Notes on Cymbeline

How is it that the commentators take no notice of the un-Shakspearian defect in the metre of the second line, and what in Shakspeare is the same, in the harmony with the sense and feeling? Some word or words must have slipped out after ‘youth,’—possibly ‘and see’—

That should’st repair my youth!—and see, thou heap’st, &c.

Ib. sc. 4. Pisanio’s speech:

—For so long
As he could make me with this eye or ear
Distinguish him from others, &c.

But ‘this eye,’ in spite of the supposition of its being used διευθυνώς is very awkward. I should think that either ‘or’—or ‘the’ was Shakspeare’s word;—

As he could make me or with eye or ear.

Ib. sc. 7. Iachimo’s speech:

Hath nature given them eyes
To see this vaulted arch, and the rich crop
Of sea and land, which can distinguish ’twixt
The fiery orbs above, and the twinn’d stones
Upon the number’d beach.

I would suggest ‘cope’ for ‘crop.’ As to ‘twinn’d stones’—may it not be a bold catachresis for muscles, cockles, and other empty shells with hinges, which are truly twinned? I would take Dr. Farmer’s ‘umber’d,’ which I had proposed before I ever heard of its having been already offered by him: but I do not adopt his interpretation of the word, which I think is not derived from umbra, a shade, but from umber, a dingy yellow-brown soil, which most commonly forms the mass of the sludge on the sea shore, and on the banks of tide-rivers at low water. One other possible interpretation of this sentence has occurred to me, just barely worth mentioning:—that the ‘twinn’d stones’ are the augrim stones upon the number’d beech, that is, the astronomical tables of beech-wood.

Act v. sc. 5.

Sooth. When as a lion’s whelp, &c.

It is not easy to conjecture why Shakspeare should have introduced this ludicrous scroll, which answers no one purpose, either propulsive, or explicatory, unless as a joke on etymology.
Notes on Titus Andronicus

TITUS ANDRONICUS.

Act i. sc. 1. Theobald's note.

I never heard it so much as intimated, that he (Shakspeare) had turned his genius to stage-writing, before he associated with the players, and became one of their body.

That Shakspeare never 'turned his genius to stage-writing,' as Theobald most Theobaldice phrases it, before he became an actor, is an assertion of about as much authority, as the precious story that he left Stratford for deer-stealing, and that he lived by holding gentlemen's horses at the doors of the theatre, and other trash of that arch-gossip, old Aubrey. The metre is an argument against Titus Andronicus being Shakspeare's, worth a score such chronological surmises. Yet I incline to think that both in this play and in Jeronymo, Shakspeare wrote some passages, and that they are the earliest of his compositions.

Act v. sc. 2.

I think it not improbable that the lines from—

I am not mad; I know thee well enough;

* * * * * * *

So thou destroy Rapine, and Murder there,

were written by Shakspeare in his earliest period. But instead of the text—

Revenge, which makes the foul offender quake.
Tit. Art thou Revenge? and art thou sent to me?—

the words in italics ought to be omitted.

TROILUS AND CRESSIDA.

Mr. Pope (after Dryden) informs us, that the story of Troilus and Cressida was originally the work of one Lollius, a Lombard: but Dryden goes yet further; he declares it to have been written in Latin verse, and that Chaucer translated it.—Lollius was a historiographer of Urbino in Italy. Note in Stockdale's edition, 1807.

'Lollius was a historiographer of Urbino in Italy.' So affirms the notary, to whom the Sieur Stockdale committed the disfacimento of Ayscough's excellent edition of Shakspeare. Pity that the researchful notary has not either
Notes on Troilus and Cressida 89
told us in what century, and of what history, he was a writer, or been simply content to depose, that Lollius, if a writer of that name existed at all, was a somewhat somewhere. The notary speaks of the Troy Boke of Lydgate, printed in 1513. I have never seen it; but I deeply regret that Chalmers did not substitute the whole of Lydgate’s works from the MSS. extant, for the almost worthless Gower.

