO.

Though the attack on the Beloved in Troilus and Cressida has only strengthened her hold upon Shakespeare's imagination, the resources of the Adversary are not exhausted. The vision can be attacked from two sides. Either the image itself can be shown to be imperfect and unstable, or the power of seeing it may be destroyed. That is to say, the Adversary may attack either the character of the Beloved or Shakespeare's faith in her. In either case, her image will be driven from its place in his world. The former method has failed, but the latter is still open, and seems more promising. It will have been noticed that such success as the Adversary had in Troilus and Cressida was gained by attacking Cressida indirectly through Shakespeare. The Adversary therefore suggests that Shakespeare will loose his vision of the Beloved, not through any fault of hers, but through the corruption of his own mind.

Shakespeare in reply appeals to the certainty of his own intuition, but this does not settle the matter. Though he sees Desdemona with clearness and certainty, he sees her through the form of beauty, and can give no rational account of what he sees. Her excellence, though plainly visible, is neither explicable nor demonstrable. Her image, while increasing steadily in clearness, has also increased still more in richness, and accordingly rises higher than ever above the plane/

plane of understanding. Consequently, though Shakespeare may violently repudiate the Adversary's suggestion, he cannot prove its impossibility.

Moreover, Shakespeare's record is against him. Though the image of the Beloved has always been clear, it has not always been welcome. He has repeatedly tried to banish it from his imagination. Perhaps he may do so again. With a mind so fantastic and incalculable, how can he prophesy what he will do or not do?

Shakespeare admits that the Adversary has an abstract possibility in his favour, but maintains that under no imaginable circumstances could he actually cease to love and reverence Desdemona.

Thus challenged, the Adversary replies: "Let me put before you the following situation. Let us suppose that Desdemona is young, inexperienced, and beautiful, while you are a middle-aged man, hardened and roughened by the world's strife. You have dazzled her and swept her off her feet by your fame and your eloquence, but the effect of that will soon wear off, and she will see you as you are. Let us suppose, too, that you are not her equal in birth and social position and that her friends disapprove of you and will lose no opportunity of speaking ill of you. Do you think that you might then be induced to suspect her of faithlessness? No? Shall we suppose, then, that you are of a different and inferior race, that, for/

for instance, you are black? Would she not turn from you as soon as she came to her sober senses, and met some excellent young man of her own age and circle? Well, I dare say she might not, but could you not be brought to believe that she would? Would it not be natural for you to think so, especially if I arranged the circumstances so that they seemed to justify suspicion? Remember that we are supposing you to be, as indeed you are, a man of hot blood, and swift, impetuous imagination. You are still incredulous? Very well, since reason is lost upon you, I shall appeal to your imagination, and show you in detail how all I have threatened might come about. You know Cinthio's tale of Disdemona and the Moor. Disdemona shall be your Beloved, and you must suppose yourself to be in the position of the Moor. I shall show you what in such circumstances you would inevitably do. I shall make no attempt to take you by surprise. Examine the vision I shall show you as carefully as you please, and then deny its truth if you can."

Shakespeare replies: "I have no fear. With the eyes of my soul I can see the truth in the soul of my Beloved. Show me what you please. But play fair. No more Cressidas. Desdemona must do nothing unworthy of my Beloved, and nothing that seems to me incredible, otherwise your vision will have no effect."

"Your conditions are reasonable. I desire no stolen victory/

victory. I confess I do not quite understand Desdemona. It may be that I have no power over her, though I have not yet given up hope. But I do understand you, and I know the stuff your faith is made of. In the vision I am about to show you, you yourself will reject and slay Desdemona, and you will not be able to disown the image of yourself which you will see."

"I do not believe it. In the Moor's circumstances I should not act like the Moor. Do your worst."

The adversary does his worst, and the result is the play of Othello. It follows Cinthio's general plan, but this was only a short-circuiting of Shakespeare's imagination. Something of the sort would have emerged if Cinthio had never been born.

IX. IAGO.

It soon becomes clear that Shakespeare's faith can hold out against any accidental combination of circumstances, however unfortunate. Cinthio's tale, however, suggests a deadlier form of attack. Perhaps the operation of a determined and intelligent malignity upon a mind deceived by a mask of truth and goodness might prove irresistible. The Adversary therefore conjures up the terrible figure of Iago.

The tremendous genius displayed in the creation of Iago has been acknowledged by all commentators, but his character has been something of a puzzle. What is the motive of his malignity? Are the motives which he himself alleges sufficient? It is difficult to show that they are not, but somehow we are not satisfied that they are. He does not seem to produce them with full conviction. Coleridge thought his malignity motiveless, and I believe he was essentially right. At bottom, Iago has no more motive for attacking Othello than a nightmare has for attacking a dreamer. He is not a rational soul, but a figure of fear. He does not exist in his own right, but in virtue of his relation to Othello. His essence, like that of a demon or vampire, departs as soon as becomes completely intelligible.

Moreover, just as in looking at a picture we must place ourselves at the proper distance from it, so in considering the effect of a piece of music or a drama, we must/

must take it at its proper speed. Sustained and passing discords are governed by different principles. So we must judge Iago, not as he appears under analysis, but by his effect in the moving play. He becomes more and more credible as the play gathers momentum and our fears overpower our reflections.

But though Iago's malignity is fundamentally motiveless, the Adversary takes pains to supply him with as many motives as he can. To be formidable he must be plausible. His real power lies in the fact that he attacks the sensitive spots in Shakespeare's imagination, but to give himself a formal locus standi he provides himself with good superficial excuses, such as his resentment at Cassio's appointment, and his suspicions about Othello's relations with Emilia. If we considered these reasons in cold blood we should perhaps find them unconvincing, but under the stress of terror we have no leisure to give them the necessary scrutiny.

Even as it is, many readers of the play do not find Iago's malignity quite plausible, apparently because Iago does not inspire the same terror in them as he inspired in Shakespeare. What, then, was the source of Shakespeare's fear? To understand this, we must remember that though in one sense Iago is a new individual especially created by the/

the Adversary for the purpose of this play, yet he enters Shakespeare's imagination with the power of a long ancestry behind him. Let us look at his pedigree.

In the first place, he is of the line of Falstaff. He has Falstaff's destructive comic mind, and his thoroughly gross view of life. In fact, Iago is Falstaff turned malignant. Antony and Claudius belong to the same line, but Iago is more like his ancestor than either of them. Like Falstaff, Iago is an instrument prepared by the Adversary to fight a pitched battle on a decisive issue, and his whole energy is expended upon his equipment. He has Falstaff's singleness of outlook, and the daemoniac vitality which results from it. Indeed, the economy of his nature due to his special organisation for the sole purpose of battle gives him the same kind of beauty that we noticed in Falstaff.

Falstaff, however, had one advantage which Iago has not. He had part of Shakespeare's sympathy. He attacked an ideal which Shakespeare was determined to admire, but which had no deep root in his nature.. The triumph of Falstaff thus represented not only the victory of the base over the heroic, but the victory of the natural over the artificial. It was a liberation as well as a disappointment. With Iago, on the other hand, Shakespeare has no sympathy at all. I have no belief in Freud's theory that every creation of the imagination is the expression of a wish, patent or disguised/

disguised. Nor do I agree with those defenders of Shakespeare's artistic impartiality who represent him as dealing out fragments of his own large nature to all his characters, both good and evil. Iago is a pure figure of fear, and entirely hateful to Shakespeare. Even his beauty only makes him more dangerous. His victory would be an unqualified disaster. The feminine ideal, which has superseded the historic ideal, has no feet of clay, and Shakespeare believes in it at the bottom of his soul. His opposition to Iago will therefore be strenuous and whole-hearted. This time there will be no treacherous confederate within the citadel to open the gates to the enemy.

On the other hand, Iago enters Shakespeare's imagination with the prestige of victory. He represents a spirit that has been repeatedly successful in the past, and may be successful once more. His success now may seem improbable, but so did Falstaff's. Before the event, Shakespeare had no doubt of his ability to put Falstaff in his place. In the light of this expreience, can he have the same confidence in his power to deal with Iago?

Iago has another advantage. There was an old alliance between Woman and Comedy, as old as Comedy itself. They/

They joined forces in an attack upon History, and during the long campaign against it there was a tacit agreement between them to tolerate one another. Falstaff's spirit is profoundly hostile to the feminine ideal, but his hostility never becomes malignant. Mercutio and Touchstone are more threatening, but they keep their disrespect within reasonable bounds. The women, on their part, show a toleration for comic grossness which seems strange to us. It is perhaps most noticeable in Helena, probably the original Helena of Love's Labour Won, but it appears also in Portia, Beatrice, and Rosalind. The result is that Iago brings with him inherited memories of something questionable in even the best women, superficial, no doubt, but undeniable. To Shakespeare in his present mood, these memories are exceedingly unwelcome, and make Iago an object of fear as well as loathing. In him the buried past returns like a vampire.

But Iago has also another ancestor. Strange as it may seem, he is the lineal descendant of Valentine, Antonio and Horatio. Not only the Genius of Comedy, but the Genius of Friendship, has turned malignant. The rivalry between love and friendship in Shakespeare is almost as old as the alliance between woman and Comedy. At first, Shakespeare's deliberate sympathies were all with friendship, which he connected with the heroic ideal. Under the old dispensation, therefore, Shakespeare's nightmares had always pictured/

pictured the betrayal of friendship under the influence of love. But now there is a new distribution of parties. Love is in the ascendant, and friendship joins the opposition. Shakespeare's fear now is that under the influence of friendship he may betray love.

It is particularly unfortunate that Iago should be the immediate successor of Horatio. The importance of friendship had been gradually declining in Shakespeare's mind. It is supreme in the Two Gentlemen and the Sonnets, great but not all-important in Romeo and Juliet and the Merchant of Venice, and beginning to totter in Julius Caesar and Much Ado. In Hamlet there is a brief revival. Love is for the moment under a cloud, and Shakespeare falls back on friendship. Hamlet's affection for Horatio is both strong and limited. He does not take him into his confidence about matters that really trouble him, but in ordinary practical affairs he relies upon him implicitly. In Hamlet this trust is entirely justified. Horatio is all he seems to be, thoroughly honest, wise, and sympathetic. The Adversary is thus in a strong position when he puts the question: "Before I launch my nightmare upon the sea of your imagination, tell me this. If Horatio, or one of my servants in his likeness, were to report evil of Desdemona, would you believe him?"

Shakespeare throws overboard the creed of a lifetime, and replies that he would not. The Adversary then begins to/

to produce his picture.

Of course it will be understood that the foregoing Prologue in Heaven is not to be taken literally. I cannot hope to re-produce the actual broodings of a mind like Shakespeare's during the germination of what I take to be the greatest of his plays. Here, as elsewhere, I must rely upon the goodwill of my readers to separate what is substantial in my fables from what is merely diagrammatic.

X& THE PREPARATION.

The Adversary has no conscience, and plays as unfairly as he can, but in this play he abstains carefully from any substantial infringement of the rules. He does not wish his victory to be annulled. Shakespeare must not complain that Iago is incredible, that Desdemona is an imposter, or that Othello represents him unfairly. Of course the dice are heavily loaded against Othello, but that is part of the game. As in the case of Job, unusual power is permitted to the Adversary, and he may load the dice up to the limits of credibility. Shakespeare undertakes that Othello will not break down under it.

Yet in spite of this advantage the Adversary finds it difficult to make a credi~~t~~able picture. Shakespeare is fully awake and on his guard. The Adversary therefore proceeds with extreme caution and self-restraint. No other Shakespearean play takes so long to get under way. The tragic action does not begin till about a third of the play is over.

The long introduction serves the Adversary's purpose in various ways. It allows the situation to get a firm grip of the imagination, so that we may realise that we are dealing with events which are both genuine and extraordinary. The supernatural, which plays so great a part in Hamlet and Macbeth, is carefully avoided, nor is there any trace of that atmosphere of fable which we find at the beginning/

beginning of King Lear. Nor again is there anything of that bleak remoteness which we feel in the other three great tragedies. The atmosphere is that of the comedies. Everything is warm and near, and full of vivid colour and movement. The scene is not only credible, but actual visible reality. And in all this vivid reality, nothing is more real than the figure of Iago. He is not yet the fiend which he becomes later. He is little more than a shrewd man of the world, with an unclean mind, a sour temper, and a blistering tongue. His evil qualities are all indicated, but his general effect is rather amusing than otherwise. He certainly adds wonderfully to the vivacity of the introduction.

At the same time, we are thoroughly aware that the world which the play reveals to us is not ordinary. There is an underlying enchantment about it, compared with which the supernaturalism of Hamlet and Macbeth seems almost prosaic. This glamour emanates chiefly from the hero. The charge of witchcraft brought against him breaks down, but we somehow do not feel it to be utterly incongruous. There is the suggestion of some daemon within him which is not yet sinister, but merely extraordinary. In this hint of unknown possibilities there is nothing that Shakespeare can object to. It merely reflects the strange uncertainties in his own nature, of which he is quite aware, but which he would gladly forget in the/

the present connection.

A point is also scored against Desdemona, the skill of which we can only appreciate if we remember her antecedents. Ophelia was forced by the conditions of her play into an undue subservience to her family, even going so far as to plot with them against Hamlet. Cressida, also, was inert in the hands of Pandarus and the Trojan Council. So Shakespeare said, "This is unfair. Let Desdemona have the freedom of my gallant comedy heroines." The Adversary allows his plea. In the cause of love, the gentle Desdemona shows a courage and resolution greater, perhaps, than that of any other heroine. She marries Othello in the face of almost every conceivable natural and social barrier. Many lovers of Shakespeare, indeed, who are rather inclined to praise Juliet for defying the family feud, find it hard to forgive Desdemona for crossing the colour line. To Shakespeare her independence of character is very satisfactory till the Adversary throws out the suggestion:"She has deceived her father, and may deceive thee." Othello brushes the point aside without consideration, but it rankles in Shakespeare's mind.

Many minor points are scored by the Adversary in the introduction, but what tells most in his favour is its length. The imagination is naturally active, and can rest only when it has reached a state of perfect stability. Now, though the introduction is full of superficial life and movement, its situation/

situation is essentially static. There are many ripples on the surface of the river, but the river itself is not flowing. Yet the situation is anything but stable. We feel that something is bound to happen, and yet it is not happening. When a fuss is made over the voyage to Cyprus, the superficiality of the action becomes almost exasperating. In the uneasy restlessness of the imagination, the elements of instability loom larger, the hate of Iago, the incalculability of Othello, the tremendous risk run by Desdemona. An explosion would come almost as a relief. The longer Shakespeare is compelled to contemplate the situation the more his mind misgives him. The bright world about Othello hates idleness. If it is not provided with employment it will become mischievous. But Shakespeare is not prepared to give it an outlet for its energy. He wishes to hold the fort and enjoy what he has. He has achieved his heart's desire, and can for the moment imagine nothing better. Unfortunately, the imagination is at its worst when on the defensive. If Shakespeare will not create, the initiative passes to the Adversary, and the longer his inaction lasts, the more he reailses his own helplessness and the opportunities of the enemy.

At length the Adversary decides that his time has come, and Iago begins to act.

XI. THE ATTACK.

I need not follow the course of the action in detail. Unlike that of Hamlet, it lies mostly on the surface, so that we can appreciate every move. Some points, however, may be noted.

We have seen how the grossness of mind which had been amusing in Falstaff and Mercutio, becomes loathsome and sinister in Iago. In the same way we can see how other moral lapses which had formerly been entertaining to Shakespeare now suddenly become dangerous. The drunkenness of Sir Toby becomes disgusting and malignant in Cassio. So also do his relations with Bianca, though he himself still seems to find them comic. The duping of Shallow by Falstaff becomes poisonous when practised by Iago on Roderigo. All the minor vices which Shakespeare had tolerated now spring up against him to his undoing. They have not only a direct effect upon the visible action, but an indirect effect in undermining his faith in himself, and therefore in Othello.

Even Desdemona does not escape. The Adversary cannot touch her soul without destroying the whole credibility of the play for Shakespeare, but he weaves a curse about her, so that all her actions, however innocent and kindly, seem inopportune. At one point, where she prevaricates about the handkerchief/

handkerchief, he even permits himself to touch her character. I shall give a little attention to this incident, as I think it has been misunderstood. Some critics have even singled out Desdemona as the type of heroine, who, for good and evil, is a liar. This accusation I find intolerable and infuriating. With the exception of Cordelia, there is not one of Shakespeare's major heroines who is so free from guile as Desdemona. Consider the deliberate deceptions practised by Julia, Helena, Juliet, Portia, Hero, Rosalind, Viola, Isabella, Lady Macbeth, Imogen, and Hermione. The innocent Miranda deceives her father by instinct as soon as there is occasion for it, and Beatrice and Ophelia play their parts in the deceptions of others. Even Cordelia's truth is more deceptive than Desdemona's "lies." Why, then, does Desdemona's fencing about the handkerchief - it was not even a lie - make such a profound impression? Some of the reasons are easy to see. The other heroines lie comically or romantically, and conduct their deceptions with spirit to a triumphant issue. Desdemona prevaricates uncertainly and inopportunely, and fails disastrously. Moreover, the moral scrutiny directed upon her by the whole conception of the play is so intense that everything questionable in her conduct stands out with painful clearness, especially as it is the business of the Adversary to make the most of it.

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The main reason, however, is that Shakespeare himself is so sensitive about it, and resents it so fiercely. He would like Desdemona to be perfect, but the Adversary has fastened this flaw upon her, and after the systematic deceptions he has permitted to his other heroines, he cannot protest against this tiny one without being ridiculous. He has been too lax about the truth in the past, and must take the consequences. The treatment of Desdemona by the Adversary, therefore, not only serves its direct object, but is part of his general scheme of reviving the indiscretions of Shakespeare's past self in order to shake his confidence in his present one. Over and above the visible attack on Othello, there is an invisible attack on Shakespeare himself, and in order to estimate the deadliness of the Adversary's tactics we must take account of both.

XII. THE ESTRANGEMENT OF OTHELLO.

Does the Adversary succeed? The question is more difficult than would appear at first sight. In the obvious sense, he certainly does. He creates a vivid and credible vision in which Shakespeare sees Othello fall into Iago's net, and suspect, reject, and kill Desdemona. Possibly a cold-blooded analysis might discover flaws in its logical coherence, but as it is seen, it is intolerably real. The struggles which Shakespeare makes to throw it off, only fix it more firmly in his imagination. All his protests only serve to draw attention to the completeness of the answers to them. Any complaint of indefiniteness is met by more minute concrete detail. The catastrophe must be accepted as genuine.

Only one doubt remains. When the catastrophe occurs, is Othello still to be identified with Shakespeare himself? I do not think this question can be answered by a simple affirmative or negative. Let us try to get to the truth of the matter.

We must remember at the outset that Shakespeare's dramatic self, with which alone we are concerned, is only known to him from his plays. The self cannot view itself directly. To become visible it must project a representation of itself upon the imaginative field. Unfortunately, such representations/

representations are only hypothetical, so that rival pictures may seek admittance to the imagination, each claiming to represent the true self. As a rule, the contention resolves itself into a struggle between two claimants, the representation which Shakespeare would like to be true, and the one he fears to be true. The victory falls to the one which succeeds in making itself imaginatively credible.

In the long series of plays from the beginning down to Hamlet, one thing has become apparent. It is useless to try to maintain in the imagination a perfect self-supporting ideal of the self. There is something infinite - which in this case is almost equivalent to indefinite - about the growing self which makes it impossible to represent it plausibly as a beautiful self-contained whole. Any attempt to do so only invites the attack of comedy. The appropriate embodiment of the ideal is the Beloved, who, being external and objective, can be viewed as a whole. Perhaps in some transcendental sense the Beloved and the real self are identical, but in the meantime we cannot take this as known, or even as probable.

While the Beloved, therefore, is judged by her qualities as a self-subsisting being, the self must be judged differently. We must consider, not its qualities, but its affinities, not what it is, but what it loves, admires, and believes/

believes in. The representation of himself which Shakespeare now desires to prevail is therefore not, as formerly, a figure of heroic manhood, but one securely anchored to a supreme ideal, while the one which he fears is that which pictures him as betraying it. Which has prevailed in Othello? As in the case of Job, the answer is obscure, and requires careful interpretation.

Let us follow Othello's evolution. At first he is a rather optimistic representation of Shakespeare. Perhaps because he was aiming at something else than splendour, no hero so splendid ever entered Shakespeare's imagination. Shakespeare could hope for no better champion, so he accepts him, throws in his lot with him, and looks at the play through his eyes.

But when Othello begins to listen to Iago, Shakespeare's feelings towards him become divided. He has still an acute perception of Othello's point of view, and feels a sympathetic horror at the vision that presses upon him, though he knows it to be in fact unfounded. If the truth had really been as Othello saw it, Shakespeare would have felt about it exactly as Othello does. In all his struggles to throw off the nightmare which threatens him, Shakespeare is passionately at one with him. At the same time, Shakespeare, knowing the truth, has a point of view which he cannot share with Othello, and to that extent/

extent sees him from the outside. Partly, he pities him for the agony he is undergoing, partly, he is angry with him for his lack of faith, and partly he is terrified in case he may be a true representation of himself. At first pity predominates, then, when Othello shows signs of succumbing to the power of the nightmare, fear comes to the top, but when Othello actually attacks Desdemona, all other feelings are swallowed up in anger. This anger reaches its height when Othello in his blindness proclaims his pride in what he has done. His self-satisfaction seems so monstrous that Shakespeare throws away his last shred of sympathy with him, and sees him as a stranger. Othello has now achieved independence. He is an objective person in his own right like Desdemona and Iago, but in mortal peril of being classed with Iago.

Yet the bond between Othello and Shakespeare, though no longer the bond of identity, is not quite broken. The anger that Shakespeare feels against Othello is of a different quality from his loathing of Iago. It is both fiercer and less stable. It has that intimate bitterness of resentment which we reserve for ourselves or those for whom we are closely responsible. It adds to Shakespeare's sense of outrage that he does not feel fairly entitled to disown Othello outright.

It is to be noticed that Desdemona, who knows

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none of the excuses for Othello's conduct which are known to Shakespeare, never falters in her love for him even when he is at his worst. So far from disowning him, she even tries to take his blame upon herself. She is not responsible for him, as Shakespeare is, and she is free to forgive his offences against herself, as Shakespeare is not. Still, her faith in him is further evidence of the bond which still exists between him and Shakespeare.

We may say, then, that when the catastrophe takes place, Othello can neither be considered identical with Shakespeare nor wholly severed from him, but that there is between them a bond whose nature it is easier to see than to describe, since it is only revealed through the great beauty of the play. We may say further that while all the honours of war are with the Adversary, his success has not the finality it was meant to have. A situation has arisen which neither party anticipated, and whose outcome neither can foresee. Cinthio has been left far behind.

XIII. DILEMMA OF THE ADVERSARY.

With the death of Desdemona the play, as originally conceived, comes to an end. The Adversary has achieved what he set out to do. But the situation is still unstable, and full of evil possibilities. Shakespeare, full of grief and rage, scarcely cares what happens. The initiative is still with the Adversary. How can he turn the catastrophe to the best advantage?

Two schemes present themselves. Either Othello may be undeceived, and feel the intolerable pain of realising his folly, his guilt, and his loss, or he may be allowed to remain under his delusion, so that his soul may wither in unbelief. The latter alternative, which is followed in Macbeth, is actually the more terrible, and perhaps if a breathing space for reflection, such as occurs after the mid-climax in most of Shakespeare's plays, had been allowed, the Adversary might have chosen it. But after the long introduction, the action proceeds at full speed without pause or slackening. The imagination is hot and volcanic, and not in the mood to welcome pictures of gradual processes. An immediate overwhelming grief strikes it with greater terror than a lingering decay.

The positiveness of the imagination, also, which had formerly been so disastrous to Othello, now tells in favour of his redemption. When a spectacular event is suggested/

suggested to the imagination, it is much easier to see it happening than not happening, and the undeceiving of Othello would be so spectacular that the imagination is almost compelled to contrive it.

The Adversary therefore decides to undeceive Othello, and proceeds to think of ways and means. The machinery is reversed, and the dice are now loaded against Iago. The Adversary has no conscience about his agents, When they have served their purpose they are thrown aside. Iago is unmasked rather easily, considering the skill he has hitherto shown, and Othello learns the truth.

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that a new action arises, with characters that are to some extent conceived afresh. The Adversary has finished one campaign, and is beginning a supplementary one, using the material ready to his hand for a different purpose.