The Troilus and Cressida of Shakspeare can scarcely be classed with his dramas of Greek and Roman history; but it forms an intermediate link between the fictitious Greek and Roman histories, which we may call legendary dramas, and the proper ancient histories; that is, between the Pericles or Titus Andronicus, and the Coriolanus, or Julius Cæsar. Cymbeline is a congener with Pericles, and distinguished from Lear by not having any declared prominent object. But where shall we class the Timon of Athens? Perhaps immediately below Lear. It is a Lear of the satirical drama; a Lear of domestic or ordinary life;—a local eddy of passion on the high road of society, while all around is the week-day goings on of wind and weather; a Lear, therefore, without its soul-searching flashes, its ear-cleaving thunder-claps, its meteoric splendours,—without the contagion and the fearful sympathies of nature, the fates, the furies, the frenzied elements, dancing in and out, now breaking through, and scattering, —now hand in hand with,—the fierce or fantastic group of human passions, crimes, and anguish, reeling on the unsteady ground, in a wild harmony to the shock and the swell of an earthquake. But my present subject was Troilus and Cressida; and I suppose that, scarcely knowing what to say of it, I by a cunning of instinct ran off to subjects on which I should find it difficult not to say too much, though certain after all that I should still leave the better part unsaid, and the gleaning for others richer than my own harvest.

Indeed, there is no one of Shakspeare’s plays harder to characterize. The name and the remembrances connected with it, prepare us for the representation of attachment no less faithful than fervent on the side of the youth, and of sudden and shameless inconstancy on the part of the lady. And this is, indeed, as the gold thread on which the scenes are strung, though often kept out of sight and out of mind
by gems of greater value than itself. But as Shakspeare calls forth nothing from the mausoleum of history, or the catacombs of tradition, without giving, or eliciting, some permanent and general interest, and brings forward no subject which he does not moralize or intellectualize,—so here he has drawn in Cressida the portrait of a vehement passion, that, having its true origin and proper cause in warmth of temperament, fastens on, rather than fixes to, some one object by liking and temporary preference.

There's language in her eye, her cheek, her lip,
Nay, her foot speaks; her wanton spirits look out
At every joint and motive of her body.

This Shakspeare has contrasted with the profound affection represented in Troilus, and alone worthy the name of love;—affection, passionate indeed,—swoln with the confluence of youthful instincts and youthful fancy, and growing in the radiance of hope newly risen, in short enlarged by the collective sympathies of nature;—but still having a depth of calmer element in a will stronger than desire, more entire than choice, and which gives permanence to its own act by converting it into faith and duty. Hence with excellent judgment, and with an excellence higher than mere judgment can give, at the close of the play, when Cressida has sunk into infamy below retrieval and beneath hope, the same will, which had been the substance and the basis of his love, while the restless pleasures and passionate longings, like sea-waves, had tossed but on its surface,—this same moral energy is represented as snatching him aloof from all neighbourhood with her dishonour, from all lingering fondness and languishing regrets, whilst it rushes with him into other and nobler duties, and deepens the channel, which his heroic brother's death had left empty for its collected flood. Yet another secondary and subordinate purpose Shakspeare has inwoven with his delineation of these two characters,—that of opposing the inferior civilization, but purer morals, of the Trojans to the refinements, deep policy, but duplicity and sensual corruptions of the Greeks.

To all this, however, so little comparative projection is given,—nay, the masterly group of Agamemnon, Nestor, and Ulysses, and, still more in advance, that of Achilles, Ajax, and Thersites, so manifestly occupy the fore-ground,
that the subservience, and vassalage of strength and animal courage to intellect and policy seems to be the lesson most often in our poet's view, and which he has taken little pains to connect with the former more interesting moral impersonated in the titular hero and heroine of the drama. But I am half inclined to believe, that Shakspeare's main object, or shall I rather say, his ruling impulse, was to translate the poetic heroes of paganism into the not less rude, but more intellectually vigorous, and more featurely, warriors of Christian chivalry,—and to substantiate the distinct and graceful profiles or outlines of the Homeric epic into the flesh and blood of the romantic drama,—in short, to give a grand history-piece in the robust style of Albert Durer.