Emilia therefore comes, so to speak, under new management. Formerly it suited the purpose of the Adversary that she should be a rather inert instrument in the hands of her husband, and not too far removed from him in character. Now it is necessary that she should rouse herself, turn against Iago, brave his and Othello's wrath, and by vindicating Desdemona, wring Othello's heart. Her denunciations express the Adversary's triumph over both Othello and Shakespeare.

This alteration in the policy of the Adversary accounts for the sudden change in Emilia, but not for her magnificence. A higher voice than that of the Adversary also speaks through Emilia. The death of Desdemona has roused Shakespeare's own spirit to fury. He can no longer express himself through Othello, for Othello is estranged. He is barred from speaking in his own person, and must not deliberately cause any character to speak for him. His disembodied spirit therefore hovers over the play, burning to utter itself. Accordingly, when Emilia begins to speak on behalf of Desdemona, Shakespeare's imagination eagerly seizes upon her, and his spirit inspires her to say/

say the words he is longing to hear.

The other event is the coming to life of Desdemona after Othello has apparently killed her. Here, again, the initiative is taken by the Adversary. When Desdemona returns from the grave to take Othello's guilt upon herself, Othello completes his shame by using her words as confirmation of her wickedness. Of all the strokes of the Adversary this is perhaps the most cruel.

Yet here, as before, Shakespeare has his own part in the event. When he hears Emilia defending her mistress, he is seized with an overpowering desire to hear once more the voice of the Beloved in the flesh. He cannot with any dramatic plausibility bring her back on his own initiative, but when the Adversary for his own purpose resurrects her, Shakespeare cannot choose but welcome her. Nor can he refrain, whatever be the cost to Othello, from putting in her mouth the most loving words ever spoken in any play.

The combination of powers behind Desdemona's resurrection gives it an effect which is overwhelming and almost appalling. In the world of art, I can only recall one parallel. Beethoven, in his C minor Symphony, the work which in character and serial position corresponds to Othello, inserts in the last movement a fragment of the Scherzo, with something like the same uncanny effect. Is it/

it only a coincidence that the same event should occur to two supreme creators at their most strenuous moments?

XV. THE REGENERATION OF OTHELLO.

When Othello realises what he has done, his grief is all that Shakespeare could wish. Once again he and his creator see and feel alike. Indeed, Othello's grief is, if anything, greater than Shakespeare's. His responsibility is direct, whereas Shakespeare's is vicarious. His pain is so intense that Shakespeare's anger is gone, and is replaced by pity. Yet though Othello and Shakespeare now see eye to eye, their reconciliation does not involve a return to their primitive identity. Othello, at a terrible price, has achieved his individuality, though not a completely separate individuality. Some part of the ancient bond still remains, and impulses can still pass direct between him and his creator.

It is not only Othello's grief which brings him back to Shakespeare. Beneath all his pain, there springs up in the depths of his soul a profound feeling of joy and triumph. After all, his faith had not been misplaced. His ideal was all he had believed her to be, and infinitely more. The knowledge increases the pain of his wound, but also cleanses it. He knows now, though his agony is too acute to give him leisure to notice the fact, that his suffering is wholesome and cannot be felt too deeply. His soul welcomes the fire which burns all the rottenness out of it, though he never ceases to feel it as fire.

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The possibilities of evil which were once latent in him are gone for ever. He sees the beauty and goodness of the Beloved more vividly in his pain, than ever he had done in his happiness. The result is that Othello, as he appears at the end of the play is the most splendid figure in Shakespeare. He is less popular than Hamlet, partly because there is no mystery about him to fascinate the intellect, and partly because when he is at his highest it is almost impossible to look at him steadily. We are dazzled by his brightness, and cannot bear to see his agony.

But this is not all. The evolution of the play has brought about a gradual shifting of interest. When it was first conceived, the interest centred about Desdemona. Then the terror of the nightmare brought Iago to the front, and for a time he was perhaps the most prominent person in the play. After Desdemona's death, however, his work is finished, his interest departs, and he falls into an eternal silence. Meanwhile Othello has been growing more and more important. The action of the play must ultimately express itself through him, and as he is neither a true child of light like Desdemona, nor a child of darkness like Iago, his action is uncertain. His soul is the arena of conflict, and the centre of the game interest. Shakespeare is therefore inclined to take Desdemona and Iago for granted, and fix his attention upon Othello. He watches every turn of Othello's mind with anxious excitement, feels for him the/

the most poignant pity, hope, fear, anger, and disgust, and finally, when he emerges from his trial with a new, unlooked for tragic splendour, regards him with an almost admiring affection. At the end of the play, Othello, not Desdemona, is the central figure in Shakespeare's heart. The scheme of the play is not now: "The Rejection and Death of Desdemona," but "The Fall of Othello, and his Redemption by the Death of Desdemona." His redemption is not marred, but completed, by the fact that he is himself too grief-stricken to observe it, and dies by his own hand.

XVI. THE APOTHEOSIS OF DESDEMONA.

Though Desdemona has perhaps lost ground in Shakespeare's mind as compared with Othello, she has gained a great deal absolutely. The policy of the Adversary has been as favourable to her character as it has been unfavourable to her destiny.

In the early plays he had an inclination, gradually decreasing as we approach the tragedies, to represent the heroine as a somewhat formidable creature, with a rather hard brilliance, and a humiliating superiority which nothing could break down. To be loved by such a wonderful being would no doubt be a dazzling experience, but would it be altogether comfortable? Does it not suggest being pleasantly eaten up? It is just this formidable quality which gives women their place in comedy. They are the instruments for breaking down man's dignity and self-sufficiency.

In Othello, however, the object of the Adversary is different. It is not Othello's dignity, but his faith, happiness, and life, that are to be destroyed. Since Desdemona is to be lost to him, she must be made infinitely desirable. There must be no Freudean wish mingled with the fear of her death. Accordingly, though she has all the gallant courage of her comic predecessors, she has not their unnatural/

unnatural skill and success. There is no hard gloss over her perfection. She never teases nor snubs. In her saintliness there is a childlike quality which makes it appealing instead of oppressive. When in her short resurrection she tries to take upon herself the blame of Othello's crime, she not only wipes out the memory of her quibbling about the handkerchief, which had always rankled, but lifts herself above all other Shakesperean heroines, to become the pure and perfect ideal of the Beloved. She finally achieves what the comic heroine was always aiming at, but which her alliance with the Comic Spirit did not permit her to reach.

The policy of the Adversary has another effect. In order that Othello's suffering may be complete, it is necessary that he should share Desdemona's, and to do so he must see her from within. He must see the world from her point of view, and with her emotions. Fundamentally, this is a new departure. The comedy heroines were essentially objective. They were parts of Shakespeare's imaginative world rather than instruments through which he saw it. The formidable, teasing quality which we have noticed, was part of this objectivity. Of course, they had to be presented plausibly, and therefore had to have a lifelike point of view and credible motives, but these were rather seen from without than felt from within. When the alliance with Comedy begins to break up, the feminine point/

point of view is presented with a wealth of loving detail, but it is still at bottom objectively conceived. Shakespeare loves Viola, and draws her portrait at full length, but he never _is_ Viola.

Desdemona is originally conceived in the same manner, but when she begins to suffer, Shakespeare is compelled to enter into her feelings and see everything through her eyes as well as through his own. While she is still alive, Othello is prevented from doing likewise, but after her death he enters retrospectively into her life as thoroughly as Shakespeare himself. There thus arises in Shakespeare's mind another ideal of the Beloved. Hitherto she had been the soul of his world, whom he looked upon and loved. Now she is also his second self, standing by his side, and sharing his view of the external world. The conception is attractive, but it contains new uncertainties, and raises new problems, thus giving the Adversary new openings for attack.

XVII. MEASURE FOR MEASURE.

For the moment, however, the Adversary is cowed by the fiery exaltation of Shakespeare's spirit, so that the next play, Measure for Measure, is formally a comedy. Nevertheless, he is never far away. Indeed, it is in this play that the seeds are sown which bear such terrible fruit in the later tragedies.

Though Measure for Measure bears the impress of the full weight of Shakespeare's genius, it has never been popular either with the public or the critics. It seems unsatisfactory in many ways. Apart from the disagreeableness of its subject, there seems to be something incoherent in its whole conception. It has the unity neither of a work of art nor of a game. We have neither singleness of vision nor freedom of action. Nor is this uncertainty of effect due simply to carelessness. A great deal of technical ingenuity has been expended upon the working out of the plot, and the result is neat, though perhaps a little fussy and artificial. The trouble lies deeper. We suspect some radical vagueness of purpose at the foundations of the play. We feel inclined to ask too many questions to which there seems to be no clear answer.

For instance, did the Duke know of Angelo's relations with Mariana when he put him in charge of the city? Are they not inconsistent with the opinion universally held/

held about Angelo? Was the Duke making a genuine effort to reform the city, or merely laying a trap for Angelo, or did he think it possible to do both at once? Was Claudio's sin with Juliet nominal or real? If nominal, why does Isabella condemn it so emphatically? If real, why is Mariana encouraged, apparently without misgiving, to commit a similar sin? Why need Mariana be brought into the affair at all? Could not the Duke have shown his hand sooner and saved her? Is not Angelo's attempt to execute Claudio in breach of his bargain gratuitously wicked? At the same time, seeing that Isabella did not keep her part of the bargain, is not her indignation, and that of the Duke, at Angelo's breach of faith, a little illegitimate? Is there any justification for the Duke's teasing of Isabella in the fourth and fifth acts? And finally, is not the matter of fact arrangement for the marriage of the saintly Isabella somewhat inappropriate?

Again, the play contains elements that seem thoroughly tragic. One feels the presence of something terrible and uncontrollable, something that chills the spirit, and fills the heart with despair. Yet the Duke apparently holds the action in the hollow of his hand from first to last. One sees Shakespeare's intention of shaping everything towards a happy ending. The whole effect is disquieting. It makes us uneasy to see the tricks of comedy being played on the

slope/

slope of a volcano. The Adversary is not receiving fair play, but he makes no protest, and there is something contemptuous in his quiescence which is ominous. His power seems as great as ever. Why does he hold his hand?

Measure for Measure is as great a problem as Hamlet, but as it is less attractive, less trouble has been taken in solving it. Yet it is surely worth while to make a determined attempt. The play was written at the height of Shakespeare's powers, and shows abundant evidence of them. The fact that the play as a whole is not a supreme masterpiece, and indeed rather unpleasant, should encourage speculation. One has always misgivings in subjecting to analysis a masterpiece or an object greatly loved, but I think no one need have any compunctions in analysing Measure for Measure.

And not only is speculation in this case more harmless. It is also more promising. A masterpiece is its own justification, but defects invite inquiry. I therefore feel less diffidence in the present investigation than when I lay violent hands upon universal favourites.

My theory briefly is that Shakespeare twice changed his personal attitude to the dramatic action before the process of creation was finished, and then lost interest in the play to such an extent that the heat of his imagination was no longer able to fuse the varying conceptions into a thorough unity. Let us see how this hypothesis works out.

XVIII. THE ORIGINAL CONCEPTION.

Though I have placed Measure for Measure as a whole after Othello, I am inclined to think that its first conception followed immediately upon Hamlet, perhaps even upon the first version of Hamlet. It seems the natural sequel to the duel with Claudius. We must bear in mind that though we now think of Hamlet as one of Shakespeare's very greatest plays, from his own point of view it was so far a failure that it did not accomplish what it set out to do. Hamlet did not achieve that spectacular victory over Claudius on which Shakespeare had set his heart. He did indeed kill him, but in a confused scuffle which had no symbolic significance.

The reason was not far to seek. Shakespeare had been too much concerned about the spotlessness of his hero, and not enough about the work to be done. In his next play this must be rectified. The hero must keep his personality subordinate to the work of the play. He must remain more in the background, and pull the dramatic strings unobtrusively.

Again, in Hamlet the wickedness of Claudius has all been committed before the play begins, and is known only by report. Hamlet is therefore in the position, as far as the visible play is concerned, of having to begin the quarrel. Would it not have been much more effective if we had seen the/

the actual crime in the play with its punishment following hot upon it.

The story of Promos and Cassandra, adapted by Whetstone from Cinthio, appeared to give Shakespeare what he wanted. Promos, like Falstaff, is selfish, sensual, and heartless, but in addition he has the plausible hypocrisy of Claudius. Placed by his sovereign in a position of authority, he condemns Cassandra's brother to death under an old law against sexual incontinence, and then uses his life as a bribe to tempt Cassandra to the same offence. Having succeeded in his object, he nevertheless tries to carry out the sentence against the brother, but in the moment of triumph has the tables dramatically turned against him by his master, who in the meantime has become acquainted with all his doings.

The scheme seems promising, much more promising than that of Hamlet. The hero's part is quiet and effective, and not liable to miscarry. The villain's wickedness is of that glaring kind which seems to cry out for immediate punishment. Cassandra's fall is much more intelligible than Gertrude's, and directly blamable upon the villain. The action has unity, symmetry, and climax, and allows of a display of neat poetic justice which will justify the title Measure for Measure. The play will have all the dramatic merits of the Merchant of Venice in greater perfection, without/

without its emotional uncertainty, and with much more symbolic significance.

I imagine, then, that when Hamlet's great attack upon Claudius proved a fiasco, Shakespeare began to design a new play on this theme, but that in the meantime the absorbing question of the incorruptibility of the Beloved gave a new turn to Hamlet, and was worked out in Troilus and Cressida and Othello. After the dear-bought triumph of Desdemona had settled the status of the Beloved, Shakespeare turned once more to the Promos theme.

XIX. THE TRAGEDY OF ANGELO.

In the meantime, however, Shakespeare's emotional attitude has changed. Othello has produced a mood of militant and passionate purity which was not quite contemplated in the original design. The Duke's scheme for purifying his realm ceases to be a mere detail of the plot, and arrests attention on its own account. Not only is it an inspiring enterprise in itself, but it symbolises Shakespeare's own longing to purify his mental world. To conceive such a heroic design merely in order to lay a trap for Promos seems out of all proportion.

Again, the character of fierce militant purity assumed by Promos is so attractive to Shakespeare in his present mood, that he begins to regret that it is only a hypocritical mask. If he were only what he seems, he would be the very man to put the Duke's scheme into execution. In the play we can see Shakespeare's sickening disgust at the deep-rooted vice of the city. Surely it would be a more splendid achievement to purify the land than to unmask and punish a villain.

Shakespeare hesitates. He is loth to abandon a scheme over which he has brooded intermittently for years, and which seems to promise sure success. Yet the new idea is finer, though more hazardous, and seems to call imperatively to be given a trial. Shakespeare decides to give Promos/

Promos a fair chance. He shall receive a new name, Angelo, and be endowed with a genuine enthusiasm for the purity he professes. He shall make a bona fide attempt to reform the realm, and Shakespeare's blessing shall be with him. If the Adversary can tempt him to his fall, the original scheme shall go forward, but if he stands firm, his victory will be so splendid as to make the loss of the old scheme of little account.

Angelo is therefore accepted by Shakespeare as his champion. He is not, however, his representative in the ordinary sense. Othello, while increasing Shakespeare's faith in goodness and purity, has also made him humble. The disasters of the play can all be traced to his former tolerance of comic baseness. His representative in Measure for Measure is therefore the Duke, who feels that his long toleration of his people's vice has unfitted him for Angelo's task. Angelo is rather a sort of ideal spiritual son, who expresses his present spirit without the handicap of his past record. According to the new scheme, then, the Duke, like Shakespeare, is not laying a trap for Angelo, but giving him a genuine commission to undertake a task for which he doubts his own fitness.

The Adversary accepts the challenge. He recognises that Angelo is to be credited with a passionate love of purity, and considered invulnerable to all ordinary sensual temptation, but/

but he nevertheless undertakes to bring about his downfall. His strategy is very subtle. It is directed to two objects. Firstly, the temptation must be extraordinary, and peculiarly appropriate to Angelo's temperament, and secondly, it must be such that Angelo cannot evade it by marriage. The original Cassandra fulfils neither of these conditions. The Adversary therefore replaces her by Isabella, who satisfies both.

In the first place, Isabella is a saint. Now in order to account for the fatal effect of this fact upon Angelo, it is not necessary to show that a saint must always be an irresistible temptation to a saint. Even if we question the intrinsic probability of the suggestion, it still retains an air of surprise, as if a masked battery had been opened upon an unguarded point of the defences. Whether the temptation be really appropriate or not, it is at least extraordinary, and has an exasperating appearance of plausibility. Shakespeare suffers the same sinking of heart as Macbeth felt when he learned that Macduff was not born of woman.

But I think there is a real appropriateness in the attack. It seizes upon a genuine weakness in Angelo's attitude to purity, and to sex in general. Angelo's feeling combines the crudity of early comedy with the intensity of tragedy. But the comic and the tragic resentment against the/

the irrationality of the sex attraction rest on different grounds. In comedy there is a hostility to the sex attraction as a whole. The king of Arragon, for instance, objects to women as tending to upset all attempts at leading a dignified life devoted to the pursuit of rational ideals. In sexual love there is an element which is neither comprehensible nor controllable. The most we can do is to keep it at a distance, and we cannot always do even that. As comedy matures, this hostility is overcome. The nature of woman is exalted to so high a pitch that to love her seems the most rational thing in the world. In the latest comedies the rational element in love entirely dominates the irrational, so that the sexual attraction as a whole is accepted with serene confidence and joy. The spirit gives direction to the flesh, and the flesh supplies energy and fixity to the spirit.

The coming of tragedy puts an end to this state of peace. The hostility to sex breaks out more violently than ever, but now it is directed not against love as a whole, but against the obtrusion into it of its irreducible, irrational element. The dislike of sexual impurity has become a passionate loathing. It is now not simply an offence against a rather vaguely conceived ideal of the heroic life, but a blasphemy against the sacred person of the Beloved. It is a corruption of the highest. But it can/

can only be felt by one who has had a personal vision of the glory of love.

Angelo has been conceived under the influence of the spirit of Othello, and so is a sincere convert to the religion of purity. He admires it more than anything else in the world. But since he has resolutely kept love at a distance he cannot feel towards it in the true tragic manner. He is therefore compelled to revert to the attitude of the early comic heroes, and regard his devotion to his ideal as an addition to his own personal perfection. But one of the main lessons taught by the comedies is that a morality founded upon the principle of self-perfection will break down if sufficient strain be put upon it. It will always collapse before the power of the sex attraction. Objective beauty can attain to a perfection which subjective beauty cannot. Angelo's position is therefore insecure. He is not, like Adonis, devoid of sexual feeling. It is because it is strong within him that he finds his glory in controlling it. Hitherto it has been amenable to discipline, but perhaps it has never been appropriately stirred.

We must notice that Shakespeare never thinks of the flesh as acting alone. Sex attraction is always selective, always based to some extent on a visible excellence in its object. Indiscriminate lust, since it does not lend itself to imaginative representation, is unknown in the plays. There/

There is a constant give and take between the flesh and the spirit, the flesh catching fire when the spirit finds its ideal embodied, and the spirit in its turn, after the flesh is roused, finding perfections in the object which are visible to itself alone. Accordingly, when Angelo finds his ideal of saintliness embodied in a beautiful woman, he realises that Fate has spoken. The flesh and the spirit have joined forces, and are together irresistible. Angelo himself bitterly recognises the Adversary's ingenuity in making his best quality the instrument of his destruction.

His situation is not in itself tragic. His whole scheme of life has been shattered, and his pride laid in the dust, but though to his own Miltonic soul this may seem tragic enough, it is scarcely so to the onlooker. If Angelo could have married Isabella his fate would have been merely comic. There are two facts, however, that make the position tragic.

One is that Angelo cannot marry Isabella. Apart from the fact that both Angelo and Isabella have the saintly temperament, to which marriage is almost as impure as lust, there is, I believe,a positive bar to marriage. In the play as we have it, Isabella is on the point of becoming a nun, but does not actually take the veil. I suggest, however, that/

that in the earlier version of the play, the Adversary made Isabella an actual nun. The idea is simpler, and harmonises with all that I assume to have been in Shakespeare's mind at the time. Afterwards, when he had decided to marry Isabella to the Duke, he modified his idea so that she never committed herself irretrievably. Angelo, therefore, had not only to abandon his ideals and humble his pride, but to burden his soul with mortal sin.

The other tragic fact is that the Duke's scheme for purifying his state has failed. Angelo's fall has made it impossible. The bitterness of this failure is felt throughout the play. On the one and only occasion when Shakespeare has been roused from his natural passivity to contemplate a constructive design for the benefit of his fellows, his plan has come to nothing. Apparently he is doomed for evermore to see his world seething with vice, and everyone taking it as a matter of course. The Adversary can afford to let the rest of the play run on as a comedy. He has done enough. The world is indeed little worse than we have always known it to be, but hope is gone.

That dream, then, is over. Let us go back to the play as we originally planned it, and carry it through.

XX. ISABELLA.

Angelo can now take his place once more in the original scheme of the play, but Shakespeare has not yet come to the end of his adventures. This time it is Isabella who proves refractory. In the original story Cassandra fulfilled two purposes. She tempted Angelo, and was in turn tempted by him. Her fall was needed to complete his. But Isabella is not Cassandra. She has been specially created to offer an extraordinary temptation to Angelo's unexpectedly extraordinary nature. Unfortunately for the plot, the very qualities which make her a temptation to Angelo make it impossible for her to be tempted by him.

At the first glance we might suppose that the attraction of Isabella for Angelo would be mutual. If Angelo is tempted by the saintly Isabella, why should not Isabella be tempted by the saintly Angelo. The circumstances, however, are different. When Angelo approaches Isabella, he is no longer a saint. On the contrary, he has become exactly the kind of sinner whom a saint would loathe. She would infinitely prefer a generous, impulsive worldling.

But apart from the difference of circumstances, I believe that Isabella's virtue would have been impregnable in any case, not because she is a saint, but because she has been invested by Shakespeare with the mantle of the Beloved. When we first see her, she is very much a saint.

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Her wish to have the discipline of the convent made more severe is a piece of moral bravado worthy of Angelo himself. But as the play progresses, the emphasis laid upon her saint-hood becomes more and more faint. The charm which Shake-speare's imagination has bestowed upon her for the subjugation of Angelo has had its effect upon himself. He sets her in the seat of the Beloved, with all the Beloved's qualities and immunities, and, in addition, that special halo of purity which is the distinctive mark of Shakespeare's spiritual life at this period.

Such being Isabella's nature, she is proof against any inward sexual corruption. Still less can we expect her chastity to yield to any outward pressure. Even the terrible choice between her chastity and her brother's life, which was too much for Cassandra, does not shake Isabella for an instant. And here again I must insist that she is acting, not as a saint, but as the successor of Viola and Desdemona. Accordingly, though the scene in which Claudio pleads for his life is very powerful, the original dramatic effect of the dilemma is lost. Isabella can see only one horn of it. Angelo cannot tempt her either from within or without.

Now Isabella's point-blank rejection of Angelo's solicitations is no doubt wholly admirable, but it places Shakespeare in a very awkward position. Isabella's fall is necessary to complete the case against Angelo, but she refuses/

refuses to fall. Shakespeare must therefore either abandon the whole design of the play, which he is very unwilling to do, or else - happy thought! - provide a substitute. He therefore creates Mariana in order that she may be sacrificed in place of Isabella.

This expedient may be the best available, but it is profoundly unsatisfactory. Besides being improbable, it involves the very sin which Isabella had refused to commit in her own person. To soften the guilt of the transaction Shakespeare invents Mariana's pre-contract with Angelo, and Angelo's mean repudiation of it. This retrospective blackening of Angelo's character seems quite gratuitous. Not only is it inconsistent with Angelo's reputation, but it reduces the Duke's noble scheme for the purification of the state to a petty trap to catch Angelo. Nor is all the guilt lifted from Mariana and her aiders and abettors. She has still to commit the same sin that Isabella so emphatically condemned in Claudio. Whether from the point of view of probability, consistency, or morality, the substitution of Mariana is a failure.

From this point the play goes to pieces. Angelo becomes an ordinary melodramatic villain, Isabella seems dazed by the transactions in which she is called to take part, and the Duke's plots are ridiculously artificial and over-elaborate. There are still gleams of genius in the/

the play, perhaps the most notable being Isabella's pleading for Angelo, and her testimony (let us forget about the pre-contract and Claudio's head) to the genuineness of Angelo's natural character. On the whole, however, the later portions of the play are little more than exhibitions of ingenious stage-craft, without enough imaginative energy behind them to give them life. Shakespeare arranges everything exactly according to his pleasure, while the Adversary looks on scornfully, never deigning to raise an interfering finger. When Isabella refuses to act according to plan the dramatic game ends, and thereafter Shakespeare merely moves about the pieces for his own amusement.

XXI. THE DUKE.

Evidently, then, the substitution of Mariana was a mistake, but what was the alternative? If Shakespeare had not paralysed the freedom of his characters, and constrained them to play their predestined parts, but had left them to their own will, what would have been the natural continuation of the play?

We might say that the Duke's obvious course was to declare himself at once, resume his authority, protect Claudio and Isabella, and disgrace Angelo. This course would certainly avoid the unpleasant Mariana compromise, but it would utterly ruin the play. The dramatic knot would be cut by the god in the car before it was fairly tied. The action of the play would be strangled at its birth.

But as soon as we consider the possibility of such an intervention, we see where the fundamental weakness of the play lies. The tragic spirit has entered into it, yet it remains under complete control. Prospero himself has not a more complete command of his surroundings. Now comedy may possibly endure a visible supervision, but tragedy cannot. So long, therefore, as the Duke stands safely out of the reach of tragedy, the position is absurd. The/

The Adversary is challenged, but not allowed to play his own game. Since, then, the intervention of the Duke will only make patent the existing weakness of the play, what is the alternative?

The Adversary is ready with his answer. If the freedom of the game is to be preserved, the Duke's immunity from tragedy must be withdrawn. The Adversary must be allowed to attack both his life and his soul. He may find that he cannot resume his authority at his pleasure, that an abdication of power may be irrevocable, and that it is easier to make a mistake in the character of a trustee than to repair the consequences of it. What if Angelo penetrates his disguise, gets him out of the way, and works his will upon Claudio and Isabella? What if he has obtained too firm a grasp of the reins of power to be dislodged from his seat, so that the Duke is compelled to look helplessly on at the ruin wrought by the devil he has raised? Perhaps this last possibility is the most terrible, and therefore favoured by the Adversary. Can Shakespeare shirk facing it? Can he continue playing Providence with complacent confidence, when one part of his design has been wrecked, and a sea of iniquity at which his soul shudders boils under him?

Shakespeare decides that he must give the Adversary his chance. Is it too late to recast the whole drama? Perhaps not, but it will certainly be awkward. The new conception will have to be worked out in a setting designed for/

for one quite different. Moreover, the conception has already been modified to an extent which is beginning to confuse the imagination. As much new wine has been poured into the old bottle as it will stand. On the whole it will be better to let Measure for Measure remain as it is, and consider in a new play the vision suggested by the Adversary of the possible consequences of misplaced trust and irrevocably abdicated power.

The attempt to embody the new conception is made in two plays, Timon of Athens and King Lear.

PART IV.

THE LATER TRAGEDIES.

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I. TIMON OF ATHENS.

Of these two plays, Timon of Athens, I think, was written first. This opinion, I am afraid, is unusual, but seems quite tenable. Bradley has pointed out Timon's close connection with Lear, and places it immediately after it. But if his judgment is correct, there can be no great improbability in supposing that it was written immediately before Lear, and under the same dramatic impulse. The commentators who wish to make it considerably later than Lear mostly base their opinion on general aesthetic grounds rather than on any precise evidence.

Again, I am supported by the authority of Mr E.K. Chambers in supposing that Timon of Athens is a substantially genuine, though unfinished work of Shakespeare. He accounts for the inferiority of the play as a whole and for the large number of halting and uninspiring passages in it, by supposing that Shakespeare's mood changed during the process of creation, so that he lost interest in the play, and did not revise the first draft of it. So far Mr Chambers' theory suits me admirably. But whereas he suggests that Shakespeare's change of mood was due to the fact that Timon was his last tragedy, and that the tragic cloud lifted before the play was finished, I rather believe that Shakespeare abandoned Timon because he found that King Lear would express the same fundamental idea/

idea much more adequately. Timon is not merely unsatisfactory because it is unfinished. It was left unfinished because it was already unsatisfactory. Let us consider the idea that Timon was meant to embody, and in what respect it fails to express itself.

We have supposed that Shakespeare's imagination has refused to accept the comic ending of Measure for Measure, and is exploring the possibilities of more natural anternatives. Of these the most arresting is that the Duke should find that he has parted with his power irrevocably to the wrong person. The theme to which Shakespeare's imagination has thus finally brought him has evidently a much more universal significance than the one from which he started. Indeed, it touches the fundamental tragedy of all free creation, the fact that its results can be neither foreseen, controlled, nor rectified. When a creator has bestowed independence and power upon his creatures, he has always to reckon with the possibility that it may be used against himself and all that he holds dear. When he gives them his love and confidence, he may find it misplaced and abused. Of course a dramatist, if he chooses, can always compel his imagination, at any given point, to submit to the control of his will, but by so doing he not only destroys the life of the game, but the real existence of good/

good and evil. Moreover, the moment the constraint is removed, the imagination takes its revenge in a violent reaction.

We have supposed, however, that in Measure for Measure the idea that finally emerged from Shakespeare's imagination was too much entangled with other irrelevant ideas to allow of his recasting the whole play in accordance with it. He therefore leaves Measure for Measure as it stands, and takes up the tale of Timon.

In Timon, the theme is expressed with perfect clearness. Shakespeare, in the character of Timon, imagines himself possessed of immense wealth, which he uses to create round him a world of love and happiness. As long as his wealth enables him to control the situation, the desire of his heart appears to be realised, but as soon as he has given away all that he has, and made his creatures independent of him, so that they have nothing more to hope or fear from him, they cast him off, and his whole world collapses. He sees its worthlessness, curses it bitterly, and renounces it.

But if Timon clearly expresses Shakespeare's idea, why did he throw it aside? In what respects did he find it unsatisfactory? I suggest the following.

In the first place, the plot is too short. It has/

has only one turning, and that is foreseen from the first. Not only is it too little varied to hold the mind by its own interest, but it cannot even supply a large enough framework to hold episodes together. Any play founded upon it must either be tediously spun out or loosely constructed. The one we have is both.

Again, the secondary Alcibiades theme has little external relevance to the main theme, and only a divided internal relevance. Alcibiades has rendered great services to Athens, which are repaid with gross ingratitude, and in this respect resembles the Duke and Timon. On the other hand, he has been entrusted with the power of the state, which he threatens to use for its destruction, thereby resembling Angelo and the false friends of Timon. The secondary theme therefore fails to engage Shakespeare's sympathies or fire his imagination.

Again, the story of Timon expresses Shakespeare's conception on a low plane. It all centres about money. It is only by some kind of symbolism that we can read any high idealism into Timon's generosity. Neither of the two motives which excite Shakespeare's soul, the love of woman, and the love of rule, appear in the play at all. Not even genuine friendship is in question./

question. Perhaps it is unfair to describe Timon's ideal as a life of feasting. He seizes every opportunity of promoting the happiness or relieving the distress of all about him. But his one way of doing so is to give them what he does not appear to value. Certainly his whole scheme of life is wrecked, but Shakespeare must have considered it a poor scheme, and can scarcely have felt that the depth of his tragedy visibly justified the violence of his curses.

The curses themselves, though they seem to have the weight of Shakespeare's spirit behind them, are not altogether relevant to Timon's position. He does indeed rail at the venality of the world, but he seems even more disgusted by its beastliness. Apparently Timon is speaking from more than his own experience. Loathing of the unpurged vice of Measure for Measure is finding an illegitimate vent for itself. Timon's curses are therefore too heavy for the play, and overbalance it.

Again, the game principle is not called into play. Evil gains too easy a victory. Good is hardly represented at all. That this was not Shakespeare's deliberate intention is shown by the stress he lays on Flavius, and by the half-hearted magnanimity/

magnanimity shown by Alcibiades at the end. But Flavius is a poor substitute for Isabella. Shakespeare cannot become really enthusiastic over him.

Finally, the play is always either too rational or too improbable. It never has that kind of inevitability which we feel when the imagination forces us to conclusions which are mysterious to our reason. It is either perfectly agreeable to our common sense, or plainly repugnant to it. That Timon should squander his money on ungrateful timeservers is commonplace enough. That he should afterwards be hurt and angry is also quite natural. But that he should carry his indignation to the lengths described in the play seems almost incredibly silly. The play never strikes deep enough to take us out of the plane of everyday thought. We never come under the spell of beauty.

Shakespeare therefore leaves Timon and passes to the kindred theme of <u>King Lear</u>, which possesses all the elements that <u>Timon</u> lacks. and others which Shakespeare does not yet foresee.

II. KING LEAR.

In King Lear, as in Timon of Athens, there are two themes, the main tragedy of Lear and his daughters, and the subsidiary tragedy of Gloster and his sons. But whereas in Timon the subject is related to the main-plot in a way that confuses the issue, in King Lear the two plots are not only interwoven externally with great skill, but reinforce one another internally. In Timon, the connection is given in the original sources, but in Lear each comes from a different source, so that in relating them to one another Shakespeare is not influenced by any suggestions already contained in his material.

Though the two themes of King Lear have been woven into a whole which has been universally acclaimed as one of Shakespeare's supreme masterpieces, the connection between them is not so close as would appear at first sight. King Lear has not the compact, organic texture of Othello. Indeed, its peculiar effect is largely due to the looseness of its texture. I therefore propose to split up the play into its two plots, and consider each separately before taking them in combination. In doing so, I think we shall be following in Shakespeare's footsteps.

To show that the two themes are separable, let

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us first consider how the Gloster plot affects the Lear plot. Firstly, Gloster helps Lear when he is cast out by his daughters. Kent, however, would have done all that was necessary. Secondly, Edmund reveals to Cornwall the news of the French army, which he has learned from his father. This also is unimportant. The news could have been easily revealed otherwise, or not revealed at all. Thirdly, Edmund causes jealousy between Goneril and Regan, and conspires with Goneril to murder her husband. This, again, is not vital. Goneril was quite capable of quarrelling with Regan and murdering her husband without help from anyone, or with the help of some other person than Edmund. Fourthly, the blinding of Gloster is the indirect cause of Cornwall's death. But his death might easily have happened otherwise, and is in any case of no great consequence. Fifthly, Edmund won the battle for the sisters. But the army was English, and would have won anyhow. Sixthly, Edgar revealed the plot against Albany's life. It might easily have come to light otherwise. Lastly, Edmund gave the order for Cordelia's death. But there seems to be no good reason why Edmund should have given such an order/

order at all. It would have come more appropriately from someone else. On the whole, therefore, the influence of the Gloster plot on the Lear plot is superficial, and might have been dispensed with.

The influence of the Lear plot on the Gloster plot is still slighter. Gloster is blinded by Cornwall for abetting Lear, but he might have been blinded by Edmund directly, as he is in the original story. Edmund's entanglement with Lear's daughters is purely episodical. He would have been killed in a duel by Edgar in any case.

So far as the technical fusion of the plots is concerned, therefore, the play resembles a physical mixture rather than a chemical compound. The elements can be separated without changing their nature. Of course their contiguity produces architectural and emotional effects which neither could produce separately, but in the meantime we shall not consider these. We shall try to follow the order of Shakespeare's thought, and reconstruct for ourselves the appeal which each theme in turn made to him.

III. GLOSTER AND HIS SONS.

I think that the Gloster theme caught Shakespeare's imagination first. The story, as originally adapted from Sidney's tale, would run thus. Gloster has two sons, the elder, Edgar, born in wedlock, and the younger, Edmund, in bastardy. Both are brought up with equal love, but Edmund poisons Gloster's mind to such an extent against Edgar that he threatens his life. Edgar escapes, leaving his father at the mercy of Edmund. Edmund blinds Gloster, casts him out helpless upon the world, and seizes his kingdom (the original of Gloster was a king). Gloster's misery is aggravated by the feeling that it is due to his own guilt, in which he includes mot only his cruelty to Edgar, but the adultery which produced Edmund. He tries to take his own life, but is rescued by Edgar, and nursed by him through his dark hour. The deaths of Edmund and Gloster, and the rehabilitation of Edgar, are later additions.

Now this is evidently another version of the same conception that we have already found in Measure for Measure and Timon of Athens, but the tragic consequences are drawn more unflinchingly than

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in the former, and the action is upon a much higher plane than in the latter. It is not now mere wealth that is in question, but life, love, power, and eyesight, all the things that are dearest to man.

Not only does the Gloster theme touch the major passions of the heart. It deals with them in a form particularly appropriate to Shakespeare's own problem. Of all human relations, that between parent and child affords the nearest parallel to that between the dramatist and his creatures. In some mysterious way the dramatist creates his characters, and is to some undetermined extent responsible for them, but he can neither prophesy nor control their actions. Angelo, who was to purify the state, becomes a villain, while Isabella, who was to succumb to temptation, refuses to fall, and becomes a saint. Shakespeare, who created them both, and feels that he ought to have known them, nevertheless allows himself to be deceived in them. He is therefore in almost exactly the same position with respect to these two children of his imagination, as Gloster with respect to the two children of his body. Gloster is therefore a much better representative of Shakespeare, at least so far as our present theme is concerned, than the Duke in Measure for Measure.

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In fact, this theme, which is fundamental for the dramatist, has now at last succeeded in finding an adequate expression. Let us see what Shakespeare makes of it.

In the Gloster theme we have not yet reached sheer brute tragedy. Some attempt is still made to keep the action within the bounds of rational probability. Indeed, I believe that Shakespeare has expended more thought here than on the Lear theme. His emotions are not so violently roused. so that he can still question the nightmare, and demand reasons. There is no grand battle with the Adversary, as in Othello. Edmund's plot is a very primitive affair compared with Iago's, and convinces Gloster of Edgar's guilt with almost ridiculous ease. Nevertheless, at least a show of resistance is made to the nightmare. The form of a plot is gone through. But Shakespeare's struggle is half-hearted. His confidence has been undermined in Measure for Measure and Timon, so that he is practically defeated before the contest begins.

Such mental energy as he can spare from feeling the tragedy, he spends, not so much in resisting it, as in trying to understand it. The theory expressed in the play itself is that Gloster's adultery is/

is the root cause of all his misfortunes. It seems fitting that Edmund, whom he cherished as the fruit of a pleasant and unrepented sin, should be the cause of his undoing. In Gloster himself this feeling of a righteous judgment might be too commonplace to arouse attention, but in the mouth of Edgar it is so arresting as to be almost shocking. Apparently Shakespeare himself assents to the theory.

Now if our analysis of Shakespeare's development is sound, Gloster's tragedy is a reflection of Shakespeare's own. Let us consider his attitude to his various types of character. We must first distinguish the major characters, towards whom he feels strongly, from the minor characters, towards whom he does not. Among the major characters we may distinguish three types, the children of love, the children of the nightmare, and his own representatives, projected into the drama from above, but subject to its conditions. Typical examples of these are Desdemona, Iago,and Othello. These divisions are not absolute, nor permanent. We have seen how Emilia, originally a minor character, attained majority through faith and love, and how Angelo fell from his position among the children of love, and became a child of fear, through his attack upon the Beloved.

Shakespeare/

Shakespeare now begins to draw distinctions among the children of love themselves. They may be children of legitimate or illegitimate love. This distinction is applied in the dramatic world somewhat after the following manner. A character born of a legitimate love is one created under the influence of an ideal to which the dramatist gives the approval of his whole mind, and to which he intends to adhere. Of such ideals, Shakespeare has had two, the heroic ideal of the Histories, which, at least in its original form, was destroyed by Comedy, and the feminine ideal of the later comedies and early tragedies. Illegitimate characters, on the other hand, are born under the influence of an irrational fascination to which the dramatist yields reluctantly, and with the hope that it may only be temporary. The type of such characters is Falstaff, the child of Comedy, whom Shakespeare loved after a fashion for a time, but always with the intention of ultimately renouncing him.

It is these illegitimate creatures of the dramatist's imagination that the Adversary turns to evil. They are not in themselves necessarily bad, but they come from the dark parts of the mind, not mysterious with the beauty that transcends reason, but with the murkiness of the unreclaimed regions

of Chaos and old Night. They are therefore unclosed gates through which the Adversary can enter. Falstaff is merely lawless, but his descendants, Claudius, Iago, and Edmund, have fallen under the power of the nightmare and become positively evil.

It is noticeable that their resemblance to their ancestor increases as they recede from him. Claudius resembles Falstaff in little but his beastliness, Iago has also his wit, but Edmund has recaptured something of his gay charm. His tirade against legitimacy is a little reminiscent of Falstaff's discourse upon honour, though of course it has an underlying venom which is foreign to Falstaff. Moreover, his magical "Yet Edmund was beloved" seems to transcend the immediate reference to Goneril and Regan, and give us a glimpse of a mood of wistful regret, on the part of Shakespeare himself for the happy irresponsible days of Comedy. He seems to be thinking how sad it is that things so beautiful and pleasant, and even lovable, should be turned to virulent evil.

But this is not the dominant mood of this section of the play. Gloster's complacent reminiscences of his adultery at the beginning of the play are apparently/

apparently felt by Shakespeare to receive their fitting comment in Edgar's ruthless speech to Edmund at the end. He sometimes feels it hard that the pleasant vices of Comedy should be paid for by the cruel miseries of Tragedy, but in the depths of his soul he perceives that it is in the nature of things that it should be so. His prevailing mood is therefore one of understanding pity and conscience-stricken resignation, of emotion tempered by moral philosophy.

Why, then, did Shakespeare not make his tragedy out of this theme alone?

In the first place, the plot, like that of Timon, is too short. Of course, it could easily have been lengthened by elaborating the details of Edmund's designs against Edgar, and it might be maintained that such an elaboration is much needed, since in the play as it stands these are sketchy and improbable. In Shakespeare's present mood, however, such an expedient makes no appeal to him. He has had experience of the power of the nightmare, and has no confidence in his ability to throw it off. The same battle has already been fought and lost in Othello. He is therefore willing to accept Edmund's scheme as sound, without troubling himself to test every joint in it. At present he is not/

not interested in the mechanism of villainy, but in its nature and origin. To lengthen the plot by elaborating its machinery would therefore destroy the balance of the play as he conceives it.

Again, the tragedy is too calm. Philosophic resignation is certainly admirable in its own place, but in tragedy it strikes at the root of the game. Both Gloster and Edgar take their misfortunes lying down. Edgar in particular accepts them in a cheerful, matter of fact spirit that seems to make sympathy unnecessary. No one shows temper, or passion of any kind. Even Edmund is possessed by no active devil. His maxim seems to be that in the absence of any special compelling motive one may as well pursue one's own advantage. The whole conception. in short, lacks steam.

The root of the trouble is, I think, that Shakespeare does not really love Edgar. He approves of him and respects him, but his heart does not really go out to him. It is difficult to say exactly what is wrong. Edgar does all the right things. He is honest, open, generous, and courageous. His tender care of his father in his blindness is admirable. But he somehow lacks beauty. Perhaps he is too simple, rational, and comprehensible, so/

so that Shakespeare understands him too easily to have any mystic enthusiasm about him. But I think it is unnecessary to criticise his qualities. His real offence is that he occupies a position in the scheme of the play which can be properly filled only by a woman. In Shakespeare's imagination it is only woman that can be the object of supreme love. The ideal man has not beenfound, but the ideal woman has. Lacking the powerful fire of the feminine ideal, therefore, the Gloster theme is by itself inert and unreal. But it contains too much of Shakespeare's genuine spirit to be simply discarded, like Timon. It still remains in his mind as something to be used when the proper opportunity arises.

IV. LEAR AND HIS DAUGHTERS.

In the theme of King Lear and his daughters Shakespeare finds all that was left out in the Gloster theme. It is again founded on the relation between parent and child, but the substitution of daughters for sons changes its whole emotional aspect. The passion of love is aroused, with fear, rage, and all the other passions that attend upon it.

The nightmare gets swiftly to work. There is no long preparation for its attack as there was in Othello. Indeed Shakespeare almost seems to rush forward to meet it. The opening scene plunges us into the midst of tragedy with unexampled abruptness. To readers coming fresh to the play, this lack of preparation is somewhat upsetting. They find it hard to believe that a really great drama can follow so improbable and even silly an opening. Lear's folly seems to place him beyond the bounds of all rational sympathy. But to Shakespeare himself the opening does not come without preparation. The spadework of the Adversary was all done in Measure for Measure, Timon, and the tragedy of Gloster. The opening scene of Lear is to him almost like the synopsis of previous chapters in a serial story. His previous/

previous tragic experiences make him willing to take his own folly for granted, to admit that he may be deceived in both his friends and his enemies, and that he is quite capable of stripping himself for the benefit of the ungrateful. He therefore begins the play by stating bluntly and concisely the position to which the Adversary has driven him, and then proceeds to imagine the consequences.

Still less than in the Gloster theme does he try to resist the attack of the Adversary. He simply defies him to do his worst. Neither Lear, Kent, nor Cordelia, makes the slightest concession to common sense. They provoke where it would be wiser to conciliate, and rejoice in the rough answer that increaseth wrath. Prudence is not counted among the virtues. Only love and truth are recognised.

But though Shakespeare takes no effective steps to check the Adversary, he is only too ready to rail at him. He retreats like an angry dog before the advances of a stranger, barking and snarling at every step he takes. Lear and Kent are both masters of invective. Lear's curses are perhaps less intellectually ingenious than Timon's, but they have more body behind them. The fool can hit hard in his own way, and even Cordelia can strike smartly with her tongue. Throughout

Lear's/

Lear's section of the play, at least until he goes mad, the general atmosphere is one of anger. Nothing is further from anyone's mind than resignation. Lear is frequently exasperated at his own folly, but he has no thought of moral self-reproach.

What does this irascibility mean? In the play it is attributed, so far as Lear himself is concerned, to the impatient irritability of old age. The same explanation may apply to Kent, but Gloster is also old, and is without this trait. Perhaps the idea is that when old age becomes feeble, it is tired and submissive, but while it still retains its vitality, it is headstrong and choleric, especially when it has not been accustomed to opposition.

Assuming that this is true of Lear and Gloster, how does it apply to Shakespeare himself? Can we suppose that Shakespeare at this time felt his age, or is the age of Lear and Gloster only dramatic? Of course the question does not concern Shakespeare's bodily age, but his dramatic age, that is to say the age of his mental world. Now we are so accustomed to think of <u>King Lear</u> as belonging to Shakespeare's prime, that we are apt to forget that it is a fairly late play. It almost certainly belongs to his last quarter. And perhaps he thought he was nearer the end of his dramatic life than he was. It may be that

at/

at this time Shakespeare was beginning to feel that he could not stand the strain of dramatic creation much longer. The spiritual effort involved in writing Othello must have been tremendous and when, after emerging triumphantly from this terrible ordeal, he attempted to relax his energies a little in straightforward drama, he found himself hopelessly entangled in the treacherous morass of Measure for Measure and the stony wilderness of Timon of Athens. He may well have felt that the world of his creation was growing too big for him, or that his hand was becoming too feeble to cope with it.

Supposing, then, that the old age of Lear and Gloster is not simply a dramatic accident, but really significant, why does it express itself in such diverse forms? I suggest that in the Gloster theme, where Shakespeare's feelings were not so deeply moved, he felt that his loss of control over his world was due to an ancient, incurable vice in his own nature, and that it was accordingly fitting that he should abandon his kingdom. On the other hand, when the beloved Cordelia appears in his world, and he sees her involved in the general ruin, he is filled with helpless rage, and curses the whole constitution of the dramatic world because it gives the Adversary such power over her. Moreover, he is so intensely anxious to save her/

save her that he cannot believe that he himself can have any share in bringing about her destruction. It is all the work of his mortal enemy, who has now become too strong for him.

For the same reason, moral distinctions are more absolute in the Lear section than in the Gloster section. The children of light are sharply separated from the children of the nightmare. In spite of the fact that Cordelia contributes to the tragedy and Edgar does not, Shakespeare has none of that lukewarmness towards Cordelia that he has towards Edgar. The villainies of the sisters are certainly not more serious than those of Edmund, yet for them Shakespeare feels no shadow of that almost tolerant understanding with which he regards Edmund. They are black as night, without one redeeming feature. In Regan especially there is an impatient hunger for cruelty that is beyond anything even in Iago. The singleminded simplicity with which the characters are painted either pure white or dead black is apt to seem childish unless we appreciate Shakespeare's mood. He feels that he is receiving the final triumphant attack by the Adversary upon the dramatic life of himself and his Beloved, and in this last Twilight of the Gods, the one distinction that matters to him is that between friend and foe.

V. LEAR'S MADNESS.

The climax of the Lear theme is Lear's madness. It is not the end of the original story upon which Shakespeare was working, but it makes necessary a new turn in Shakespeare's conception which he had not foreseen.