The character of Thersites, in particular, well deserves a more careful examination, as the Caliban of demagogic life;—the admirable portrait of intellectual power deserted by all grace, all moral principle, all not momentary impulse;—just wise enough to detect the weak head, and fool enough to provoke the armed fist of his betters;—one whom malcontent Achilles can inveigle from malcontent Ajax, under the one condition, that he shall be called on to do nothing but abuse and slander, and that he shall be allowed to abuse as much and as purulently as he likes, that is, as he can;—in short, a mule,—quarrelsome by the original discord of his nature,—a slave by tenure of his own baseness,—made to bray and be brayed at, to despise and be despicable. 'Aye, Sir, but say what you will, he is a very clever fellow, though the best friends will fall out. There was a time when Ajax thought he deserved to have a statue of gold erected to him, and handsome Achilles, at the head of the Myrmidons, gave no little credit to his friend Thersites!'

Act iv. sc. 5. Speech of Ulysses:

O, these encounterers, so glib of tongue,
That give a coasting welcome ere it comes—

Should it be 'accosting?' 'Accost her, knight, accost!' in the Twelfth Night. Yet there sounds a something so Shaksparian in the phrase—'give a coasting welcome,' ('coasting' being taken as the epithet and adjective of 'welcome,') that had the following words been, 'ere they land,' instead of 'ere it comes,' I should have preferred
Notes on Coriolanus

the interpretation. The sense now is, 'that give welcome to a salute ere it comes.'

CORIOLANUS.

This play illustrates the wonderfully philosophic impartiality of Shakspeare's politics. His own country's history furnished him with no matter, but what was too recent to be devoted to patriotism. Besides, he knew that the instruction of ancient history would seem more dispassionate. In Coriolanus and Julius Cæsar, you see Shakspeare's good-natured laugh at mobs. Compare this with Sir Thomas Brown's aristocracy of spirit.

Act i. sc. i. Coriolanus' speech:—

He that depend,
Upon your favours, swims with fins of lead,
And hews down oaks with rushes. Hang ye! Trust ye?

I suspect that Shakspeare wrote it transposed;

Trust ye? Hang ye!

Ib. sc. 10. Speech of Aufidius:—

Mine emulation
Hath not that honour in't, it had; for where
I thought to crush him in an equal force,
True sword to sword; I'll potch at him some way,
Or wrath, or craft may get him. —
My valour's poison'd
With only suffering stain by him for him
Shall fly out of itself: nor sleep, nor sanctuary,
Being naked, sick, nor fane, nor capitol,
The prayers of priests, nor times of sacrifices,
Embarquements all of fury, shall lift up
Their rotten privilege and custom 'gainst
My hate to Marcius.

I have such deep faith in Shakspeare's heart-lore, that I take for granted that this is in nature, and not as a mere anomaly; although I cannot in myself discover any germ of possible feeling, which could wax and unfold itself into such sentiment as this. However, I perceive that in this speech is meant to be contained a prevention of shock at the after-change in Aufidius' character.
Notes on Julius Cæsar

Act. ii. sc. i. Speech of Menenius:—

The most sovereign prescription in Galen, &c.

Was it without, or in contempt of, historical information that Shakspeare made the contemporaries of Coriolanus quote Cato and Galen? I cannot decide to my own satisfaction.

Ib. sc. 3. Speech of Coriolanus:—

Why in this wolvish gown should I stand here—

That the gown of the candidate was of whitened wool, we know. Does 'wolvish' or 'woolvish' mean 'made of wool'? If it means 'wolfish,' what is the sense?

Act. iv. sc. 7. Speech of Aufidius:

All places yield to him ere he sits down, &c.

I have always thought this, in itself so beautiful speech, the least explicable from the mood and full intention of the speaker of any in the whole works of Shakspeare. I cherish the hope that I am mistaken, and that, becoming wiser, I shall discover some profound excellence in that, in which I now appear to detect an imperfection.

JULIUS CÆSAR.

Act i. sc. i.

Mar. What meanest thou by that? Mend me, thou saucy fellow!

The speeches of Flavius and Marullus are in blank verse. Wherever regular metre can be rendered truly imitative of character, passion, or personal rank, Shakspeare seldom, if ever, neglects it. Hence this line should be read:—

What mean'st by that? mend me, thou saucy fellow!

I say regular metre: for even the prose has in the highest and lowest dramatic personage, a Cobbler or a Hamlet, a rhythm so felicitous and so severally appropriate, as to be a virtual metre.

Ib. sc. 2.

Bru. A soothsayer bids you beware the Ides of March.

If my ear does not deceive me, the metre of this line was
meant to express that sort of mild philosophic contempt, characterizing Brutus even in his first casual speech. The line is a trimeter,—each *dipodia* containing two accented and two unaccented syllables, but variously arranged, as thus;—

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{A soothsayer} & \mid \text{bids you beware} \mid \text{the Ides of March.}
\end{align*}
\]

Ib. Speech of Brutus:

Set honour in one eye, and death i' the other,
And I will look on both indifferently.

Warburton would read 'death' for 'both'; but I prefer the old text. There are here three things, the public good, the individual Brutus' honour, and his death. The latter two so balanced each other, that he could decide for the first by equipoise; nay—the thought growing—that honour had more weight than death. That Cassius understood it as Warburton, is the beauty of Cassius as contrasted with Brutus.

Ib. Cæsar's speech:—

He loves no plays,
As thou dost, Antony; he hears no music, &c.

This is not a trivial observation, nor does our poet mean barely by it, that Cassius was not a merry, sprightly man; but that he had not a due temperament of harmony in his disposition. Theobald's Note.

O Theobald! what a commentator wast thou, when thou would'st affect to understand Shakspeare, instead of contenting thyself with collating the text! The meaning here is too deep for a line ten-fold the length of thine to fathom.

Ib. sc. 3. Casca's speech:—

Be *factious* for redress of all these griefs;
And I will set this foot of mine as far,
As who goes farthest.

I understand it thus: 'You have spoken as a conspirator; be so in *fact*, and I will join you. Act on your principles, and realize them in a fact.'

Act ii. sc. 1. Speech of Brutus:—

It must be by his death; and, for my part,
I know no personal cause to spurn at him,
But for the general. He would be crown'd:
How that might change his nature, there's the question.
Notes on Julius Cæsar

—And, to speak truth of Cæsar,
I have not known when his affections sway’d
More than his reason.
———So Cæsar may;
Then, lest he may, prevent.

This speech is singular;—at least, I do not at present see into Shakspeare’s motive, his rationale, or in what point of view he meant Brutus’ character to appear. For surely—(this, I mean, is what I say to myself, with my present quantum of insight, only modified by my experience in how many instances I have ripened into a perception of beauties, where I had before descried faults;) surely, nothing can seem more discordant with our historical preconceptions of Brutus, or more lowering to the intellect of the Stoico-Platonic tyrannicide, than the tenets here attributed to him—to him, the stern Roman republican; namely,—that he would have no objection to a king, or to Cæsar, a monarch in Rome, would Cæsar but be as good a monarch as he now seems disposed to be! How, too, could Brutus say that he found no personal cause—none in Cæsar’s past conduct as a man? Had he not passed the Rubicon? Had he not entered Rome as a conqueror? Had he not placed his Gauls in the Senate?—Shakspeare, it may be said, has not brought these things forwards—True;—and this is just the ground of my perplexity. What character did Shakspeare mean his Brutus to be?

Ib. Speech of Brutus:

For if thou path, thy native semblance on—

Surely, there need be no scruple in treating this ‘path’ as a mere misprint or mis-script for ‘put.’ In what place does Shakspeare,—where does any other writer of the same age—use ‘path’ as a verb for ‘walk’?

Ib. sc. 2. Cæsar’s speech:

She dreamt last night, she saw my statue—

No doubt, it should be statua, as in the same age, they more often pronounced ‘heroes’ as a trisyllable than dissyllable. A modern tragic poet would have written,—

Last night she dreamt, that she my statue saw—

But Shakspeare never avails himself of the supposed license of transposition, merely for the metre. There is always some logic either of thought or passion to justify it.
Notes on Julius Cæsar

Act iii. sc. i.  Antony's speech:

Pardon me, Julius—here wast thou bay'd, brave hart;
Here didst thou fall; and here thy hunters stand
Sign'd in thy spoil, and crimson'd in thy death.
O world! thou wast the forest to this hart,
And this, indeed, O world! the heart of thee.