I do not think it is generally realised what a strange thing Lear's madness is. The discussion of it usually turns on the question whether it was well observed by Shakespeare or not. But with Shakespeare observation is a secondary process. He was certainly an accurate observer, but he observed, so to speak, absent-mindedly. In imagining his characters he relies primarily not upon external observation, but upon internal sympathy. Especially is this so when he is imagining his own representative in the play. In considering Lear's madness, therefore, we do not ask first: "Upon what observations was Shakespeare's representation founded?" but: "How did Shakespeare see Lear's madness from the point of view of Lear himself?" Madness, in its reality, is the vision of the madman, not of the observer. Shakespeare represented madness accurately because he had a true vision of what it must be like to feel mad.

What, then, was Shakespeare's view of madness?

Apparently/

Apparently it was nothing else than what the Adversary has been threatening, that is to say, the break-up of the mental world. It is no intellectual feat for Shakespeare to imagine madness. His main concern is to avoid experiencing it. What is happening to him is only too plain. His world is becoming too large and too unruly to be effectively handled. Nothing but supreme beauty can make so huge a world intelligible. Beauty, however, is being steadily driven out by the horrors of Hell. Cruelty, sensuality, brutish beastliness is everywhere rampant. Chaos is returning to the dramatic world, and chaos in the world is madness in the dramatist.

Lear feels madness threatening him almost from the beginning of the play. The fool does him no good. Perhaps I am too fanciful, but I think there is something uncanny about the fool. He is certainly real. His existence is recognized by others than Lear. But I can hardly think that he is quite human. His sudden and unnoticed disappearance after he has served his purpose is strange. One might almost think that if the conditions of the stage had been less matter of fact, the fool might have been represented as an externalisation of Lear's reflections on his own folly, a biting voice continually in his ear, reminding him of his lost Cordelia, his lost power/

power, and the trouble still in store. While he is sane, the deriding voice never leaves him. When he is mad, it becomes unnecessary.

Gradually all the familiar landmarks of his world disappear. His daughters' faces, which he had loved from their infancy, become devilish. He has cut himself off from Cordelia. All his friends have faded away, and he is left alone with the fool - and who is he? Then the elements seem to go crazy. The wreck of the world seems visibly in progress. Finally, the image of madness itself confronts him from the hovel. Nothing intelligible remains in the world. Chaos has arrived.

Now what are we to suppose about Shakespeare himself? Is Lear's madness in any sense a reflection of his? There is one thing that suggests that it is. Lear in his ravings seems to leave his own play, and wander into Measure for Measure, which was the chief source of all the trouble. He throws off the trammels of dramatic relevance, and mourns at large over the sin/

sin and misery of the world. It would thus seem that a glimpse of choas had appeared in the dramatist's own mind.

But this does not last. The later portions of Lear's madness are his own. Shakespeare has no part in them. Their whole tone changes. Instead of the unregulated lyrical utterances of the dramatist's mind, we have the meaningless babble of insanity.

The consequences of this change are important. When Lear becomes really mad, his fundamental identity with Shakespeare ceases. Shakespeare may accompany him to the edge of the abyss, and even descend a little way over the rim, but he cannot plunge with him into the depths, otherwise the Shakespearean drama would have come to an abrupt end. From this point, therefore, Lear becomes objective. For the first time Shakespeare really sees him. Hitherto he has seen the play through him.

And now one of those sea-changes takes place which make the drama a living and incalculable thing. Lear as seen by Shakespeare directly is a different being from Lear as seen by himself. His irritable folly, which the fool has thrown in his teeth so bitterly, becomes insignificant in comparison with his infinitely loving heart. The same thing happens to Shakespeare now that happened before in the case of Othello. Lear obtains a stronger hold/

hold upon his affection than Cordelia herself. He has borne the brunt of the battle, and been crushed by it. He becomes an object of miraculous beauty, as pathetic as Othello's was sublime. Even when he recovers his sanity, he retains complete objectivity. Shakespeare sympathises profoundly with him, but does not resume his original identity with him.

The change in Lear produces a complete change of mood in Shakespeare, which is reflected in the play. The feeling of anger dies away, and is replaced by one which is difficult to describe. It is something between wonder and awe. The agony of the world has produced something strange and sacred. The violence of the nightmare seems suddenly rebuked. Goneril and Regan are as wicked as ever, but the power of Hell no longer shines through their eyes. Stripped of the terrors of night, they appear in the hush of the solemn new dawn as insignificant. The fool has vanished. He might mock at Lear while Lear was still Shakespeare, but he must not mock the new Lear who has been admitted to the holy place where the Beloved also dwells. The Adversary has still power to grieve, but not to terrify. We feel that even he stands amazed at the new miracle, and does not know whether his weapons are going to be destructive or creative.

VI. THE COMBINED PLAY.

The Lear theme is clearly tremendous. Why, then, we may ask once more, did Shakespeare not make his tragedy out of this theme alone?

In the first place, we answer, as before, that it is too short. It rushes too swiftly to its climax. And as in the case of the Gloster theme, but for a different reason, it will not stand much elaboration. Tempestuous speed is of the essence of the conception. The irascible mood of the play makes us chafe at all delays. The vivid primary colours in which the characters are painted are meant to strike the imagination while it is hot. To spin out the theme by slackening its fury would ruin its peculiar effect.

Again, to maintain the whole play without interruption at the pitch of emotional intensity necessary for the Lear theme would be fatiguing. The high lights must be relieved by quieter patvhes, but without sacrificing the homogeneousness of the whole.

Again, the abrupt change in Lear and in the tone of the play will dislocate its structure unless it is held together by a steady background. Moreover, at the crisis of the action, the hero becomes a non-combatant. Is his position to remain vacant, or if not, who must take it,/

it? Not Cordelia. In comedy it might be possible, but in tragedy the battle is fought for the Beloved, not by her. Kent seems too much of a born follower. Albany might do, but his connection with Goneril is against him. Apparently some infusion of new blood is wanted.

Now, although I have supposed that the Gloster theme appealed to Shakespeare's mind before the Lear theme, I believe that for a time both were working in his imagination simultaneously, but in separate compartments. I do not suppose that they were absolutely shut off from one another. I dare say that while the angry mood of Lear lasted, the Gloster theme was driven into the background. But we have noticed that when Lear became mad, the partitions between the various dramatic worlds in Shakespeare's mind seemed to lose their impenetrability. Perhaps it was at this period that the two themes began to overflow into one another. However this may be, their union took place somehow. They could scarcely remain long together in Shakespeare's mind before he felt how well fitted each was to supplement the other. Both try to express the same idea, and each has what the other lacks. The Gloster theme supplies thought and steadiness to the combination, while the Lear theme supplies fire.

The Lear motive naturally comes uppermost. Emotionally, it is by far the stronger. The Gloster motive/

motive is therefore made structurally subordinate. Gloster loses his kingship, and becomes merely one of Lear's earls, and what is more serious, he loses the position of hero, without quite acquiring any other. When he was supreme in his own dramatic kingdom, he was the main window through which Shakespeare saw the play. He thus had the kind of reality which a person has to himself, not the kind of reality possessed by the person whom one loves or fears. That is to say, his reality is subjective, not objective. But when the two themes are united, Lear becomes the principal hero. so that Gloster loses most of this kind of reality. On the other hand, he never quite acquires the objective reality of Edgar and Edmund, who were conceived objectively from the first. He has therefore neither the clearness of a person seen directly, nor the intimacy of a person with whom we identify ourselves. This, I think, accounts for Bradley's feeling that Gloster's character is neither very interesting nor very distinctive, that he seems designed to fill a necessary place in the scheme of the play without being given a genuine individuality.

Further, since we do not now enter vividly into Gloster's love and fear, both Edgar's bright halo and Edmund's dark one lose most of their glow. Probably the emotional/

emotional light which played over them was never so strong as that which flames round the daughters of Lear, but it is now feebler than ever. Until Lear becomes mad, therefore, the Gloster motive is both formally and emotionally secondary to the Lear motive.

For some time the two themes scarcely touch one another, each pursuing its own independent course. Probably the foundations of each had been laid so firmly in Shakespeare's imagination, that it was difficult to make any substantial alteration in them. The effect is curious. The mind is a little bewildered by the lack of organic connection, but at the same time the similarity between the themes is so remarkable that it produces a sort of architectural or musical effect, like the two towers on the front of Notre Dame, or like a canon where the lower part follows the theme of the higher part a bar behind. Or it is like hearing the same fact established by the testimony of two independent witnesses.

Still, I think too much importance has been given to the artistic effect of this parallel action. The results of the commingling of the two themes seem to me much more remarkable. The catastrophes in both worlds occur almost simultaneously, and each is precipitated by characters belonging to the other. The blinding of Gloster/

Gloster, which in the original story was the work of Edmund, is transferred to Cornwall and Regan, while Lear, after being brought to the brink of madness by his daughters, receives the last push, which sends him over the edge, from Edgar.

In Gloster's case, the change is clearly appropriate. Edmund has his own style of cool villainy, which prepares the ground for the crime against his father, but the bestial brutality of the act itself was beyond him. It requires the hot lust of cruelty peculiar to the domain of Lear. It is natural that this incursion of alien wild beasts into the quieter Gloster world whould be a violent shock to its inhabitants, and provoke an immediate retaliation. The attack of Gloster's servant upon Cornwall is one of Shakespeare's miracles. It not only gives an unmistakable thrill of spontaneity, but has an important influence on the plot. By removing Cornwall, it prepares the way for Edmund's disastrous entry into the Lear world.

The appropriateness of Edgar's effect on Lear is less obvious, but even more important. We have noticed what a strange thing the madness of a dramatic hero must be from the point of view of the dramatist. To imagine his hero mad, the dramatist must imagine himself mad, that is to say, he must have a vision of his mental world breaking/

breaking up into confusion. We have seen that in some of Lear's mad speeches the partitions in Shakespeare's mind which separate one play from another do in fact seem to crack a little, causing some confusion of dramatic worlds. Now it may be that madness is not only the cause of this mingling of worlds, but the effect of it. When two plays have been conceived separately upon different imaginative foundations, and are then combined into one, the denizens of each will be more or less bewildered until they have made the necessary mental adjustments. For Lear this adjustment is specially difficult. He is by far the most emotional being in an emotional world. He intimately understands this world, whether through love, hate, or fear. But the cool Gloster world, the region of thought and contrivance, is quite alien to him. When, therefore, he comes in contact with Edgar, who is perhaps the most characteristic representative of the Gloster spirit, he feels himself in the presence of something new. At first he tries to bring Edgar into his own scheme. It must be his daughters that have brought him to this pass. But Edgar will not be assimilated. The madness he tries to depict has no emotional core. It is elaborate and artificial, the product of intellectual design. After his serving-man speech, in which he is too clever to be natural, Lear's mind feels his influence, and takes a new turn. He begins/

begins to think of things in general. It is significant, I think, that in this new mood he hails Edgar as a philosopher, and seeks to learn from him. Apparently it is the conflict between this new speculative impulse and his headlong emotionalism, which finally breaks up his mind.

I suggest, moreover, that this conflict in Lear's mind reflects an analogous one in Shakespeare's own. Lear's madness is not to be regarded as simply a calamity to Lear. It has an intrinsic importance of its own. There is perhaps more spiritual energy in the mad speeches than in any other part of the play. Maeterlinck thinks that Lear is the greatest of all Shakespeare's tragedies because Lear's madness gives an opportunity for unrestrained lyricism which is inappropriate to sane speech. Whether this explanation is correct or not, it at least testifies to the enormous importance of the mad speeches. My suggestion is that their unique effect is due to the sudden introduction of general scientific reflection into an emotional storm which already fills the soul, and that this again is due to the fusion of the Gloster and the Lear worlds, which deal with the same conception in different moods.

The last result of the combination of the two themes is the invasion of the Lear world by Edmund. This is not a mere dramaturgic trick. It comes about in a manner/

manner which is worth examining. We have seen that Lear's collapse is followed by the reduction of Goneril and Regan to human dimensions. They are no longer seen through Lear's terrorstricken eyes. Their wickedness remains, but their daemonic power is gone. So far as Lear's own separate tragedy is concerned, he has no more to fear from his daughters. Similarly Gloster has also accomplished his destiny within his own play, and has no more to fear from Edmund. But the fusion of the two worlds produces new terrors. Edmund was not created as a nightmare vision to frighten Lear, so that Lear's collapse does not affect him. He rather becomes by comparison more prominent than ever. In the calm which follows Lear's emotional tempest his cold-blooded methods become formidably appropriate. Edmund therefore becomes the captain of all the forces of evil in the combined play. He attacks Lear's world in the spirit of an uncomprehending alien, and destroys without either hate or pity. His order for the death of Cordelia is almost casual, and his delay in reprieving her is apparently due to sheer absent-mindedness. Against such a foe the simple minded Lear folk are defenceless, now that they can no longer sweep him away by sheer emotional vehemence.

Cordelia's death has been a stumbling block to many/

many Shakespeareans. Even Bradley thinks it an artistic mistake. It seems so gratuitous. I dare say it would have been out of place in its own separate play. Lear's madness would have sufficiently slaked the Adversary's impulse to destroy. But in the combined play we have two waves of fear, the first of intimate, hateful, comprehensible evil, like that of a devil of the Middle Ages, and the second of a cold, alien, indifferent destructiveness, touched with the scientific chill. The first wave spends itself in the separate Lear play, and the second in the combined. I think it is the double wave rather than the double plot which makes the play seems cosmic. Without the second wave it would lose its unique distinction, and it is the death of Cordelia which displays the power of the second wave.

Edmund is irresistible in the Lear world, but he has to meet his destiny in his own. Edgar has come to the forefront of the play from the same cause as Edmund, so that they meet on equal terms. What, then, gives Edgar the victory? Why does the wave of destruction stop short? One reason is that Shakespeare does not love Edgar. He only respects him. No one remains to be destroyed whom Shakespeare really loves. Edmund's work is done, and he/

he may as well die. Again, Shakespeare apparently believed that when the protection of the Adversary is withdrawn. and good and evil meet on level ground. the consciousness of a good cause is sufficient to decide the issue. Lastly, the death of Edmund belongs to the ethical scheme of the Gloster play. The curse of the pleasant adultery, lights first upon Edgar, then upon Gloster, and lastly upon Edmund. Edgar, who is least concerned, naturally comes off best. After Edgar has given Edmund his death blow, they discuss the whole matter dispassionately and amicably. Then Lear enters with Cordelia in his arms, and everything else becomes insignificant.

VII. ALBANY.

Before we leave King Lear, one point remains to be dealt with. We have seen that when Lear goes completely mad, the play is left without a hero. Gloster was originally the hero in his own play, but becomes subordinate to Lear when the plays are combined. The other persons of the play are objectively conceived, either as angels, devils, or minor characters. Accordingly, when Shakespeare can no longer identify himself with Lear, he is for the moment without a personal representative in the drama. He thus sees the play altogether from the outside, not, as he usually does, partly from the outside and partly from the inside.

Then a miracle happens, but so unobtrusively, and so late in the play, that it is apt to escape notice. Albany wakes up, and finds a soul. During the earlier part of the play he is decidedly a minor character, much less important than even Oswald. But after the catastrophes of the third act, some of the pity which Shakespeare feels for Lear and Gloster, enters into him. and rouses his soul to activity. Not being one of the demons who afflicted Lear, he does not share in their collapse. Now that Goneril has ceased to be a Gorgon, and has been degraded/

degraded into a common adulteress and poisoner, he can stand up against her, and even face Edmund himself. Little by little, he gathers all the threads of the play into his own hands. When it ends, he is undoubtedly the centre of it.

The remarkable thing is that he performs no definite act to justify his position. It is not what he does that counts. His distinction is that he sees and feels as Shakespeare does. In his indignation at Gloster's blinding, his denunciation of Goneril, his pity for Lear and Cordelia, his indecision of feeling with respect to the French army, and his challenge to Edmund, he has Shakespeare behind him. When he dismisses the news of Edmund's death with the contemptuous "That's but a trifle here", he speaks with the authoritative voice of Shakespeare's representative. He alone rises above all personal considerations and sees the situation as a whole. His reluctance to take up the reins of government is not, I think, to be considered as a sign of weakness. It is partly a mark of good faith, but chiefly a reflection of Shakespeare's weariness after the terrible strain of the play.

Shakespeare's choice of Albany as his representative/

representative may be due merely to the fact that he was the only neutral character of any importance left in the play. But I think there is an intrinsic appropriateness in the selection. Albany has a tragedy of his own, which, though less devastating, has something in common with those of Gloster and Lear. Consider his position. When the play opens, he loves Goneril, who has betrayed her true nature to no one. We are not told under what mask she had been in the habit of appearing. and she is so clearly a nightmare creation that it is perhaps not very profitable to inquire, but somehow we have the impression that she was not a thoroughpaced hypocrite like Regan. Possibly while she had no power for evil, her resolute unbending spirit had the same natural attraction for Albany that Angelo had for the Duke, the attraction of what looks, to an easy complex nature, like militant purity. At any rate, he admires her, surrenders his will to her, allows her to work untold mischief, and at last, when he sees her as she is, and tries to undo what she has done, finds that he is too late.

Evidently we have here another expression of the familiar theme of this period. But there is a difference of emphasis. The motive of ingratitude has fallen into the background. Albany has given his heart to Goneril, but/

but not his kingdom. On the contrary, he has received a kingdom from her. Again though he is certainly grieved and disappointed at the change he sees in her, his indignation is mainly impersonal. He is much more concerned about her cruelty to Lear than her treachery to himself. He is full of pity and indignation for the misery caused by those with whom he is associated, horrified at finding that he has been conniving at it, anxious to make it clear that his complicity has been unwitting, and resolute to repair, as far as possible the mischief that has been done, though, as it turns out, the one calamity which it was in his power to avert, the death of Cordelia, eludes his vigilance. In short, in Albany's tragedy, the emphasis is laid, not on the consequences to himself of a foolish self-surrender, but on its final effect upon the world at large.

This change corresponds exactly to the change in Shakespeare's own feeling. In the first half of the play, where he himself, as Gloster and Lear, bears the brunt of the tragedy, he can m eet it with remorseful acquiescence or burning indignation, but in the second half. where he is looking on helplessly at the agony of three helpless old men and a young girl. he feels an intolerable pity mingled with an uneasy self-reproach. After all, protest as/

as he may the blamelessness of his intentions, he cannot get rid of all responsibility for what has happened. Certainly it was not by his will that evil became rampant. Still, he stood by and saw the mischief done. Useless to say that he could not have prevented it. He had prevented it before in Measure for Measure. True, he had ruined the play. The Adversary had derided its lifelessness. But what of that? He had at least restrained Angelo and shielded Isabella. Why had he not also shielded Lear and Cordelia, letting the Adversary scoff as he pleased?

Indeed, Shakespeare's responsibility is much deeper than Albany's. He created the world in which all this evil was brewed. Had he any right to create living characters, and then allow them to endure such torments as Lear and Gloster suffered? Granted that King Lear is a magnificent play, perhaps his most tremendous creative effort. Was that a sufficient answer to Gloster's bitter cry: "As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods; they kill us for their sport" ? No! He must exert the power he has always had to put an end to this torture. The evil already done cannot be repaired, but let there be no more of it. To create free beings is to provide more victims for the Adversary. Let him therefore tidy up the present play, and then let the whole dramatic world fall/

fall and cease. And yet - can this be really the end?

Albany certainly has seemed resolved to retire from the scene altogether, but his last words (I follow the Quarto in attributing the last four lines of the play to him) seem to indicate a wavering of purpose. The meaning of the lines is not perfectly clear, but he seems to begin wondering whether he is not being unduly carried away by his present grief. When he thinks coolly over the matter he may decide to keep his kingdom after all. Perhaps the worst is past. Perhaps the younger generation will never be called upon to suffer so much or so long as the elder. In short, he knows in his heart that his decision to resign his power is not serious. I notice that Charles Lamb in his Tales states without comment that Albany ascended the throne.

Now I take it that Shakespeare's attitude is similar to Albany's, but far more intelligible. Crushed by the weight of the play's misery, he feels that dramatic creation is sheer cruelty. He recoils from the terrible responsibility which it involves. He may even persuade himself that he means to abandon it. But at the bottom of his heart he knows better. Perhaps it would be faint-hearted to give up so soon. Perhaps he has passed through the darkest hour which comes before the dawn. Perhaps by the aid of all his bitter experience he may find some combination/

combination of art and freedom which may defy the criticisms of the Adversary.

But behind all such reasons a dark fear makes itself felt. Whether creation be good or evil, perhaps he cannot give it up. Perhaps he cannot by any effort of will get rid of his nightmares. Perhaps his imagination will work on in spite of him, and all the more virulently when he attempts to suppress it.

Worse still, perhaps he does not really wish to abandon the drama, even though creation be evil. Perhaps the lust of creation is so strong in him that he must satisfy it regardless of consequences. Can he declare on soul and conscience that he would not, with his eyes open, create another King Lear rather than not create at all? He is not sure that he can. Indeed, he had better at once face the plain fact that King Lear with all its agony has been at bottom a joy to him, as Measure for Measure was not. Gloster's taunt is justified. He does find sport in killing his creatures. And yet he undoubtedly feels acute pity for them. What curse is upon him that he is compelled to kill those whom he loves? Has the Adversary at last laid his evil hand upon his soul?

But in raising this question, we have left the mood of King Lear, and entered upon the mood of Macbeth.

VIII. MACBETH.

In King Lear both Albany and Shakespeare are troubled by a sense of responsibility for all the trouble they have allowed to happen, and they are both careful to maintain that they are clear of all direct personal guilt. Still, the step from passive to active guilt is short, and now that Shakespeare's eyes are opened to the effect of his creative processes, he is not certain that he might not be persuaded, in certain circumstances, to take it. His imagination begins to persecute him with visions in which he himself is a deliberate, personal criminal, ready to inflict misery and death on innocent persons to gratify his own lust for power.

Suppose, for instance, that Albany's circumstances had been somewhat different. Suppose that Goneril, instead of throwing him over for Edmund, had loved him as truly as he loved her. Suppose that instead of abusing Lear herself, she had urged him to do so. Would he have consented? Why not? Had he not, through love and awe of his wife, stood by while she drove her father to madness? Was there so much difference between letting her do it and doing it himself? Was it not, indeed, the manlier course to take the responsibility on his own head? Moreover, since he felt/

felt himself the one man born to rule his distracted country, did he not at heart wish to clear the old man out of the way?

But such reflections as these do not reconcile Albany, or Shakespeare through Albany, to the pit which lies in front of him. They merely show him how appallingly near to it he has come. There is nothing in the world he desires less than to plunge into the abyss, but the thought of it fascinates him. His imagination is haunted by visions in which he is pushed over the brink.

The Albany vision, however, has already been fixed by King Lear. As in the case of Measure for Measure, any variation of the old play involving a new idea, must be recreated in a new setting. Albany, Lear, and Goneril must be reincarnated in a new world. Shakespeare's imagination therefore casts itself loose from the world of King Lear, and gropes about for a fresh battle-field. Finally it lights upon the stories of Donwald and Macbeth in Holinshed, sees in them the material for its purpose, and sets to work upon them. Immediately Shakespeare falls into the grip of the most devilish nightmare that had ever assailed him.

In one sense, Macbeth is the least dramatic of Shakespeare's great plays. In most of these, the original/

original personal dream is almost completely lost in the impersonal drama. In Macbeth, however, the dream element persists in as pure a form as the practical necessities of stage production will allow. All the other characters, with possible reservations in the case of Lady Macbeth, are created entirely with reference to Macbeth. They are part of his nightmare. They have less individual interest on their own account than the characters of any other great Shakespearean play. Their actions are governed by one single rule. They invariably do whatever Macbeth fears most. If they spare him for a moment it is only to play cat and mouse with him.

Yet though the action of the play is governed so exactly by his fears, he cannot forecast it. Everything that happens comes as shock to him, though after it has happened he can see that it is just what he might have expected from the malignity of the Adversary. Though in his heart he has a profound expectation of approaching doom, his hopes rise at every prospect of escape, and he cannot help making a desperate dash for freedom and safety. His intense fear and loathing of the part he has to play make him struggle to the last against his manifest destiny. After all, miracles have happened in other plays. One may happen here, if he fights long enough. But in this play, no/

no miracle happens to save him. He is damned beyond redemption.

The malignity of the nightmare is two-fold. The powers of evil try to draw Macbeth into their own camp, to make him act on their side and fulfil their purposes. But at the same time they remain hostile to him. They do not make him one of themselves. To the end he is a stranger among them, to be first mocked, and then destroyed. To serve devils is a thankless business, even more thankless than he has supposed. They are always one degree too cunning for him.

The malignity of the nightmare also finds visible expression through two agencies, Lady Macbeth and the witches. These, however, do not stand on the same level. The withhes express both species of malignity, that which perverts and that which destroys, while Lady Macbeth embodies the first, but is herself the victim of the second. In the first half of the play, Macbeth contends with both; in the second, he contends against the witches alone.

It is a thousand pities that the witch scenes seem to have been tampered with. I find them more terrible in retrospect after the play has become a little dimmed in my memory than whan I am actually seeing or reading them. POssibly in this way we get nearer to the effect of what Shakespeare/

Shakespeare actually wrote. Sometimes they are eerie enough, as when they meet Macbeth and Banquo in the first Act. I think I get the greatest thrill of horror in the passage where Banquo says he dreamed of them. In a dream their true essence would appear unveiled. In the play as we have it, we see and hear too much of them. It is especially unsatisfactory that they should be rebuked by Hecate. Their supernatural malignity should be beyond discussion. Hecate herself is unnecessary and unimpressive.

Still, even in our present text, the effect of the witches is tremendous. In them the Adversary becomes momentarily visible. They embody the curse which now seems to Shakespeare to rest upon the world of dramatic imagination, the curse which has turned the beautiful world of the comedies into a wilderness of beastliness and cruelty; which only suffers beautiful things to grow up in order that it may blast them, and which is now wreaking its irresistible power upon his own soul.

IX. LADY MACBETH.

The position of Lady Macbeth is more complex. At the beginning of the play she is as purely a creation of the nightmare as the witches themselves. She is a true descendant of Goneril, but a Goneril who insists on making her husband an active instead of a passive accomplice. She is a little more human than Goneril, but her human traits make her more dangerous. The weakness which prevents her from murdering Duncan herself, because he resembles her father, only rivets the necessity upon Macbeth. Her love for him, answering his for her, only makes her insistence more difficult to deal with. In his unearthly battle with the witches, her human love seems something to lean upon, yet in fact she is in league with them. She has no soul any more than they have. She has no personal point of view. Her conduct is governed by the familiar rule of the nightmare, that is, to do whatever the victim fears most. Shakespeare never thinks of the tragedy as her tragedy.

But after the murder of Duncan, her position changes. Macbeth is safely caught in the net of the witches, and her occupation is gone. The powers of evil have no further use for her. From this point onward/

onward she becomes, not their agent, but their victim. Being no longer a figure of fear, she becomes an object of pity. Shakespeare is at leisure to send a sympathetic glance into that soul which had till now been a dark pit of horror. He allows himself to wonder what that awful mind must seem like to itself. He obtains only a broken glimpse in the sleepwalking scene, but this is enough to touch him with a profound compassion not unlike love.

This change in Lady Macbeth modifies the feeling of the play to such an extent that it almost upsets its balance. She is the one fresh miracle of the play, the one emergent creation. The tragedy was originally conceived as Macbeth's, but she has achieved a tragedy of her own which almost threatens to overshadow his. There is a pathos in this broken and desolate child of darkness, who finds her soul only in time to know that it is lost, which pierces through the more spectacular damnation of Macbeth. Unrepentant as she is, she is infinitely piteous. There is no need to whitewash her, to represent her as a loving and well-meaning woman. who works for her husband's good according to her lights. She is not a misguided woman appalled by the results of a disastrous mistake, but a lost soul, abandoned by her animating daemon, wailing hopelessly in/

in the dark. Here is the pathos of helpless sin.

The effect of the unexpected humanisation of Lady Macbeth upon Shakespeare's attitude to Macbeth himself is very remarkable.

In the first place, it to some extent diverts interest from him. Formerly, what we attended to in Lady Macbeth was her effect on her husband, but now she is so lonely in her misery that when we attend to her, Macbeth is shut out of our minds altogether. After the sleep-walking scene, we return to Macbeth's affairs with a jerk like that of Albany's "Great thing of us forgot!"

Secondly, a new emphasis is laid upon Macbeth's own loneliness. Formerly his wife's existence was bound up with his. Though in one sense she was a terror to his soul. she was nevertheless a human companion and partner. Now, however, she has withdrawn into a private inner life of her own in which he has no share.

Thirdly, Macbeth's conduct now gives a strong impression of egotism. His interest in his wife seems too casual. The great suffering going on at his side makes little appeal to his sympathy. His "She should have died hereafter" has a disagreeable reminiscence of Albany's "That's but a trifle here."

Fourthly, and this is the main point, Shakespeare's relation/

relation to Macbeth becomes more external. Their divergent attitudes to Lady Macbeth to some extent destroy the bond of sympathy between them. Instead of being wholly engrossed in Macbeth's tragedy, Shakespeare sometimes finds himself looking at him as an outsider. In many cases, as we have seen, the effect of this objective regard is to engender greater love, but not so here. The result of seeing Macbeth as he must appear to the outer world is to produce a coolness almost amounting to dislike. Perhaps this is most noticeable when Macbeth bullies the servant with the "goose look", but it can also be observed in the mild interest Shakespeare begins to take in the point of view of Macbeth's enemies. Only when the treachery of the witches becomes manifest, and Macbeth has to fight his last lonely battle against the powers both of earth and Hell, does Shakespeare's sympathy return to him, and even then not in full measure. Our grief and pity at the damnation of a suffering soul is not altogether unmixed with satisfaction at the extirpation of a noxious criminal.

At first sight it might seem that this partial disposition to turn from and disown Macbeth is all to the good, that it is the reaction we have often noticed from over-violence on the part of the Adversary. But this is not so. The partial alienation of Macbeth is due to the/

the rise of Lady Macbeth, which is a calamity of the first order. Lady Macbeth has usurped the place of the Beloved. If Macbeth has slain Lear once more, she has once more supplanted Cordelia, and this time in Shakespeare's own heart. He may dismiss the witches and the murders as figments of a nightmare, but he cannot dismiss Lady Macbeth. A false goddess, splendid as Milton's Satan, and much more appealing, but uncompromisingly and unrepentantly evil, has entered his temple. Like Satan new-fallen, she is at present apparently magnanimous and clean-spirited, but when she has settled to her position she will degenerate.

X. VICTORY OF THE ADVERSARY.

On the whole, however, the main tragedy of the play is Macbeth's, and Shakespeare suffers through him. The victory of the Adversary is formally complete. But we have often noticed that formal and effective results diverge considerably. Let us see, then, what the triumph of the Adversary amounts to.

In the first place, we must notice that the whole drama, from first to last, is felt as a nightmare by both Macbeth and Shakespeare. They feel that Macbeth's natural wickedness would never have lad him to murder unless it had been unnaturally stimulated by a determined conspiracy of earthly and unearthly powers of evil. His career of crime, though not impossible, is abnormal. Even Lady Macbeth's attraction for Shakespeare, genuine and disastrous as we have supposed to it to be, is chiefly due to sympathy with her helpless horror of evil. On the whole, then, we may conclude that though Shakespeare's imagination can form a credible picture of him as an evil-doer, he never ceases to regard such representations with terror.

On the other hand, it cannot be denied that there has been a moral slackening. In this play there is no such furious reaction towards good as we have

have noticed in the other great tragedies. Macduff and Malcolm arouse little enthusiasm. The rush of pity and love which we usually feel for the good characters is here diverted to Lady Macbeth.

Again, we must admit that in Macbeth evil is taken more as a matter of course than in the other tragedies. In Hamlet the queen's guilt is as amazing as it is horrible, while the king's is only made plausible by the long ancestry behind it. Cressida's inconstancy is simply disbelieved. The villainy of Iago is felt to be so incredible that the Adversary elaborates it with an unusual wealth of circumstantial detail. In Measure for Measure the obstinate persistence of a whole field of evil is felt as a crushing disappointment. In King Lear evil has become epidemic. but is still regarded as unnatural, and arouses a continual stream of perplexed speculation. In Macbeth, however, the powers of evil work their will upon the world without exciting any special remark. No doubt the world of Macbeth is a nightmare creation, but it is not considered so unfair a representation as to call for any incredulous or wondering protest. Shakespeare is reconciled, intennectually and imaginatively, though not morally, to the idea of the wickedness of the world.

Lastly, I am afraid there is a sinister

significance/

significance in the fact that in Macbeth's tragedy the stress is laid not so much upon his damnation as upon his destruction. Up to the murder of Duncan his struggle is to save his soul. After that, it is to maintain his power. But Duncan is murdered in the second Act, so that the second struggle gets about twice as much attention as the first. No doubt Macbeth's damnation remains before his eyes and tortures him to the end, but the special addition of the last two thirds of the play is the bitter realisation that his damnation has been to no purpose. The malignity of the witches has been hostile as well as seductive. It would almost seem as if Shakespeare took Macbeth's criminality, comparatively speaking, for granted, and was more concerned with its chances of success.

If this startling suggestion is well founded, how are we to interpret it? Let us return to King Lear. In this play we supposed that Shakespeare had come to realise what the writing of a tragedy really involves. It means the creation of a world of free beings, of whom the evil sin and the good suffer. So long as he created in faith and hope he could regard the sin and misery of tragedy as a misfortune for which he was not responsible, and from which he was the greatest sufferer. But when faith/

faith and hope faded, and he began to look upon the dramatic world as essentially evil, it was borne in upon him that to continue the work of creation could be nothing more than a selfish and cruel gratification of the lust of power. He can no longer create in innocence of heart. If he persists he will be an accomplice of the Adversary. But for a dramatist to stop creating while his imagination is still boiling over with life is almost impossible. Supposing he is driven, against reason and conscience, to make dramas in collusion with the Adversary, what will be the upshot?

The Adversary is ready with his reply: "To be a great artist you must harden your heart. Be master in your own kingdom, and crush all opposition. Only by rising superior to all sentiment can you accomplish your own peculiar destiny. The artist must remain above all his creatures, out of reach of their sins and sorrows. They exist merely for his good pleasure, as material for his art. Murder and madness are merely stones in his building. Be therefore bold, resolute, and callous. I warn you that your rule will be personal only. You will never govern through any child of your imagination, as you attempted to do through Angelo. I do not ask for your worship or allegiance. You are at liberty to protect yourself from me in any way you please. I only/

only suggest that you face the facts, make up your mind what you really want, and then remember my advice."

Shakespeare, urged on by the force of his imagination, and seeing no other course open to him, hardens his heart, and follows the suggestion, dreading the consequences, but desiring to make trial of them before committing dramatic suicide. In the circumstances it is natural enough that while all his feelings rise in revolt against the decision he has taken, he should be more interested in the consequences of his crime, than in the crime itself. The spirit of creation has thrown off its allegiance to the spirit of love, and anxiously awaits the result.

It is thus difficult to say to what extent the play is a nightmare, and to what extent it is a deliberate experiment. In so far as it is deliberate, it is a victory for the Adversary. Shakespeare has been induced to tamper with evil. But in so far as it is an involuntary nightmare, it has only those effects which follow any nightmare where there is no violent reaction, that is to say, the revelation of fresh possibilities of evil, and the consequent weakening of the dramatist's faith and hope.

We conclude, then, that the play has three main results, firstly, an increased sense of the possibilities of evil, secondly, a stronger consciousness of being genuinely/

genuinely entangled in it, and thirdly, an increased horror of it. The first two points are to be credited to the Adversary's account, the third to Shakespeare's. Shakespeare has not yet lost his soul, but his dramatic world is blighted. The Beloved has disappeared, and his nearest approach to such an ideal is a being who, sick of a world of sin, leaves it voluntarily. He begins to wish the estate of the world were now undone.

Macbeth is the last of the great tragedies. It is Shakespeare's final effort to uphold his world against the attack of the Adversary. In Hamlet the attack was directed against the hero's mother, thus poisoning the creative stream at its fountain-head. In Othello, it was directed against his wife, his holiest ideal. In King Lear, it turned against his children, and the promise of the future. In Macbeth it is levelled at his own soul. There is now nothing more to attack.

Paradoxical as it may seem, however, Macbeth is the most endurable of the four great tragedies. It is more exhilarating than Hamlet, and it has neither the intolerable pain of Othello nor the piercing pathos of King Lear. It is actually a popular and enjoyable play. One reason is that the game spirit is thoroughly roused. There is something terribly adventurous and exciting/

exciting about Macbeth's entry into the realms of darkness and his battle with the powers of evil. Moreover, he is allowed a free hand. He is neither hampered like Hamlet, nor invalided like Lear. In Othello the exhilaration of the game is even keener, but here we have an agonising sense of the shattering of something divine which blackens all the surface of our enjoyment. In Macbeth there is no such strong feeling of the ruin of something priceless to disturb the joy of battle. On the contrary, the partial alienation of Macbeth from Shakespeare at the end of the play softens the pain of defeat. The joy of the game is felt in this play in its purest form, and for the last time it is felt strongly.

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XI. TROILUS AND CRESSIDA.

Though I have called Macbeth the last of the great tragedies, it does not mark the completest triumph of the Adversary. Full of evil as it is, it has the one redeeming feature that it is still felt by Shakespeare as a nightmare. This flaw in the Adversary's success is removed in what I take to be the third and final version of Troilus and Cressida.

I imagine that Shakespeare, in the mood of despair which followed Macbeth, came upon the old play which had once given him so much heart-burning. He had never at any time been satisfied with it, but now its timid reluctance to accept the obvious evil of the world irritated him so much that he took it in hand again and riddled it with a withering fire of prose commentary which turned its solemn pain into bitter farce. As a rule the new spirit is confined to the prose passages, but occasionally, as in Cressida's kissing scene, I think Shakespeare parodied ironically the metrical style of the earlier versions.

The present version is thoroughly depressing. The exhilaration of the game has departed. No resistance is offered to the Adversary, and he seems to expect none. He does not exert himself to press his case. He assumes it/

it as something already admitted. He is coolly and dispassionately surveying a field already won. Shakespeare is vexed and sickened, but not surprised. Troilus, indeed, is shocked, but his feelings are no longer Shakespeare's. He is now, not the official hero of the play, whose attitude is of supreme importance, but an inexperienced youth, whose credulity would be amusing if it were not so pathetic.

The distinction between good and evil, which in Macbeth was still unobscured, is now so confused that it provides no clear issue. Good is divided against itself. Troilus represents constancy in love, Hector goodness of character, and Ulysses wisdom. But though Troilus is perhaps the most passionate of Shakespeare's lovers, it is doubtful if there is much reverence in his passion; though Hector is one of the most knightly and lovable of Shakespeare's men, he is fighting in a cause he knows to be bad; and though Ulysses is perhaps the most penetrating intellect in all the plays, his wisdom is bitter and cynical, yet with a calmness and good-nature which suggest that his cynicism is not the result of a warped nature, but merely of accurate observation. One cannot take a strong line even about Cressida's inconstancy. She plainly cannot help herself. Her nature supplies her with no weapons with which she can fight her destiny. Moreover, since she now/

now makes no claim to represent the Beloved, her fall, except to Troilus, has no special importance. Love, goodness, and wisdom stand puzzled and paralysed, while the Adversary, through Thersites and Pandarus, triumphs over them at his leisure.

If Shakespeare had taken the trouble to rewrite the whole play, the unity of its presentation might have redeemed to some extent the disagreeableness of its substance. As it is, abundant traces of the earlier versions survive in the final play, producing a jarring of moods like that in All's Well, but more violent. The result is that Troilus and Cressida is probably the least attractive of Shakespeare's plays, and touches the lowest depth to which his authentic genius ever descended.

XII. THE GHOST OF MARLOWE.

We have now come to another turning point in Shakespeare's dramatic career. The Adversary has struck his last blow and achieved his final triumph. The walls of Shakespeare's city have broken down, and evil may enter where it pleases. He has no pride in the past, faith in the present, or hope for the future. The Beloved has vanished, or been perverted. There is nothing left in the world which he worships, nothing which he is prepared to defend with all his soul, nothing whose loss will break his heart.

But by the very fact of completing his work, the Adversary has lost his terrors. Shakespeare now knows the worst that can happen to him. There is nothing sacred in his world which he dreads to see attacked. The Adversary has therefore shot his bolt, and may now go to sleep, until a world built upon a new ideal arises to challenge him. The evils he has created remain. but their halo of terror has disappeared. They are known, familiar, almost companionable. Shakespeare even finds them artistically interesting. Indeed, he has to recognise that they are the very breath of life of the drama. The dramatist is a magician who turns the stones that threaten to crush him, into his daily bread.

The/

The result is that Shakespeare's imagination is in an obvious sense freer than it has been since the time of Twelfth Night, when the Comic Spirit had destroyed the historic ideal, and had not yet been challenged by the Beloved. Now the Tragic Spirit has banished the Beloved, and sees no fresh champion of the ideal to take her place. Shakespeare is therefore left without a master. He is relieved from absorbing moral preoccupations, and at liberty to follow the impulses of his own nature.

The first effect of his freedom is to give him a feeling of exhilaration not unlike that of the first stages of drunkenness. No longer restrained by the pressure of steady moral aims, his spirit seems to take to itself wings with which it tries to fly in all directions at once. It seems to see all the kingdoms of the world spread out before it in a moment of time, ready to acknowledge its sovereignty. The promise of the Adversary in Macbeth still holds good. Shakespeare is master in his own kingdom, and Birnam Wood has not yet come to Dunsinane. Nor is his reign as barren and disappointing as Macbeth would seem to threaten. Faith, hope, and love have disappeared, but the primary activity of the creative imagination seems unimpaired. The strenuous battles of tragedy have stimulated it to its highest point, and it may be reasonably expected that now/

now, when it has no end beyond itself, it will burst forth into unexampled luxuriance.

It is true that the deliberate employment of evil for artistic purposes implies moral and emotional insincerity or callousness. The love of good and evil of which Keats speaks does violence to that fear and loathing which is the natural attitude to evil. We instinctively feel that it is a fundamental blasphemy, and a fundamental falsehood. But it has compensations. It gives opportunities for a more spectacular appeal. The pure artist can plunge boldly into abysses on whose brink he would formerly have stood shuddering. After all, why not? If he sins and suffers, he does so artistically, and has the artist's profound joy in a wonderful experience. Moreover, while he sympathetically shares the adventures of his creatures, he can do so in safety. If he has no fears for his soul, he need have none for his life. He can die in imagination, but his true artistic self stands above his hypostases, immortal. He can cast himself down from the highest pinnacle of the temple without any worse consequence than an exciting thrill of vicarious fear. Possibly a touch of this insincerity is natural to all drama, but when it is deliberate it becomes vicious.

Having adopted these liberties and immunities,

Shakespeare/

Shakespeare consciously enlarges his dramatic field to the utmost. Nothing less than absolute superlatives will content him. The two dominant influences of his career have been the attraction of kingship and the attraction of woman. In his present high-reaching mood, the kingdom he demands is the empire of the world, and the woman is the most celebrated enchantress of all time. Even his style swells into a sumptuous magnificence which makes the bombast of his early years seem trivial.

In short, Shakespeare has worked back to the mood of Marlowe, not this time the disciplined author of Edward II, but the more characteristic creator of Tamburlaine and Dr.Faustus. But a world of artistic experience has intervened between the crude aspirations of the earlier dramatist and the mature ambition of the later. Instead of the barbaric sultanate of Tamburlaine we have the infinitely more significant Roman Empire; instead of the elemental beauty of Helen of Troy, we have the rich and subtle fascination of Cleopatra.

XIII. ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA.

When, however, Shakespeare begins to embody these two themes in a single vision, another difference between his outlook and that of Marlowe emerges. Shakespeare has a feeling for the game element in drama to which Marlowe never attained even in Edward II, and which in Tamburlaine and Faustus is conspicuously lacking. Tamburlaine consists of a monotonous succession of conquests, while the supreme achievement of Faustus, the evocation of Helen, results in nothing more than a few splendid lines. Narlowe's singleminded genius could be content with one theme at a time, which he either exhausts at once, or draws out interminably. In Antony and Cleopatra, on the other hand, the two dominant motives appear together, and, being compared and contrasted, come into inevitable conflict. The empire of the Roman world is weighed against the love of Cleopatra.

A struggle between such antagonists promises to be titanic, and this was no doubt Shakespeare's intention. The play does indeed give an impression of immensity which is quite unique. The characters move easily and freely through large spaces. The grandeur of Rome is worthily conveyed. Antony has an imperial nature/

nature amply fitted both for love and sovereignty. Cleopatra has been universally hailed as one of Shakespeare's most miraculous creations. The whole setting of the drama is gorgeous and the workmanship superb. The elements of a cosmic tragedy are embraced in a serene comprehensive harmony.

But there is something lacking. The tragedy does not grip. Bradley notes that the play has a peculiar sadness of its own arising from the very fact that it moves us so little. Moreover, the comparative tranquillity with which we view the disasters of the play is not to be confounded with the true tragic exaltation of spirit which comes from the dearly won victory of beauty over pain. It is due to the lower intensity of the emotions which have to be reconciled. The memory of Desdemona's death pierces through the gorgeous panorama as if it were pasteboard.

Why should this be? The explanation seems to be that nothing less than the antagonism between good and evil is sufficient to raise the combative emotions to tragic pitch. But to Shakespeare in his present mood this opposition is not available. He has no longer either a profound faith in good nor an intense fear of evil. Good hasbecome obscured, and evil/

evil familiar. The substitution of a conflict between unhallowed love and unhallowed ambition is quite inadequate. It is like pitting the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes against the pride of life. Neither Antony nor Shakespeare himself are very clear which side they mean to support. They apparently decide that, on the whole, empire is a duty which Antony owes to his own dignity, and that Cleopatra is a temptation. The temptation of course wins, but the resistance to it is too half-hearted to be tragic. The beauty of the game is scarcely awakened.

The truth is, I think, that Antony's heart was not passionately set upon either empire or Cleopatra. It is not clear that empire means any more to him than a background to his own person. It appealed to a streak of megalomania which we have seen to be characteristic of Shakespeare's mind at the moment, and which he felt to be in some way the mark of a noble nature. For the actual duties and responsibilities of rule he has apparently no taste.

Nor is his love for Cleopatra very wholehearted. To compare it with Othello's love for Desdemona is absurd. It contains no reverence and little esteem. Indeed, he sometimes seems to wonder whether it ia anything more/

more than a bad habit which he has not the strength of mind to break. But if he has no moral respect for Cleopatra, neither has he any moral repugnance. He accepts her as a remarkable natural product. Only when he suspects her of treachery to himself does he blame her, and even then, not for long. It is not that love blinds his eyes, but merely that he sees quite clearly that nothing better can be expected of her. He knows what she has to give an takes it, without asking for impossibilities.

What she does give, suits his disposition well enough. She evidently thinks him a great man, which satisfies his vanity, while at the same time she never thinks of subordinating herself to him, which would only have tired him. He has enough trouble making up his own mind without making up hers as well. By methods which, though somewhat primitive, are quite effective, she keeps his mind occupied, pleasantly or unpleasantly, so that he feels dull without her. She has a notable turn for finding mischief for idle hands. Moreover, her enormous egoism, the unrestrained abandon of her luxuriousness, and her feeling for the obviously large and spectacular, appeal to Antony's megalomania. In fact, for a man under a moral eclipse, but with vague aspirations after some sort of greatness, Cleopatra may serve very well. Her physical/

physical attraction is taken for granted, but not stressed.

Now if this were all, it would be difficult to understand why so many of the critics, especially the poets, rave about Cleopatra, why Swinburne, for example, places her above Viola, Desdemona, Imogen, and all the rest, as the perfect ideal of womanhood. To the plain man this is perverse and vicious nonsense. To use such language about one who is false. selfish, cowardly, inconstant, sensual, treacherous, spiteful, vain, vulgar, and useless, without intellect, decency, or kindness, seems a malignant and stupid slander on womanhood. Yet the common practice of Cleopatra-worship remains to be accounted for. There is evidently some fundamental fact about her that we have not considered.

We have overlooked the part Shakespeare himself takes in the play. Shakespeare identifies himself with Antony, and places the strumpet Cleopatra in the throne of the Beloved. Shakespeare's relation to Antony is on our theory intelligible enough, but his relation to Cleopatra requires further consideration.