I doubt the genuineness of the last two lines;—not because they are vile; but first, on account of the rhythm, which is not Shakspearian, but just the very tune of some old play, from which the actor might have interpolated them;—and secondly, because they interrupt, not only the sense and connection, but likewise the flow both of the passion, and, (what is with me still more decisive) of the Shakspearian link of association. As with many another parenthesis or gloss slipt into the text, we have only to read the passage without it, to see that it never was in it. I venture to say there is no instance in Shakspeare fairly like this. Conceits he has; but they not only rise out of some word in the lines before, but also lead to the thought in the lines following. Here the conceit is a mere alien: Antony forgets an image, when he is even touching it, and then recollects it, when the thought last in his mind must have led him away from it.

Act iv. sc. 3.  Speech of Brutus:

——What, shall one of us,
That struck the foremost man of all this world,
But for supporting robbers.

This seemingly strange assertion of Brutus is unhappily verified in the present day. What is an immense army, in which the lust of plunder has quenched all the duties of the citizen, other than a horde of robbers, or differenced only as fiends are from ordinarily reprobate men? Cæsar supported, and was supported by, such as these;—and even so Buonaparte in our days.

I know no part of Shakspeare that more impresses on me the belief of his genius being superhuman, than this scene between Brutus and Cassius. In the Gnostic heresy it might have been credited with less absurdity than most of their dogmas, that the Supreme had employed him to create, previously to his function of representing, characters.
ANTONY AND CLEOPATRA.

Shakspeare can be complimented only by comparison with himself: all other eulogies are either heterogeneous, as when they are in reference to Spenser or Milton; or they are flat truisms, as when he is gravely preferred to Corneille, Racine, or even his own immediate successors, Beaumont and Fletcher, Massinger and the rest. The highest praise, or rather form of praise, of this play, which I can offer in my own mind, is the doubt which the perusal always occasions in me, whether the Antony and Cleopatra is not, in all exhibitions of a giant power in its strength and vigour of maturity, a formidable rival of Macbeth, Lear, Hamlet, and Othello. *Feliciter audax* is the motto for its style comparatively with that of Shakspeare's other works, even as it is the general motto of all his works compared with those of other poets. Be it remembered, too, that this happy valiancy of style is but the representative and result of all the material excellencies so expressed.

This play should be perused in mental contrast with Romeo and Juliet;—as the love of passion and appetite opposed to the love of affection and instinct. But the art displayed in the character of Cleopatra is profound; in this, especially, that the sense of criminality in her passion is lessened by our insight into its depth and energy, at the very moment that we cannot but perceive that the passion itself springs out of the habitual craving of a licentious nature, and that it is supported and reinforced by voluntary stimulus and sought-for associations, instead of blossoming out of spontaneous emotion.

Of all Shakspeare's historical plays, Antony and Cleopatra is by far the most wonderful. There is not one in which he has followed history so minutely, and yet there are few in which he impresses the notion of angelic strength so much;—perhaps none in which he impresses it more strongly. This is greatly owing to the manner in which the fiery force is sustained throughout, and to the numerous momentary flashes of nature counteracting the historic abstraction. As a wonderful specimen of the way in which Shakspeare lives up to the very end of this play, read the last part of the concluding scene. And if you would feel the judgment as well as the genius of Shakspeare in your
heart's core, compare this astonishing drama with Dryden's All For Love.

Act i. sc. 1. Philo's speech:

His captain's heart
Which in the scuffles of great fights hath burst
The buckles on his breast; reneges all temper—

It should be 'reneagues,' or 'reniegues,' as 'fatigues,' &c.

Ib.

Take but good note, and you shall see in him
The triple pillar of the world transform'd
Into a strumpet's fool.