XIV. CLEOPATRA.

We must remember that Shakespeare's present mood is abnormal. His ideals have been crushed, but his imagination is still full of vitality. How is he to deal with this ever-bubbling fountain of imagery? Two courses present themselves. His dignity as an artist requires that he should reduce his mind to order, that he should be master in his own kingdom. On the other hand, it may be more easy and pleasant to give his imagination its head, and amuse himself by watching its behaviour. Hitherto his choice has been made for him. He has always had ideals of some kind, which he has had to defend, first against the Comic Spirit, and then against the Tragic. He has always had to guard what he consciously loved against the attacks of his irresponsible imagination. Now he has nothing to defend, except his artistic reputation. He still wishes to create something large and splendid, but what? He does not know. He will have to build up his dramatic ideals again from the beginning, and his tragic catastrophes have left him tired and discouraged. He tries wearily to resurrect the Beloved, but to the pale ghost which answers his call his heart does not go out. Octavia cannot fill the shoes of her mother Cordelia/

Cordelia. Fulvia, the daughter of Lady Macbeth, who could shame him into action, is dead. There is no figure in his mind strong enough to inspire him to master his world. His faith and heart are not in his task.

He therefore finds himself pursuing the second course. He gives his imagination the rein and follows its lead. It is possible that this is not merely the effect of weariness. In Macbeth he had tried to force his destiny, and no good came of it. Should he not have waited upon events, and allowed the witches' prophecy to work its own fulfilment? Further, though it may seem more slothful to drift, may it not be really more adventurous to follow the stream of his imagination wherever it may lead? Perhaps it will carry him to some new, undreamed of glory. Perhaps it may rule itself better than he has been able to rule it. Perhaps what he calls government is nothing more than limitation. The imagination naturally prefers beautiful forms. Let it create them without interference. We may suppose, then, that while Shakespeare feels the lack of controlling ideals, and resigns himself to follow the current of his imagination, he has still an elementary delight in the working of his mental processes, a vague but obstinate faith in their fundamental excellence, and a blind hope that/

that they will work some miracle for him.

The miracle arrives, but it corresponds with disconcerting accuracy to the quality of the prayer which called it forth. Cleopatra embodies, for good and evil, the ideal, or whatever we choose to call it, which Shakespeare's mind was trying to express. Let us consider her from this point of view.

In the first place, she is objectively conceived. She has that fundamental irresponsibility and lack of motive which belongs to a dream vision. Her behaviour is ultimately determined by what Shakespeare or his dramatic representative loves or fears. At the same time, owing to the circumstances of her creation, she is not so directly reflex as objective visions usually are. She is not like the Beloved, who does what the dramatist loves to see her do, or fears that she may bring destruction upon herself by doing. Nor is she exactly one of the children of the nightmare, either comic or tragic, who constitute themselves the antagonists of the dramatist, and infallibly make the very moves that he dreads most. Both of these belong to a state of war. The dramatist is so busy fighting for the Beloved and so afraid of losing her, that he has no leisure to study her. He simply grasps her as a whole in one large, comprehensive, unfathomable/

unfathomable act of vision. Similarly he is so occupied in fighting against the creatures of the nightmare, that his vision of them, though intense, remains practical and combative. In the present play, on the other hand, the combative interest has languished, so that Shakespeare has leisure to study Cleopatra for her own sake. To some extent he both loves and fears her, but above all, he is interested in her. He feels he is studying processes where formerly he had only observed effects. He examines with an almost scientific absorption Cleopatra's methods and motives, while at the same time he has still sufficient emotional sensitiveness to be able to feel their effect through Antony. The result is that though Cleopatra retains to some extent the characteristics both of a figure of love and of a figure of fear, the internal mechanism of her mind is known to Shakespeare in greater detail than that of any other of his objective characters.

Again, Cleopatra is non-moral. Even her thoroughgoing worshippers do not deny this fact. They are merely unaffected by it. In their ideal of womanliness they appear to consider morality a superfluity, if not a positive defect. Among those who care about the matter, however, there is some difference of opinion as to how far Cleopatra's morality extended. I think there is

no doubt that she was utterly selfish. She never once did a disinterested act of kindness or bestowed a single disinterested thought upon the happiness of anyone but herself. On the other hand, she was probably not intrinsically malicious or cruel. Her habit of doing what she is wanted not to do is due not so much to her personal character as to the nightmare strain in her conception. She does not know the meaning of either justice or truth. She has no courage, in the sense that she has no power within her that will make her face what she fears. Sexually, she is without shame. While apparently in love with Antony, she chats cheerfully about her former amours. The idea of purity is so alien to her that after a spell of her company we are apt to rub our eyes and ask if we ourselves know what the word means.

All this, I suppose, will be generally admitted. The point over which dispute arises is the question of the depth of her love for Antony, and her constancy to him. The evidence in the play is difficult to estimate, but we shall make what we can of it.

If we judge Cleopatra by her conduct to Antony, it is uniformly destructive. She distracts him from his work, tempts him to luxurious living, twice/

twice turns the tide of battle against him, and finally lures him to his death. She even interrupts his dying speech. It is not easy, however, to determine how far she is to be regarded as personally blameworthy, and how far she is merely an unconscious instrument in the hands of the nightmare. Possibly Shakespeare himself did not clearly differentiate. In any case, it seems clear that from first to last she never spent one thought upon Antony's welfare.

With regard to the charge that she tried to make her own terms with Caesar, both before and after Antony's death, the evidence is not conclusive, and her advocates urge that she should be given the benefit of the doubt. But why should there be a doubt at all? Shakespeare himself suggests it, and leaves it unremoved. It looks as if he wished to believe in Cleopatra's honesty, but was not sure, and was afraid to inquire too closely.

On the other hand, if we trust Cleopatra's own protestations, we must believe that she loved Antony all through the play. Of course, her own statements are very poor evidence, but if we accept her conception of love, we need not disbelieve them. She admires Antony for his more spectacular qualities, and has set her heart on binding him to her. But her love has no moral/

moral effect whatever on her, except perhaps to make her more dignified and grandiose. It certainly inspires her with fine poetry, but we can hardly put that to her moral credit.

Finally, it may be urged that she proves the quality of her love by her death. But here again, Shakespeare is ambiguous. He plainly indicates that at least one motive for her death was her dread of being led in triumph through Rome. How this motive compares in strength with that based on her love of Antony is not at all clear. Besides, she does not appear to realise what death means. Her imagination works only positively. She cannot picture the annihilation of her entire universe. Death suggests positive images, such as a race for Antony's kisses. In dying she does not conceive herself to be sacrificing anything. She has just enough awe of it to savour it as a magnificent gesture.

In fact, her death illustrates that feature of her character which I take to be the most fundamentally immoral of all. According to my theory, the foundation of morality is the impersonal devotion to beauty, a kind of reverence which imposes the obligation of guarding and upholding it. Cleopatra, however, has no reverence. She consumes what she admires. She has a strong aesthetic sense, but she lives on her aesthetic capital. She has a strong aesthetic feeling for Antony, but she

uses him up for her own individual purposes. She has also a keen relish for life, but no reverence for it. Whatever we may think of her reasons for abandoning it, there is something a little casual and disrespectful in her spectacular manner of doing it. It is a thoughtless waste of a great reservoir to produce a dazzling temporary effect.

Cleopatra is thus a genuine type of womanhood, but a perverted type. She is woman militant, not woman triumphant. The fundamental purpose of woman is to create and preserve, and for the better accomplishment of this primary purpose, she employs certain methods of display and fascination. Cleopatra has the secondary arts of display and fascination, but has no primary purpose which they may serve. They thus become merely useless and destructive.

We must consider Cleopatra's destructive extravagance in connection with her age. The destructive wastefulness of youth may sometimes be regarded as an investment, an experiment with powers which may afterwards be put to their proper use. But in maturity such waste is without promise or compensation. It indicates, not the preparation for morality, but the confirmed neglect of it.

What, then, is the source of Cleopatra's attraction for so many lovers of Shakespeare? I think it springs/

springs very largely from the very non-morality we have just noticed. We can observe her without being dazzled, as when we look at the sun through smoked glass. She has neither enough of the sacredness of the Beloved to make us lower our eyes, nor enough of the terror of the nightmare to paralyse our perceptions. Moreover, the absence of moral complications simplifies her nature so that we seem to come closer to the primitive heart of femininity, that mysterious fountain of beauty and unreason, and though, as we have seen, we do not arrive at the real primitive heart, but at a secondary pathological usurpation, we nevertheless feel that we have penetrated beneath the veil, and have light thrown on wonderful regions hitherto hidden in darkness.

The fact that she is, in the proper sense of the word, dissipated, makes continuous observation interesting. As she lives to a great extent from moment to moment, so we watch her from moment to moment with a mild wonder as to what is coming next. From this point of view she is not so much a player in the dramatic game as a moving panorama in herself. As far as we can judge from the play, her variety is by no means infinite. Her nature is much less rich than that of Portia, for instance. Her interest depends at least as much upon her uncertainty as upon her

variety. At any rate, she has enough variety to serve her turn. Her interest never flags. Wherever she moves, we know that there will always be some picturesque release of the energy accumulated in the tragedies, some sort of explosion or conflagration. She is a born prima donna.

Since the interest of Cleopatra is panoramic rather than combative, it follows that Shakespeare sees her with an unusual directness of vision. It is not so necessary to see her through the eyes of the hero as it is when there is a strong game interest. To such an extent is Shakespeare's interest in her independent of her effect upon Antony that it persists even when Antony is removed from the stage. As a rule the death of the hero ends the play, the heroine either preceding or immediately following him. Indeed if Cleopatra had really been unable to live without Antony she could have committed suicide at once. But Shakespeare cannot finish the play until he has had an opportunity of seeing how Cleopatra behaves to Caesar. Perhaps he may get some clear light on her real attitude to Caesar, and in any case she is sure to give a particularly brilliant display of emotional fireworks. The result certainly justifies Shakespeare's departure from the usual rule, but before dealing with it we must give some account of Caesar.

XV. CAESAR.

Caesar has not received his fair share of attention from the critics. His unpopularity is as marked as Cleopatra's popularity. His character is blackened with a virulence not justified by anything he actually says or does in the play. He is commonly represented as a narrow, small-minded, unimaginative, ungenerous, grasping, ungrateful, cowardly, deceitful hypocrite, who attains success by the favour of fortune and an undivided attention to his own interests, but is finally exposed by Cleopatra as the shallow trickster he is.

But let us consider the case for Caesar. We may admit at the outset that Caesar's dominating passion was his desire to rule the whole Roman Empire. This ambition, however, is anything but ignoble in itself, and it is pursued by Caesar in a large-minded spirit. Unlike Antony, he has a creditable object in seeking empire. He desires to bring peace to the world. He thinks imperially in the best sense.

Again, it is abundantly plain that he is more generous to Antony than Antony is to him. Antony never speaks of Caesar without a sneer. He considers him immeasurably inferior to himself. Caesar's very virtues he/

he attributes, quite gratuitously, to a smallness of soul which prevents him from even feeling the temptations to which he himself has yielded. Always remembering the help he has given Caesar in the past, he seems to think that he can henceforth have no obligations towards him. That his desertion of Octavia is a wrong to her brother never enters his head.

On the other hand, Caesar has a deep-rooted admiration and even affection for Antony. Almost the only evidence we have in the play of Antony's real greatness comes from Caesar's reminiscences. With the memory of his boyhood's hero always before him, he believes, with grateful if unjustifiable humility, that Antony is by nature a finer man than himself. He believes also that Antony, if only he could be brought to give his attention to the matter, would be a better ruler than himself. It grieves his heart, both as a friend and as a conscientious ruler, to see Antony's powers, and the resources of the eastern world, brought to waste by Cleopatra. His first efforts are therefore devoted to making Antony worthy of himself and worthy of empire. So important does the accomplishment of this purpose seem to him that he even trusts Antony with his beloved sister Octavia.

The detractors of Caesar say that Caesar's love

for/

for Octavia was insincere, and that he knew perfectly well that she could not detach Antony from Cleopatra. She must therefore have been sacrificed in cold blood, with the view of picking a quarrel with Antony afterwards. But this seems a gratuitous slander. That Caesar's plan failed does not prove that it was either insincere or ill-conceived. Its success would have been a happy solution of all difficulties. That Caesar miscalculated only shows that he thought more highly of Antony than he deserved.

Can we wonder, then, that Antony's abandonment of Octavia made Caesar bitterly angry and disillusioned. He was perfectly entitled to conclude that Antony was no longer fit to govern an empire. I grant that his proposal to Cleopatra that she should drive him out of Egypt "or take his life there", is ugly, but it is scarcely surprising that Caesar, in his anger, should for the moment regard Antony as a noxious animal, to be exterminated wherever found. The terrible epithet he applies to Antony, "the old ruffian", shows his feeling.

If we are inclined to boggle at Caesar's deposition of Lepidus, we may remember that he was only carrying out Antony's own idea. It was in deference to Antony, who considered Lepidus his own man, though he despised him, and knew him to be unfit to govern /

govern, that Caesar had consented to his being made triumvir, and as such deference was now misplaced, the ass was relieved of his gold, and sent to shake his ears in the commons.

Finally, he is reproached with having treated Cleopatra ungenerously and disingenuously in the last act. But what claim had Cleopatra upon Caesar's generosity? he could only think of her as a dangerous harlot, who had crowned a career of mischief by bringing his best friend to ruin and death. Still less had she any claim on Caesar's candour. Her own deceit had just been the cause of Antony's death, and the outstanding event of her meeting with Caesar was her giving a false return of her property. It has been suggested, it is true, that this was a less petty and more excusable deceit than it seemed, but though this suggestion is hinted at in Plutarch, Shakespeare gives no countenance to it. I do not think we can regard Caesar as a designing villain foiled by a heroic woman. It was a fair battle of wits between two very wide awake antagonists. Caesar regarded Cleopatra as a sort of wild beast whom he wished to take alive, but who must be stalked with the greatest care. If he failed, it was not through Cleopatra's superior cunning, but through Dolabella's treachery.

Cleopatra's/

Cleopatra's death is commonly regarded as a victory over Caesar. But is it? Cleopatra herself no doubt thought so, and regretted that she could not see its effect upon him. Caesar, however, took the event with a magnanimity that would have surprised her. Its chief effect was to reconcile him to Antony. After a personal experience of Cleopatra and her royal ways he could make some allowance for Antony's infatuation. He showed no regret for his lost triumph, but gave his tribute of admiration to the unfortunate lovers. He recognized, even though he was Octavia's brother, that they belonged to one another, and ordered that they should have an imposing funeral.

Why, then, in the face of all these facts, are the critics so hard on Caesar? I think the reason is that Shakespeare himself disliked and feared him, and that this dislike and fear makes itself felt in the play. Antony certainly feels it, and probably Cleopatra also, though her chief spite is reserved for Octavia. In the feeling Caesar inspires there is a touch of the true nightmare chill. There is an atmosphere of pitiless destiny about him which is not quite human. Shakespeare himself seems puzzled to account for it, and makes a kind of superstition of it. The soothsayer, himself a rather/

rather awesome figure, warns Antony that in the presence of Caesar his guardian angel becomes a Fear. It is probable that it is an irritable revolt against the encroachment of this fear that makes Antony so bitter in his attitude to Caesar. He is uneasy and restless at having to fight against something that he does not understand, and as Shakespeare himself is apparently behind him, this uneasy resentment communicates itself to the reader.

But we seem to have only increased the mystery. Why should Shakespeare fear and dislike Caesar? To answer this we should note that Caesar is the one person who is genuinely concerned at Antony's moral collapse. He is first grieved, and then, when Octavia is touched, indignant. He is thus a continual moral reproach to Antony. Enobarbus, in a shallower way, is also critical, but Antony overwhelms him by a brilliant display of spectacular generosity. But the accusing voice of Caesar cannot be so stopped. He is the ghost of Antony's murdered conscience, continually casting in his teeth his past greatness and present degradation, his desertion of the Beloved, and allegiance to the scarlet woman. When Caesar is not present, he can still flatter himself with the idea that he is intrinsically a great man, but when this boy who formerly worshipped him calls him "the old ruffian", he/

he knows in his heart, in spite of violent superficial protests, that the reproach has pierced home. In short, what Antony dislikes in Caesar is his insistent moral superiority.

His fear has the same source. It is the haunting fear of a bad conscience, the dread that no good can come of a godless life. Caesar is Antony's Macduff, the predestined enemy whose hand will be strengthened by all the great alienated moral powers. The difference is that in Macbeth Macduff appears in his true character, whereas in Antony and Cleopatra the moral character of Caesar is veiled. Shakespeare himself does not see it clearly.

For Caesar is a reproach to Shakespeare himself. Shakespeare has allowed his art to become morally relaxed. He has abandoned the rigour of the game. He has allowed himself to become entranced in observing the play of his imagination instead of striving to the utmost for the establishment of the ideal. He has replaced the divine Beloved by a kind of inspired animal. He has allowed moral distinctions to become confused, and lost his grasp of the meaning of purity. Caesar stands for the old strenuous life, for the old ideals, the old morality, the old Beloved.

Yet Shakespeare is irritated. He feels it

unjust/

unjust that he should be reproached. What else was there to do? He did not abandon the old life. It was the old life that abandoned him. He had done the best he could, but a curse appeared to rest upon him. Why should this obstinate voice reproach him without understanding? What alternative had it to propose? The conquest of the world and universal peace? A boyish dream! The peace after conquest would only result in the tame insincerity of the ending of Measure for Measure. The strenuous life would only result in the agonies of King Lear.

In fact, Shakespeare is in the toils. He feels the truth of the accuser's criticisms, but as they do not seem constructive, they merely irritate him. Moreover, when he can get away from the accuser, he seems to be doing very well. The play is going to be full of great things, and Cleopatra is a wonderful creation. Let her meet Caesar, and her dazzling brilliance will make Caesar look pale and insignificant.

When, therefore, Cleopatra meets Caesar, Shakespeare is on her side. He does not bate one jot of her immorality. In fact, as we have seen, in the matter of the false returns, he increases it. But he gives her all the poetry at his command, and Caesar is undeniably impressed. So, likewise, are Shakespeare's readers, especially the poets, who are abnormally sensitive to the force/

force of suggestion. They feel, as Shakespeare intended them to feel, that the struggle is between a narrow, critical, non-constructive morality, and the primary forces of poetic creation. It is a supreme proof of the ingrained justness of Shakespeare's vision that he has obtained the emotional colouring he wants without distorting the facts. He is an eloquent advocate for his own cause, but he has not tampered with the evidence. We can judge for ourselves, and I think we must admit that Shakespeare, though with all the excuse in the world, is for the moment not on the side of the angels. His superstitious fear of Caesar is evidence, also, that in his heart he knows it himself.

Caesar is the creation of a new kind of nightmare, differing from both the comic and the tragic, but resembling the former more than the latter. The Comic Spirit is destructive, but not malignant. Its attacks ideals which are intrinsically imperfect, and so clears the way for better ones. The Tragic Spirit is both. It destroys, or attempts to destroy, what is intrinsically good, but not extrinsically secure against attack. It may produce supreme beauty and good, but only indirectly, through the struggle against it. In Antony and Cleopatra, however, we have in Caesar a nightmare which/

which is destructive only in form. It is the spirit of a banished good reappearing in the imaginative world in the guise of an ememy. Its action, being entirely critical and non-constructive, is acutely exasperating. It is the skeleton at the feast, or the handwriting on the wall. Yet the whole health of the soul depends upon its being recognized and attended to. The fact that Caesar exists, and gets fair play, though no sympathy, is the one sign of health in Antony and Cleopatra.

XVI. CORIOLANUS.

That Shakespeare was profoundly dissatisfied with Antony and Cleopatra I have no doubt. Caesar had made its whole point of view untenable. He is therefore compelled to reconsider his position, and the result is Coriolanus.

About this play the opinions of the critics vary greatly. Swinburne thinks that a nobler work was never created by man, while Mr Chambers has the courage to call it dull. Between these two extremes there are all sorts of intermediate opinions. The general feeling appears to be that while it is a splendid exhibition of Shakespeare's genius, and is an excellently constructed work of art, it yet lacks something that the supreme tragedies possess. Dulness is too strong a word, but it indicates the direction in which the trouble is to be sought.

I think the root of the matter is that Coriolanus is not a tragedy in the ordinary sense, and must be judged by different standards. Even less of the genuine tragic feeling is present than in Antony and Cleopatra. The terror of the nightmare holds us no longer. The excitement of the game is not aroused. We are not called upon to fight for all we hold most dear against/

against terrible and overwhelming powers of evil. We do not follow the fortunes of the hero with passionate sympathy, trembling at every move of the Adversary which threatens him. This, however, does not mean that Shakespeare has tried to create a drama of the same type as Othello, and failed. Coriolanus is evidently excellent of its kind, but of a different kind. Something new has happened in Shakespeare's mind. Let us note the main characteristics of the play and then consider what they signify.

We have already noticed the absence of the nightmare element. Connected with this is the presence of an unusual amount of rationality in the working out of the action. Instead of accepting what his imagination irresistibly forces upon him, Shakespeare seems to advance by a succession of logical steps, almost as if he were stating a thesis. Not only does the general conduct of the drama have a logical basis, but its whole atmosphere is argumentative. The characters are almost Shavian in the way they discuss their principles and explain their motives. Shakespeare is evidently thinking rather than seeing, or perhaps I should say, he is seeing for the purpose of thinking.

Again, Coriolanus is emphatically the hero of the play. Since Henry V, we have had no hero, not even/

even Timon, who dominates his play so completely. He is evidently Shakespeare's representative in the dramatic world, yet Shakespeare's relation to him is not quite like that in any of the other plays. He is passionately sympathetic, yet at the same time steadily critical. He simplifies his character, magnifying both his good and bad qualities so that they may be perceived with diagrammatic clearness. Nevertheless, in his scrutiny he is not emotionally indifferent. He is pathetically eager that the good points shall be appreciated, but he is determined to shirk no jot of the truth. I take it that through Coriolanus Shakespeare is anxiously weighing himself in the balance.

Again, it will be noticed that the play is reminiscent of former themes. In fact, I was at first inclined to place it in the Angelo-Timon-Lear group as an ingratitude play. But here the ingratitude theme is treated differently. A serious attempt is made to do justice to the other side. It is clearly recognised that the ingratitude of which Coriolanus is the victim, is excusable, if not justifiable, and that Coriolanus's resentment of it is altogether excessive. Timon and Lear are indeed represented as culpably foolish, but their antagonists are felt to be monsters. Here, the enemies of Coriolanus have something to say for themselves. Coriolanus/

Coriolanus has fought for the people, but for his own purposes. He is really no friend of theirs, and they recognise it. It would therefore seem that Shakespeare is reviewing his own dramatic position, and finding it less satisfactory than it had appeared at the time.

We are thus encouraged to consider the suggestion that Shakespeare, roused by the accusations of Caesar, is putting himself upon his trial. Of course we must not consider the drama as a detailed allegory. That is not Shakespeare's method, and in any case the story follows Plutarch too closely to permit its application. We may suppose that the symbolic reference gives the primary impulse to the play, but it does not supply the incidents. Observing this caution, let us see if we can reconstruct the argument.

We may notice first that Shakespeare's critical attitude to Coriolanus reaches its height about the beginning of the fifth act, when he has gone over to the enemy, and is preparing to destroy his own people. Moreover, this point in the play corresponds to Shakespeare's own position at the end of Antony and Cleopatra, when he has clearly gone over to the Adversary. We may therefore take this point as the time when Shakespeare reviews his position and passes judgment on himself. He has/

He has evidently gone far astray. What has led him into such a false position, and how can he escape from it?

His defence is that he was driven into it by the monstrous ingratitude of his people. They practically owed their lives to him. He had fought prodigious battles for them, sometimes singlehanded, against the Adversary, and had received many painful wounds on their behalf. He was clearly their natural leader, yet when he asked them to accept him as their ruler, they refused, and followed their own misguided will. When he indignantly remonstrated, they cast him out of their gates. He had not rejected them; they had rejected him, and thrown him into the arms of the Adversary.

To this the Accuser replies: "Admitted that your services to your people have been great, have we not something to set against them? Is it not true that you hate and despise your people, that you have reviled and cursed them, and that you have tried to take away their liberties?"

"No, I do not think I have hated them, or at least, not till lately. I admit that they have often provoked me to anger and contempt. They are foolish and cowardly. They neither know their own true interests nor fight setadfastly for them. As it is my nature/

nature to speak as I feel, I never flatter them, but tell them freely what I think of them. Nor do I deny that I have become very much inclined to cut down their liberties. I know better than they the dangers which threaten them. I, who have so often fought the Adversary, know how powerful, cunning, and malignant he is. It makes me furious to see their short-sighted and changeable fancies asserting themselves against my knowledge. Yet that I loved them in my own fashion, surely the desperate battles I have fought for them, and the wounds I have endured for them, are proofs?"

Again the Accuser replies: "You deceive yourself. You did not fight for them, but for yourself and your own glory."

"That is quite untrue. It is not even plausible. I have done nothing for myself. All the spoils of war have been divided among the people. I have refused to touch even the smallest portion. And as for my glory, I defy anyone to say that I have ever courted popularity. I have constantly avoided the public gaze. I cannot bear to hear myself praised. Nor have I tried to curry favour by praising my people. I hold my mirror mercilessly before them so that they can see their true image. But my own private feelings I keep to myself. I have been wounded more than any of them, but I never show my wounds

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nor ask for sympathy. I have never asked anything of them but the right to guide them for their own good. If I had my own way, I should remain out of their sight, and direct them from above."

"Yes, and therein you find your glory. Is it for your satisfaction or theirs that you fight all your battles? You take a pleasure in fighting, and because they do not, you call them cowardly. Why should they follow your purposes? You say you would rule them for their own good, but you have just shown by your actions that this is a mere pretence. You fought for them as long as you hoped that they would do your will, but as soon as they reject your leadership, you fight against them. Your pride has been outraged because your creatures have declared their independence. Your egoism is now stripped naked. You are without disguise fighting against all you once professed to hold dear. Your mother, who gave you spirit to fight the Adversary, you have shamed. Your Beloved, for whom you fought your greatest battles, and who waits even now for you in your home, you have deserted. Your son, in whom all your hopes of the future are fixed, you have disowned. See, I shall bring them, and they shall speak for themsevles. Confronted with them, you shall see clearly the pit into which you have fallen. and the Heaven from which you fell. If then you do not

repent, you are damned for ever."

He does repent, but with a heavy heart, for he believes that repentance means dramatic death. He cannot fight for his people, and he will not fight against them.

It will be noted that the foregoing argument applies either to Coriolanus or Shakespeare, though some straining of metaphor is sometimes necessary to make the two cases correspond. At one point, however, the symbolic interpretation is more satisfactory than the literal. There is a psychological gap between the departure of Coriolanus from Rome and his finding himself in the Volscian camp, which Shakespeare does not attempt to bridge. In the play this gap gives us a jerk for which there seems no adequate reason, but if our interpretation is correct, it corresponds to the jerk with which Shakespeare realises that he has gone over to the Adversary without knowing precisely how he got there.

Again, Coleridge felt that there was something unreal in the picture of Anfidius, and later critics have echoed his doubt. Here I imagine that Shakespeare had in mind his own great Adversary, who was prevented by the limitations of Plutarch's story from embodying himself adequately in the drama. Most of the characters take quite/

quite kindly to their local habitations and their names, but the Adversary is too large and vague to incarnate himself comfortably within the body of the Volscian general.

If our theory of the play is correct, it confirms our refusal to accept the common idea of Shakespeare as the most careless and indifferent of the world's great artists, eho turned out masterpieces in a jogtrot sort of way as part of his day's work, with one eye on his noble patrons, and the other on the box office. According to our account, Shakespeare must be placed among the very proudest artists, along with Sophocles, Virgil, Dante, Michelangelo, Milton, Goethe, Beethoven and Wagner. His indifference to the opinion of the world, which I think is less complete than is usually supposed, seems due, not by any means to lack of appreciation of the value of his work, but to lack of appreciation of the importance of the world. I suspect that his pride was so towering as to be ridiculous even in his own eyes, as the whole comic series seems to show. He therefore carefully suppressed all evidence of it, and its only visible effect was probably to make him, like Beethoven, a better business man, in spite of a fundamental absent-mindedness, than his more pliable neighbours.

Though Shakespeare's pride is most noticeable

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in Coriolanus, it is one of the prime forces in the whole series of plays. The Comic Spirit, as we have seen, plays upon his fear of humiliation. In the great tragedies, this fear is overshadowed, though not banished, by the dread of losing the ideal, but when the ideal has been submerged, pride becomes once more of the first importance. Antony's conviction of his own superiority is as necessary to him as Cleopatra.

The same conviction sustains Coriolanus when he has lost everything else, and so too, I think, did it sustain Shakespeare. Even when his whole dramatic world seemed to be falling into corruption, proceeding, doubtless, from a like corruption in his own soul, he retained an unshakable belief in the unique nature of his own powers. His fall from Heaven, like that of Satan, seemed only to increase his pride, by making it more necessary to him. The breaking of it is the catastrophe of the play. "I melt, and am not of stronger earth than others."

Yet we cannot feel this catastrophe as tragic. It is so obviously the only way to salvation. The feeling with which the play leaves us is clearly one of victory. Still, though the note of tragedy is not predominant, it is not absent. Coriolanus has been saved from damnation, but he has no hope of regaining his lost/

lost paradise. He sees that there are depths to which he cannot sink, but he thinks he knows himself and his world too well to believe that he can rise. His own people have cast him out. and the Adversary has no use for one who will not do his work. Coriolanus is condemned to disappear from the stage.

It may be asked: "Why should we suppose the death of Coriolanus to be symbolic? Why should not Shakespeare retrace his steps, and write dramas under the influence of such ideals as he approves? But we must remember that Shakespeare, like Coriolanus, had been cast out by his creatures. He had done his best to rally them round the flag of goodness and purity, but some spirit of perversity, apparently inherent in the nature of dramatic imagination, had frustrated all his efforts. His creatures openly defied their creator, and placed him in such a position that if he continued to create, he must do so with the knowledge that he was creating evil and making himself responsible for it. Antony and Cleopatra, which he had created in spite of this knowledge, was clearly demoralising. To save his soul, and the soul of good in the world, it seemed that he must cease to create.

PART V.

THE LAST PLAYS.

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I. PERICLES.

The foregoing account might lead us to expect that Coriolanus would be the last drama of the Shakespearean series, and in a sense it is. There still remain a few very precious plays, but their value is poetic and symbolic, rather than dramatic. Shakespeare's mind survives the fall of his world and meditates over its ruins. As his mind is essentially dramatic, the dramatic form persists in his thought, but the tension of the game has completely relaxed, and the dramatic spirit is dead.

But this is not the end. An unexpected miracle occurs. Death turns out not to be simple dissolution. The Shakespearean world is drowned five fathoms deep, but it does not fade. It suffers a sea change.

The first play of the new order is Pericles. The commentators are practically unanimous that it is not wholly by Shakespeare. Almost certainly he did not write the first two acts or the introductory speeches by Gower. His authorship of the brothel scenes in the fourth act has also been doubted, but apparently for no other reason than their disagreeableness. I shall suppose that Shakespeare wrote them.

If we omit all that is undoubtedly non-Shakespearean, what remains? A simple tale of the

Arabian/

Arabian Nights order, without any dramatic conflict, told in scenes loosely strung together. Only the most primitive art is employed upon the story, yet it makes a remarkably direct emotional appeal. It is evidently told, not for its own sake, but as an outlet for a powerful spring of personal feeling. We may therefore naturally expect a stronger symbolic element in this play than is usual in Shakespeare's self-significant art. Let us examine the play from this point of view.

The hero throws his wife overboard in a tremendous storm, believing her dead. He is perhaps a little hasty and credulous, but not otherwise blameworthy. His daughter, born in the storm, he entrusts to the care of persons he has benefited, and on whose gratitude he relies. They conspire to kill her, and believe that they have done so. Here the hero is distinctly negligent, but more sinned against than sinning. When he hears of her death, he is stricken with grief, and falls into a dumb melancholy.

But his daughter is not dead. She has been carried away by pirates and placed im a brothel. Here she is in terrible danger to her soul, but her indestructible goodness keeps her unharmed. The subsidiary hero Lysimachus seeks her with apparently impure motives, but is either converted by her, or turns out not to need conversion,/

conversion, being somehow pure all along. In any case, with the help of the long arm of coincidence, he restores her to her father, and presents himself as her honourable lover. Her restoration fills her father with profound joy, whose expression is clearly the main motive of the play. Finally, by a frank miracle, the hero's wife is also restored to him, and his cup of happiness is full.

It is evidently useless to try to trace in this story a formal allegory. Yet I think it is not difficult to see the state of mind from which it flows, if we remember the position at the end of Coriolanus. Shakespeare is full of joy at the recovery of his ideals. He has escaped eternal damnation. The witches have no further power over him. Lady Macbeth, Cressida, and Cleopatra can no longer cast their spells over him. He has dissociated himself from Macbeth and Antony, and even they were better than they seemed. The shadow of the curse of the brothel has been lifted from him, and he can even see that he was never seriously threatened by it. The image of the Beloved rises before him in all her radiant purity as she appeared to him in the days of Cordelia and Desdemona. He has not deserved to see them again, but by a miraculous grace he possesses them once more. The world remains full of evil, but its inmost/

inmost spirit is clean and pure as it had never been before, not even in the days of Twelfth Night.

But the feeling of the play is not one of pure joy. It is mingled with an unavailing regret and unsatisfied longing which is piercingly pathetic. Something precious has apparently been irretrievably lost. I think that while Shakespeare was perfectly convinced of the genuineness of his own change of heart, he looked upon the restoration of the Beloved in her own person as in some way unreal. There is some crucial test of reality which he refrains from applying, some challenge of the Adversary which he declines to take up. He seems to look upon the play as a lovely dream which will vanish away if he tries to endow it with full dramatic reality, a glimpse of an ethereal world too fragile to suffer the glare of the earthly sun. Accordingly, he accepts the visions which descend upon him with humble gratitude, caring little about their inconsistencies and improbabilities. Why should they trouble him, when he does not hope for complete reality in any case? What do such trifling defects matter compared with the great regret that Thaisa and Marina, beautiful as they are, have not the complete flesh-and-blood vitality of Desdemona and Cordelia? They are spirits from a dead dramatic world, incredibly lovely, but unsubstantial.

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As a drama, of course, Shakespeare's little sketch was unsatisfactory, but I do not suppose that he himself regarded it as a real play, or meant it to be acted. What actually did happen is not clear. Some other playwright, probably Wilkins, supplied the rest of the play which we now have, and it was acted with success.

II. CYMBELINE.

After Pericles there is a pause, during which Shakespeare's creative powers seem to remain inactive. But he is not yet exhausted. He has not yet said his say. Pericles was only a rough sketch, and anyhow it is disfigured by the addition of alien matter. He would like to express its idea adequately and without alloy. At length he writes Cymbeline.

Cymbeline is as destitute as Pericles of true dramatic spirit and real verisimilitude, but it is much more carefully written. In fact the wealth of stagecraft displayed in its construction contrasts oddly with its dramatic tameness. As in Pericles, the effect seems poetic and symbolic rather than truly dramatic. There seems to be no very close relation between the general feeling and atmosphere of the play, and its plot. We must therefore look beyond the obvious action to the state of feeling which it more or less symbolically expresses. It may of course be mere coincidence, but even the name Cymbeline seems to suggest a symbolic interpretation.

The title name of the play is important for another reason. It reminds us of a fact which we are apt to overlook, namely, that Cymbeline himself is the formal/

formal hero. Our natural inclination is to neglect him altogether, and give our main attention to Imogen and Postumus. I suggest, however, that the position of Cymbeline is clearly parallel to that of Pericles, who in the Shakespearean portion of the play has a short and entirely passive part, and yet is indisputably the hero. The length and elaboration of our present play somewhat obscures the parallel, but I think it can be made out.

Consider the play from Cymbeline's point of view. He is living in a false world, apparently the world which comes to its climax in Antony and Cleopatra. He has lost his first wife, banished his wisest Counsellor, and in consequence been robbed of his splendid young sons. He has fallen under the spell of a beautiful and wicked woman, who has charmed his senses and poisoned his mind. Under her influence he quarrels with Caesar, and tries to mate his daughter, the only wholesome thing left to him, with her brutish son. Then it is suddenly revealed to him how thoroughly wrong he has been. His wicked enchantress confesses and dies, his false world collapses, and his old world is restored to him.

All this account is, on our theory, clearly applicable to Shakespeare himself. and indeed, allowing for the concrete nature of his imagination, defines his dramatic position/

position with remarkable exactness. It may still be maintained that there is no need for any symbolic interpretation at all, but there is one curious point which seems to indicate that we cannot take the story altogether literally. Why should Cymbeline, when under evil influence, refuse to pay tribute to Rome, and when he is supposed to return to his right mind, resume the Roman yoke? That Shakespeare's patriotism is not dead is abundantly shown in the play itself, yet the tame submission to Rome seems glaringly inconsistent with it. I think we must take the incident as Shakespeare's acknowledgment that Caesar after all was right, and Antony wrong.

But though the fundamental plan of the play remains visible, it can hardly be said that Shakespeare has kept to it. Formally, Cymbeline is still the centre of the play, but its emotional interest centres round Postumus and Imogen. Shakespeare has evidently changed his attitude in some way during the course of the play. Imogen is unaffected by the change, except that her importance is emphasised, but the position of Postumus becomes rather ambiguous.

Postumus was originally intended to be the natural mate of Imogen, and a complete contrast to Cloten. We are meant to deplore the perversity

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of Cymbeline in rejecting one so entirely admirable, and to see in it the power of the evil influence which enthralls him. Evidences of this original intention remain in abundance. Throughout the play there is a general chorus of praise of the superexcellence of Postumus, which in the light of his actual conduct is a little disgusting. I take it that Postumus was not originally meant to have much to do, so that we should not have known of his great nobility of character without the praise lavished upon him.

Why, then, is he given so important and so ignominious a part in the play? I imagine that something like the following took place in Shakespeare's mind. It was a necessary part of the original scheme that while Cymbeline was under enchantment Postumus should be separated from Imogen, but that when Cymbeline came to his right mind he should be reunited to her. The restoration theme therefore applies to Postumus as well as Cymbeline. Postumus naturally becomes a sort of subsidiary hero like Lysimachus, with whom Shakespeare identifies himself when not concerned with the principal hero. But the position of Shakesperean hero at this period carries with it certain liabilities. Shakespeare's mood was passionately humble and self-reproachful. He still trembled at the depth of the evil from which he had been delivered. Postumus therefore tends to feel the restoration of Imogen as a moral miracle/

miracle of which he is utterly unworthy.

In what respect, then, has he been unworthy? Shakespeare's dramatic life immediately supplies the answer. He has been Othello, just as Cymbeline has been Lear and Antony. The story of Postumus and Imogen therefore becomes a retrospect of that of Othello and Desdemona, but with a miraculously happy ending. It is not surprising then, that there is enough fire left even in the ashes of that mighty drama to thrust Postumus and Imogen to the forefront of the play, especially as Cymbeline's part is essentially passive.

But though the story of Postumus is a kind of echo of Othello, Shakespeare's attitude to it is altogether different. He regards it, not as a pitched battle to be fought with all the power of his soul against almost incredible powers of evil, but as a confession of past frailty, mercifully forgiven. It is recognised that the conduct of Postumus is not altogether without excuse, but on the whole it is viewed with a severely critical eye. This criticism strikes also at Shakespeare himself. He sees that the infamous wager upon the character of the Beloved is not disgraceful to Postumus alone. After all, has not every catastrophe of the tragic period, including that of Othello, been due to the fact that Shakespeare has felt it inconsistent with his/

his dramatic honour to refuse any challenge of the Adversary touching the character of the Beloved. Postumus merely does explicitly what Shakespeare has always done virtually.

Shakespeare's critical rather than combative attitude has the result that the temptation and disillusion scenes are surprisingly perfunctory. Both Postumus and Imogen are no doubt grieved to the heart, but neither feels that the foundations of a firmly established universe have been overthrown. The movement of Shakespeare's heart is felt rather in a passionate worship of the unspeakable loveliness of Imogen, a piercing pity for the poor human frailty that could lose her, and a trembling incredulous joy at the thought of recovering her.

It is not only as the wife of Postumus that Imogen gets the benefit of Shakespeare's idealising power. I think she is even more memorable in the Cymbeline, than in the Postumus story. When I think of the play the first picture that strikes my eye is that of Imogen and her brothers before the mountain cave. Indeed I believe that Postumus has disturbed the atmospheric balance of the play. The clean, fresh air of the mountains, in which Imogen is most entirely herself, is as characteristic of Cymbeline as the breath of the sea is of Pericles.

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To the Cymbeline scheme, also, belongs the main villain of the play. Shakespeare no longer feels strongly about Iachimo. He no longer wields the nightmare terrors of Iago, and Shakespeare can forgive him without effort. Even the queen stirs no deep resentment in him. She is allowed to confess her misdeeds upon her deathbed. The one person whom Shakespeare seems really to hate is Cloten. Apparently Shakespeare has lost his terror of a hostile intelligence working against him. The tragic Adversary has ceased from troubling. What Shakespeare now loathes is the dull, soulless, intractable beastliness which infects his world like a plague, constantly threatening to destroy all that is good and beautiful. From the nature of the case, the play scarcely gives an adequate idea of Cloten's power, but it may be noticed that when Cymbeline is converted, Cloten is the last evil to be remounced. Cloten's death was an essential part of the cleansing of the world.

We may notice that it is Guiderius, not Postumus, his natural enemy, who kills Cloten. The explanation which I would suggest is perhaps somewhat fanciful, but it draws attention to a distinction which I think can be felt in the play. Postumus, though untouched by the spirit of the game, which alone gives genuine reality, has by spontaneously achieving an unexpected degree of prominence, raised himself to a higher level of reality than the characters of

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the Cymbeline branch. He now belongs to a different scheme, which cuts across the original Cymbeline scheme. Guiderius, on the other hand, belongs to the same plane of reality as Cloten. and takes the place of Postumus in that plane. If Postumus had killed Cloten, it would have been a comparatively commonplace incident, but when that beautiful son of the mountains slays him in front of Imogen's enchanted cave, the event becomes symbolic. The world is purged of its dross. Unfortunately, in this unsubstantial dreamlike play, Guiderius is the most dreamlike figure, and the cave the most dreamlike place, so that it may be that Shakespeare never believed that Cloten's death was more than part of a beautiful dream, like the recovery of Imogen in the flesh.

III. THE WINTER'S TALE.

Full of divine beauty as Cymbeline is, it is not on the whole a satisfactory play. As we have seen, it lacks unity of idea. Shakespeare's imagination is still fertile, but his technique has not yet adapted itself to his new state of mind. Though he has taken far more pains, he is less lucid than in the sketchy Pericles, where he briefly and naively expressed the main current of his mind. Working now on a larger scale, he has much more difficulty in avoiding obscurity. Not having the stress of the game to force him into concentration, he is apt, in spite of great constructive ingenuity, to become diffuse and emotionally confused. Cymbeline himself, robbed of his emotional position by Postumus, becomes uninteresting, while Postumus, losing in turn the nobility connected with his objectivity, becomes jarring. Moreover, on account of these cross currents, there is a feeling of fussy restlessness in the action which prevents the magic of the atmosphere from producing its full effect.

In The Winter's Tale these defects are corrected. There is no undue technical elaboration. The story moves easily and clearly from beginning to end. The air of restlessness is gone, and a curious stillness has settled upon the world. Leontes, by seizing the Othello theme/

theme for himself, firmly retains the position of hero. Florizel is kept carefully in his place, and even Perdita is kept secondary to Hermione. So determined is Shakespeare that there shall be no mistake, that he denies Perdita the great final recognition scene which is her right. The threads of the plot are unusually loose, but nothing is allowed to interfere with unity of impression. It is true that the fourth act is a decided contrast to the rest of the play, but this effect is part of the whole design.

The fundamental theme of the play is the same as that of Pericles and Cymbeline, the loss of the Beloved and her ultimate recovery. Its feeling, however, is much more intense. The terrible shadow of Othello falls here as in Cymbeline, but with a deeper blackness. Still less than in Cymbeline can we discuss the Othello motive from the same point of view as in the original tragedy. Critics have often distinguished between the jealousy of Othello and that of Leontes as if they belonged to different species. I think, however, that it is not the quality of the passions that is different, but Shakespeare's attitude to them. In Othello, jealousy appears to Shakespeare as a terrible and almost incredible nightmare against which he is still able to fight. In Winter's Tale, it is a disgraceful madness to which he has succumbed, and whose/

whose recollection overwhelms him with shame and self-reproach. Accordingly we find that all the evil cunning of earth and Hell is required to make Othello fall, and even then we feel that he has fallen too easily, whereas Leontes falls without a struggle or an excuse, without even that perfunctory resistance which the praises bestowed upon Postumus make necessary in Cymbeline. Yet we accept the fall of Leontes as the most natural thing in the world. The fact is, I think, that the jealousy of Leontes is a much more universal thing than that of Othello. Othello's is treated as an individual test case in which the Adversary is challenged to do his worst. But behind Leontes lies the whole of Shakespeare's tragic experience. He knows now where the overwhelming power of the Adversary lies. He may make use of ingenious villains and cunningly falsified evidence, but Shakespeare knows that this is mere superficial pageantry. The Adversary really works through the inherent perversity of the imagination. The kingdom of Hell is within us. The images of love which light up the world of the mind seem to be inevitably followed by images of fear which blight them. There is apparently a permanent Beast within the imagination ever ready to attack what is good and beautiful. In Pericles it is the brothel. In Cymbeline it is Cloten. Here it assumes/

assumes no visible shape, but as a spiritual force it becomes rampant in the soul of Leontes. Shakespeare himself, in the late tragedies, had fallen under its loathsome power, but had broken loose in Coriolanus. He knew how its suggestions seemed like immediate intuitions, more certain than any oracle. Leontes is an imperfectly incarnated Shakespeare succumbing in retrospect to the resurrected ghost of the tragic nightmare.

If we look at the matter in this way, there is something magnanimous in Shakespeare's treatment of Leontes. His self-abasement is so absolute that he magnifies his sin in every possible way, and disdains every attempt at extenuation. Hermione is the last person in the world to be the object of suspicion. Her character has a kind of sacredness which makes unbelief blasphemy. Nor is there any attempt to soften Leontes' abominable cruelty to the baby Perdita. Yet there is a whole-heartedness about his delusion which is almost respectable. He has the fullest confidence in his own intuition. He shrinks from no test. He is thoroughly incapable of appreciating evidence, but he fully believes that he is giving his wife a fair trial. Only when the fury of the Beast has been slaked with blood does it leave him.

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As his sin is more unpardonable than that of either Othello or Postumus, so his repentance is more bitter and profound. When he sees his error, he is struck, not like them, with pain and rage, but with a pitiful, crushed helplessness which is irresistibly moving. He receives almost with gratitude the nagging of Paulina, whose tongue strikes deeper than that of Lear's fool. Some critics have thought that Paulina was necessary to keep the weak thoughts of Leontes fixed upon Hermione, but I am afraid that that is not her function. She is a penance which Leontes prescribes for himself, and to which he patiently submits.

The restoration scene, also, is admirably contrived. It is much more than an effective theatrical trick, though it is certainly that. It allows the restoration to take place slowly, so that the emotions of Leontes have time to gather to a head and rise to fever heat. But apart from such considerations there is something appropriate in the statue idea. Shakespeare, like Leontes, had long gazed wistfully upon the image of the departed Beloved, longing for it to come to life, but it would not. Finally, the miracle happens, and the dramatist, like his hero, is filled with a trembling joy which is perhaps the/

the most moving thing in all the plays.

We may notice that the restoration of Hermione is practically unique. In Pericles, indeed, the restoration of the hero's wife is part of the formal scheme of the play, but as we never knew her before her loss, at least in the Shakespearean part of the play, our interest in her has no substance. Imogen, again, is conceived as a daughter rather than as a wife, and it is only by a kind of accident that her wifehood competes with her daughterhood. In the Tempest the hero has a daughter, but no wife. It would thus seem that in the last plays the daughter is essential to the scheme, but that the restoration of the wife is a special miracle almost too great to be believed.

Shakespeare apparently makes some symbolic distinction between his wife and his daughter which it is easier to see vaguely than to state exactly. He can love either passionately, but not both at once. When the hero has a wife, he has no daughter, and vice versa. Pericles and the present play are only apparent exceptions, for in these the daughter is kept apart from both her father and her mother until the last act. In Pericles, the sketch, the brunt of the action is borne by the daughter, but in this, the developed drama/

drama, it is borne by the wife. Hermione is the principal heroine, Perdita her understudy, who takes her place in the fourth Act while she is supposed to be dead.

Either wife or daughter, then, may be the unique Beloved, the heroine of the play. To get at the distinction between them more precisely, we must remember the nature of the Beloved. She is the primary image in the dramatic world, the nucleus round which it gathers. Her relation to the dramatist is twofold. On the one hand, she is certainly his creation. Her being and nature depend absolutely upon his. On the other hand, she does not reflect his ordinary habitual nature, but its finest flower. She is struck forth by his imagination when it has soared into the highest circle of that region of beauty which lies beyond the reach of the intellect and the will. Her creation therefore seems mysterious and spontaneous, and she herself an independent being far more marvellous than himself, and yet by some wonderful chance embodying all those qualities for which his soul hungers.

While the Beloved always exhibits both these aspects, I think that the beloved daughter emphasises the first, and the beloved wife the second. Towards the daughter/

daughter he is so far conscious of the creative relationship that he assumes the right to a certain amount of obedience and gratitude, that is to say, he claims some control over her actions and feelings. The daughter thus embodies the ideal of the conscious artist. The wife, on the other hand, belongs to a higher plane of beauty where the creative relation is lost sight of, so that the question now is not of obedience or gratitude, but of constancy. Is there a pre-established harmony between her and him whereby her essence permanently embodies his highest ideal instead of only temporarily coinciding with it? The answer depends upon the ability of the dramatist to maintain his highest level of intuition, or at least his faith in it. The wife, then, embodies that ideal which dwells too high upon the inaccessible peaks of the artist's soul to be made the object of deliberate art. To reach her abode his imagination must be reinforced by the intense energy of the game.

From this analysis it naturally follows that the plays in which the game element is strong, and the pursuit of beauty comparatively spontaneous, tend to be wife-dramas, whereas the plays in which the game element slackens and the artistic impulse comes to the front, tend to be daughter-dramas. The one daughter-play of the/

the great tragic period, where the game spirit is strongest, is King Lear, in which the theme, the rebellion of the creatures against their creator, brings the creative relation into special prominence, and in which the struggle against the Adversary is replaced by a lyrical recognition of his terrific power. The beautiful plays which follow Coriolanus, being retrospective rather thsn combative, are naturally daughter-dramas, but where, as in the present play, the dramatic spirit tries to raise its head, there is a corresponding impulse towards a resurrection of the wife-beloved.

Accordingly, in the first three acts, where Hermione is present, the spectre of the great tragic Adversary is uncomfortably close, but in the fourth, where she disappears, the tension is relaxed, and Perdita, the daughter, takes her place. That strange, fresh, remote, magical beauty, which is characteristic of the last plays, fills the air. Some of Shakespeare's very loveliest poetry is to be found here. At the same time, the dramatic spirit is hushed, and the dramatic threads hang loose. Autolycus gives promise of intrigue which comes to nothing. The whole business of the fourth act is simply to let us have a good look at Perdita and Florizel in their pastoral surroundings. In the fifth act/

act Perdita again appears, but Hermione gradually overshadows her. Her recognition scene is scamped, and she is almost forgotten till she is brought into prominence by her mother's solemn benediction.

In spite of Perdita's subordinate position, she is necessary to the effect of the play. It is Shakespeare's design to contrast the natural goodness of the world with the blighting effect upon it of a perverse imagination. Now, with the exception of Leontes himself, practically everyone in the play is good. But the goodness of such characters as Hermione, Paulina, and Camillo is of the tragic type which can flourish in an evil world. Perdita and her circle, however, bear witness to an indestructible goodness in the nature of things, not a reaction from evil, but primitive and positive. Only Leontes has been vile, and he is so no longer. He has tried to destroy or reject the divine things of the world, but they have been mercifully restored to him.

Yet the general impression left by the play is profoundly sad. The restoration of the lost world is less complete than it seems at first sight. Mamillius and Antigonus are dead. Sixteen years of love and friendship are irrecoverably wasted. Leontes' own heart will never forgive him, even if Hermione does.

Moreover, there is a certain hardness in the atmosphere/

atmosphere of the play. It has the fresh beauty of Cymbeline, but not its gentle tenderness. Shakespeare is more in earnest, and less inclined to trifle with reality. In the sacrifice of Antigonus, for instance, there is a cool callousness which is shocking. Autolycus, too, differs in some unsatisfactory way from his comic ancestors. He seems intended to be genial, but is not. Feste is not restored.

Perdita and Florizel themselves do not escape this touch of hardness. Florizel is prepared not only to disobey his father, which might be quite admirable, but to ignore him. He will not even give the old man a chance. Perdita is less explicit, but she apparently has the same spirit. Her discussion on gardening with Polixenes shows that she prefers the free growth of nature to the controlled growth of art. The King Lear problem, that is to say, the control of the creature by the creator without destroying his freedom, is evidently still unsolved. These two children are beautiful and good, but they mean to go their own way. They are not tragic rebels instigated by the Adversary. They merely illustrate the tendency of all beauty to follow the laws of its own nature rather than the will of the deliberate artist. In a sense, therefore, Perdita will never be restored/

restored to Leontes, and perhaps it is for this reason that she is denied her recognition scene. Shakespeare could not put his heart into anything which he felt to be so incomplete. By some mysterious miracle he may achieve perfect union with his wife, but never with his daughter.

Even the restoration of Hermione leaves something wanting. Shakespeare can bring her back from the dead, but he cannot make her speak to him. Is it an accident that she speaks only to give her blessing to her daughter, and addresses no word to her husband? I am afraid not. I fear that the dream vision returned no answer to his prayers, and that he was too much in earnest to invent any speech that did not come in authentic tones to his mind's ear. Hermione was only half restored to him. The power of the imagination is greater to create evil than to blot it out.

And here I think we come to the real root of the sadness of the play. We seem to penetrate to the foundations of the dramatic world. We see that it is by nature unspeakably good and beautiful, but we see at the same time that there is at large within it an evil Beast whose vile breath can cast a blight over it all, and against which there is no defence. This monster is an inseparable attendant upon the dramatic imagination. It can be to some extent diverted, propitiated, or restrained,/

restrained, but it cannot be either tamed or destroyed. Its constant presence is an immeasurable danger to the dramatic world, and a dramatist cannot confer the gift of free will upon his characters without the risk of arousing its fury. Even in the present play, where there is only the shadow of genuine dramatic freedom, we can see what would have happened if that freedom had been real. The play, therefore, while apparently rejoicing in the recovery of that which was lost, really enforces the lesson of Coriolanus, that the salvation of the dramatic world can only be purchased by its death.

IV. THE TEMPEST.

Before finally abandoning the drama, however, Shakespeare once more reviews his position. Surely there must be a way out. Surely the enormous artistic skill he has acquired will enable him to find some means of protecting his Beloved from the Beast.

Already he has done something. He has evaded the tragic Adversary by refraining from challenging him. He lives now in a fairy world, in which, by sacrificing something of reality, he has gained greater security and control. By deliberately allowing his visions to remain somewhat dreamlike, he evades dangerous tests of their substantiality. The game element is lost, but so also are its tragic consequences.

But has he gone far enough? Why allow the shadow of the tragic world to come so near? Why all these spectral reminiscences of Othello and Lear? Why this unnecessary mimicry of the world of reality? Why this illusion of a freedom which is not allowed to become genuine? Why not dwell frankly in fairyland, keeping the real world resolutely out of sight? Why not build a beautiful haven of rest, where he may dwell alone with the Beloved, far from even the echoes of tragedy?

So he dreams of an enchanted isle ringed

about/

about with storms to prevent all intrusion from the outside world. By the power of his art he rules all things exactly according to his pleasure. He will have no wife. The risk is too great. A wife implies an independent will, and a mind that can never be fully known. Accordingly his Beloved is the daughter whom he has brought up from infancy, whose mind he has formed, and who has no will but his. There is no flaw in her beauty, goodness, and purity, and her background is lovely like herself. Shakespeare promises himself a perfect existence.

But now comes the inevitable struggle of the imagination to preserve unchanged what it has created. Nothing but absolute perfection can resist change, and after all, the isle of bliss is not perfect, for it is not free. Complete reality and the spirit of the game have been excluded from it. Shakespeare can resist intrusion from without, but the forces of unrest besiege him from within. He finds that a beast has appeared in his island. At first it seems harmless enough. It is ugly and misshapen, but not malignant. Shakespeare thinks it can be tamed and humanised, and finds some entertainment in the task. Perhaps rather carelessly, he entrusts a large part of its education to Miranda.

Then the catastrophe of the early plays

repeats itself. What was only grotesque becomes diabolic. As Caliban grows, his true nature becomes manifest. He believes that the island is his, and desires to people it with Calibans. Finally, he attempts to assault Miranda. Then Shakespeare recognises the Beast. He is the child of the Adversary and the Third Witch. There is now no hope of educating him. All that Shakespeare can do is to restrain him. Still, Shakespeare does not despair. All the spirits of the isle are at the command of his art, and with their aid he may, by constant vigilance, keep the monster from mischief.

But here he has unexpected trouble. Even when the game is excluded, Art itself desires to follow its own laws, and chafes against external restraint. Shakespeare finds that his executive spirits are becoming increasingly unwilling to obey him. Ariel, their leader, begs for his freedom. Shakespeare coaxes and bullies him into submission, but he sees that his position is becoming untenable. The power of the enemy is constantly growing, while his allies are becoming reluctant. Shall he blot out his dream, or give it a new turn?

Shakespeare cannot find it in his heart to annihilate Miranda. He therefore resolves, while his power still holds firm, to make terms with the outside world, not perhaps the free world of tragedy, but at least/

least the half-free world of Cymbeline and Winter's Tale. By a supreme exertion of his art, he will call typical representatives to the island, and having tested and judged them, allot to each the part he is to play in the new world. Having thus made the future as secure as he can, he will remove all constraint from his imagination, and set the world free.

Having finally taken his resolution, he raises a great storm which brings his elected visitors to the island, and in this tempest the fairy dream rises to a higher plane of reality and becomes drama. The rough, earthly voice of the boatswain, calls out an answering substantiality in the island. Its dream beauty remains, but it becomes clear and articulate. Shakespeare appears in visible form as Prospero, but as the game spirit is never let loose throughout the play, his identity with his representative is never disturbed.

Prospero's first care is to provide for Miranda. Ferdinand, a reincarnation of Florizel, or perhaps of Orlando, is detached from the others, tested, and judged fit to be entrusted with her. In fact, Shakespeare feels that she is safer with Ferdinand than with himself. Ferdinand is in no sense his representative. He is entirely objective, like Miranda herself. He can therefore be seen clearly, and seen to be good, whereas Shakespeare is eternally barred

barred from obtaining a clear vision of himself. To make Miranda safe, he must therefore resign his claim to her, and perhaps, since she is the soul and nucleus of the dramatic world, the same necessity applies to it also.

Miranda is only too willing to fall in with the arrangement. She is emphatically a daughter-heroine, and exemplifies the truth so bluntly enunciated by Cordelia, that a husband's claim is at least as great as a father's. Like Florizel and Perdita, the two young people will henceforth go their own way.

Two more of the visitors detach themselves from the general company, Stephano, the drunkard, the successor of Falstaff and Sir Toby, and Trinculo, the fool, the successor of Touchstone and Feste. They naturally ally themselves with Caliban in his conspiracy to murder Prospero, as the drunkenness of Cassio and the folly of Roderigo played into the hands of Iago. That they should form such an alliance is Shakespeare's judgment upon them. The tragic impatience of vice and folly as instruments of evil still persists, though it has lost much of its sharpness.

It is to be noticed that Caliban's conspiracy is the one thing in the play which upsets Prospero. At the approach of Caliban, the creations of Ariel vanish in disorder. Prospero himself is violently agitated, and/

and even begins to consider the total annihilation of the entire dramatic universe. He has apparently neglected the conspiracy until it is almost too late, and though he frustrates it easily enough, he seems unnerved at the thought of his lapse, and its possible consequences.

I think that in the clear light of the drama, Caliban has lost the horrific quality he had in the dream. Unless we keep firmly in remembrance who he is, we shall be at a loss to explain Prospero's intense fear and loathing of him. He is nothing less than the visible representative of that shadowy but terrific being whom I have called the Adversary. If it is objected that Caliban is both too amusing and too attractive for such an identification, we must remember that Shakespeare on reflection saw the power of the Adversary behind Falstaff and Cleopatra as well as Iago.

Of the other visitors only four have any importance. These represent the four main moral types. Gonzalo is consistently good, and Antonio consistently evil. Alonzo is a sinner who repents, and Sebastian is corrupted before our eyes. Prospero takes Gonzalo and Alonzo to his heart. The others, in the disquieting words of the Westminster Confession, he "passes by", punishing them in no other way than by telling them that their evil is known. Their villainy, unlike that of Caliban/

Caliban, appears to disturb him not at all.

One incident in which they are concerned, however, does, I think, disturb Shakespeare. Gonzalo, to pass the time, imagines how he would rule a Utopia if he were king with unlimited power. After describing how everything would be ordered for the best, he pictures his people as absolutely free from any constraint or sovereignty. He is at once reminded by Antonio and Sebastian that he has begun by supposing himself king.

I can scarcely believe that the appearance of this parable in Shakespeare's mind at this time, is without significance. It states clearly the problem of King Lear which is the eternal dilemma of dramatic creation in general and of this play in particular. It is that whatever care you take, you cannot give freedom to your creatures and still retain control over them. That this conclusion occurred so clearly to Shakespeare, and in so appropriate a form, the ideal being constructed by his friend and criticised decisively by his enemies, shows that despair had entered his heart. He must give freedom to his world, and abandon his control over it.

He accordingly arranges his affairs, and bids farewell to the island. All the characters go their several ways, and Prospero is left alone in his dukedom. The dream of the enchanted haven of bliss is over, and since this/

this was his last hope, he knows that the entire dramatic universe must follow it into the thin air from which it sprang.

V. THE PASSING OF THE DRAMA.

We must suppose, then, that when Shakespeare gave The Tempest its final shape, he knew that the entire universe of his creation stood on the brink of dissolution. The knowledge produces a profound change in the play, not in its structure or superficial appearance, but in its atmosphere and general effect.

Shakespeare feels that he is bidding farewell, not only to the isle of bliss, but to the whole dramatic world which lies behind it. The island with its visitors seems to enlarge its scope until it embraces the whole series of Shakespearean plays. Prospero represents Shakespeare, not simply as seeking a last refuge for his Beloved, but as a universal dramatic creator. Ariel is more than the Slave of the Lamp in a fairy world. He is the genius who carries out Shakespeare's designs in the whole dramatic domain. Caliban, too, is more than Prospero's private Beast. He carries us back to Thersites and the Witches and all the ugly and malign powers of the earlier plays. Miranda is seen more clearly to be the eternal Beloved. The whole isle seems laden with reminiscences of the preceding series.

In one way this change makes for richness,

but/

but not altogether. The characters, by becoming representative, lose those irrelevances of detail which give individuality, and become almost diagrammatic in their simplicity. The illusion of flesh and blood is replac by a cool, crystalline translucence. Imogen before her mountain cave is a more remote and dreamlike figure than Miranda, but she has a warm opacity which Miranda has not.

At first sight this diagrammatic character of the images in the play seems to detract from their reality, so that they become more unreal than even those of Cymbeline and Winter's Tale. They are detached from that vast world vision whose self-consistency guarantees the reality of its parts. Yet the figures of the Tempest have a kind of intrinsic reality of their own. Their artistic beauty enables them to be seen with a perfect clearness which seems to ensure an eternal place in the imagination. Like some simple melodies they seem as if they must always have existed, and were not invented, but found. They are the Platonic Ideas of drama, more essentially real than reality itself.

The figures of the Tempest are not only detached from the world of reality. They are detached from one another. The spirit of the game being dead, and not even imitated, there is no interest to bind them together except the constraining art of Prospero and Ariel. As soon/

soon as that is gone, we feel that each will exist in its own right without any necessary reference to the others. Even if the dramatic world is not annihilated it will at least be disbanded.

This dissociation of the characters means that morality ceases to have any great importance. Even murder excites only a languid interest. It is only a premature dissolution of what will be soon dissolved in any case. Morality tends to be resolved again into those more primitive aesthetic conditions from which it arose. Sin is a blot on that vision which we wish to see in all its beauty before it finally disappears.

All these conditions, the simplification of the characters, their detachment from any predetermined system, the quiescence of the game, and the slackening of moral pressure, make for a primitive, but singularly perfect type of artistic beauty. The full-blooded richness of tragic beauty is absent, but the simplicity and pliability of the material allows of a delicate elaboration of design almost like that of music. The result is that to many people the Tempest is the most beautiful of all Shakespeare's plays. Its beauty, so to speak. stands still to be looked at, whereas the beauty of the great tragedies must be taken on the wing while the mind is excited about other things. The quality

quality of the beauty of the Tempest, too, is very attractive to those who are attuned to Shakespeare's sunset mood. It has the thin, magical iridescence of a soap-bubble, about to burst. Other elements are present which we shall notice later.

The simplicity and beauty of the play, and the stilling of the dramatic and moral interest, leave room for the observation of that symbolism which is more or less present in all the Shakespearean plays, but which, owing to the extreme importance of the occasion, is specially prominent in this. The clear atmosphere, from which the mists of dreamland have been swept away, is now tinged with mysticism. The characters and incidents all have the air of meaning more than appears on the surface. There is no set allegory, only a backward reference to the processes of Shakespeare's imagination, which seems to take us to the hidden springs of the dramatic world.

Ariel, in particular, seems full of symbolic significance. It is specially interesting to distinguish between him and Miranda, who also embodies the delicate, rarified beauty characteristic of the play. Shakespeare keeps them entirely separate. Miranda never sees Ariel, and is apparently unaware of his existence./

existence. Ariel is no doubt aware of Miranda, but he never attends to her. Miranda, it would appear, is the ideal, the soul of the drama, whereas Ariel is its technique, its executive artistry. The ideal is unaware of the technique through which it is expressed, while the technique is only too eager to be an end in itself and to ignore the ideal. The ideal is open and undisguised, while the technique appears in its true form only to its master.

Again, Ariel's antagonism to Caliban is different from that of Miranda. Caliban is a constant menace to Miranda, but Ariel is not afraid of him, as he was of Sycorax and Setebos. It is true that in the masque scene, where Caliban recovers for a moment some of his ancestral terrors, Ariel's fears revive, but in general he merely finds it irksome to expend his powers in keeping the Beast in check. He longs to cast such duties aside, and follow his own nature.

What is that nature? Clearly, I think, it is lyric, and will express itself best through pure poetry or music, in which, especially the latter, the pure artistic faculty can work unhampered. Ariel has been harnessed to the drama by a powerful master, but he feels that in his service he is working under constraint. He knows/

knows that in some real sense the island is Caliban's, or at least that Caliban has his legitimate place in it. But though Caliban may be necessary for the drudgery of the drama, Ariel hates to be associated with him. All his instincts impel him to split the partnership between art and the game upon which the drama depends. His last service to the drama is to provide heavenly music in which it may dissolve.

The symbolism of the Tempest, however, seems to strike deeper than even the foundations of the drama. Many readers have felt that Prospero refers back beyond Shakespeare to God himself. We see, for instance, how he sometimes veils a benevolent purpose under an appearance of harshness, how he sometimes sends trouble to those he loves in order to test and strengthen their character, and how he sometimes attains his ends through the disobedience of his creatures. Through the whole play, too, there is the suggestion of a Last Judgment, which I do not think accidental. The other two supreme artists of the modern world, Michelangelo and Beethoven, crown their careers with Last Judgments. In Michelangelo's case the theological refererence is explicit. In Beethoven's it is more indirect. In the last movement of his last symphony, he briefly reviews and judges the preceding movements with reference to their fitness to express/

express the Hymn to Joy, which at its highest point becomes theological. I think, therefore, that a genuine theological symbolism was present, though perhaps very dimly, in Shakespeare's mind when he was finishing The Tempest.

As this theological reference, being extra-dramatic, is irrelevant to the purpose of this essay, though very relevant to the general design of which this essay is intended to form part, I shall not consider it further here. Its effect, however, is felt in the emotional tone of the play, and in the quality of its beauty. Though the firm structure of the island seems to be dissolving into its aesthetic elements, and Prospero, unable any longer to hold them together, sees nothing but death before him, yet the feeling of the play as a whole is not one of despair. The inmost soul of the play is not to be found in Prospero, Shakespeare's representative, but in Miranda, Shakespeare's Beloved, the topmost peak of the inaccessible heights of beauty, and from this peak our vision is not of despair, but of hope. Miranda's strongest feeling is a delighted amazement at the beauty of the new world that is dawning upon her. Though Prospero's whole dramatic world may pass away, Miranda sees herself surrounded by another world which shall not pass away. So in the beauty of The Tempest we have

not only the prismatic hues of dissolution, and the solemnity of approaching death, but the fresh glory of the mystic vision.

VI. THE SERIES AND OTHELLO.

We have now reached the end of the Shakesperean series. Henry VIII does not seem to be substantially his, though he apparently had a hand in it.

If we view the series as a whole, we see that it can be regarded as one vast connected drama. The local habitations change, but the inner thread is continuous. At the beginning we had to take some account of the ordinary real world, and at the end we seemed to be directed towards some super-world, but between these two extreme points the inner dramatic movement is self-contained. Extra-dramatic influences are no doubt constantly present, but our investigation seems to show that they are superficial, and have in no case altered the flow of the dramatic current.

We may therefore claim that in the dramatic movement of the Shakesperean series we see at work a most important and typical form of the pure creative process. We can observe the created world as it rises out of chaos, comes to its prime, sinks into old age, and finally dissolves. We can follow the forces at work, distinguish between the constructive and the destructive, and almost understand why the course of events/

events should be exactly as it is. In fact, we have found a working model of creation, which our aesthetic theory leads us to believe to be the most typical that we are likely to obtain.

For some of the purposes of a working model, however, the whole series is too cumbrous. It is too long to be carried about in the mind all at once, and too discontinuous with respect to its local habitations to be perceived as a homogeneous whole. To make an analytic digest of it is to descend from the imaginative plane. What we require is an imaginative digest. If we could take one play as adequately representing the series, we should have a picture of the world of creation shaped by the power of beauty into an unsurpassable instrument of mental vision.

Our nearest approach to such a play I take to be Othello. I firmly believe it to be the greatest of the series, but as many critics whose opinion I respect do not agree with this judgment, I shall not press it. I shall be content with the general verdict that Othello is at least one of the very greatest plays, and shall try to show only that it is the most representative.

In the first place, it is admittedly the most perfect. To some critics, indeed, this perfection is its chief defect. Finish suggests finitude. Othello seems/

seems to lack those gaps which in King Lear, for instance, appear like gateways to the infinite. It is so self-contained that it suggests nothing beyond itself. But for our purposes, finitude is no defect. We do not wish to suggest the infinite by the imperfectly finite, but to represent the infinite universe by a finite model as self-contained as itself, and yet affording, by reason of its supreme beauty, as vast a vision as perfect finitude will permit. Though Othello is quite self-contained, its extreme perfection of organisation allows an unclouded vision of a content of unequalled richness.

In the second place, Othello is the most dramatic of the plays. Those who prefer Hamlet, King Lear, or The Tempest, do so admittedly for reasons other than dramatic. Othello, however, is pure drama. The balance and climax of its design is miraculously combined with a free and strenuous conflict in which the spirit of the game reaches its highest intensity. If, then, we are to choose a representative drama as an illustration of the process of dramatic creation, it seems only reasonable that we should choose one in which the characteristic dramatic qualities appear in their greatest purity.

In the third place, and this is the most important/

important point, Othello briefly sums up in itself the movement of the whole series. We have first the long introduction with its atmosphere of mingled heroism, romance, and comic criticism, in which the Beloved asserts her rights against the powers of the State. Then we have the tragic attack by the child of the Adversary, in which the hero loses his faith and the Beloved her life. Finally, we have the hero's recovery of faith, but at the price of such grief and self-reproach that he voluntarily abandons the world, while at the same time the spirit of the Beloved so triumphantly dominates the close of the play that we leave it with renewed vitality. The parallel cannot be pressed too far, but we can see that the general scheme of the single drama is the same as that of the series. Other plays, like King Lear, deal with dramatic problems of fundamental importance, and some, like Coriolanus and The Tempest, pass judgment on the whole series, but Othello is the only play which actually comprehends the series in itself.

When, therefore, we wish to study the dramatic processes at leisure in full detail, we can make use of the whole series, but when we wish to grasp the creative scheme in one intuitive movement of the imagination, we must turn to Othello, keeping the series in the background of our minds for reference.

It/

It is valuable to have the smaller as well as the larger dramatic model, not only because we are able to use them alternatively, but because their relation to one another is very suggestive. Just as Othello can be regarded either as parallel to the series or as comprehended, and having its own position in it, so we may regard the dramatic world either as parallel to the real world, or as part of it, and having its own place in it. In an adequate treatment of the Shakesperean drama both aspects of this double relation to the real or theological world would be considered. The drama would be treated not only as having an independent life of its own, but as having its own place in God's life. My investigation, being intended as a step towards the formation of a theological vision, has necessarily been restricted to the former aspect. It can therefore be regarded only as preliminary and tentative. It is only as a first approximation to a complete Shakesperean theory that I now present it for consideration.

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