Warburton's conjecture of 'stool' is ingenious, and would be a probable reading, if the scene opening had discovered Antony with Cleopatra on his lap. But, represented as he is walking and jesting with her, 'fool' must be the word. Warburton's objection is shallow, and implies that he confounded the dramatic with the epic style. The 'pillar' of a state is so common a metaphor as to have lost the image in the thing meant to be imaged.

Ib. sc. 2.

Much is breeding;
Which, like the courser's hair, hath yet but life,
And not a serpent's poison.

This is so far true to appearance, that a horse-hair, 'laid,' as Hollinishead says, 'in a pail of water,' will become the supporter of seemingly one worm, though probably of an immense number of small slimy water-lice. The hair will twirl round a finger, and sensibly compress it. It is a common experiment with school boys in Cumberland and Westmorland.

Act. ii. sc. 2. Speech of Enobarbus:—

Her gentlewomen, like the Nereids,
So many mermaids, tended her i' th' eyes,
And made their bends adornings. At the helm
A seeming mermaid steers.

I have the greatest difficulty in believing that Shakspeare wrote the first 'mermaids.' He never, I think, would have so weakened by useless anticipation the fine image immediately following. The epithet 'seeming' becomes so extremely improper after the whole number had been positively called 'so many mermaids.'
Notes on Timon of Athens

TIMON OF ATHENS.

Act i. sc. i.

Tim. The man is honest.

Old Ath. Therefore he will be, Timon.

His honesty rewards him in itself.

Warburton’s comment—‘If the man be honest, for that reason he will be so in this, and not endeavour at the injustice of gaining my daughter without my consent’—is, like almost all his comments, ingenious in blunder; he can never see any other writer’s thoughts for the mist-working swarm of his own. The meaning of the first line the poet himself explains, or rather unfolds, in the second: ‘The man is honest!’—‘True;—and for that very cause, and with no additional or extrinsic motive, he will be so. No man can be justly called honest, who is not so for honesty’s sake, itself including its own reward.’ Note, that ‘honesty’ in Shakspeare’s age retained much of its old dignity, and that contradistinction of the honestum from the utile, in which its very essence and definition consists. If it be honestum, it cannot depend on the utile.

Ib. ’Speech of Apemantus, printed as prose in Theobald’s edition:

So, so! aches contract, and starve your supple joints!

I may remark here the fineness of Shakspeare’s sense of musical period, which would almost by itself have suggested (if the hundred positive proofs had not been extant,) that the word ‘aches’ was then ad libitum, a dissyllable—aitches. For read it, ‘aches,’ in this sentence, and I would challenge you to find any period in Shakspeare’s writings with the same musical or, rather dissonant, notation. Try the one, and then the other, by your ear, reading the sentence aloud, first with the word as a dissyllable and then as a monosyllable, and you will feel what I mean.¹

¹It is, of course, a verse,—

Aches contract, and starve your supple joints,—

and is so printed in all later editions. But Mr. C. was reading it in prose in Theobald; and it is curious to see how his ear detected the rhythmical necessity for pronouncing ‘aches’ as a dissyllable, although the metrical necessity seems for the moment to have escaped him. Ed.
Ib. sc. 2. Cupid’s speech: Warburton’s correction of—

There taste, touch, all pleas’d from thy table rise—

into

Th’ car, taste, touch, smell, &c.

This is indeed an excellent emendation.

Act. ii. sc. 1. Senator’s speech:—

—nor then silenc’d when

‘Commend me to your master’—and the cap

*Plays in the right hand, thus:*—

Either, methinks, ‘plays’ should be ‘play’d,’ or ‘and’ should be changed to ‘while.’ I can certainly understand it as a parenthesis, an interadditive of scorn; but it does not sound to my ear as in Shakspeare’s manner.

Ib. sc. 2. Timon’s speech: (Theobald.)

And that unaptness made you minister,

Thus to excuse yourself.

Read *your* :—at least I cannot otherwise understand the line. You made my chance indisposition and occasional unaptness your minister—that is, the ground on which you now excuse yourself. Or, perhaps, no correction is necessary, if we construe ‘made you’ as ‘did you make;’ ‘and that unaptness did you make help you thus to excuse yourself.* But the former seems more in Shakspeare’s manner, and is less liable to be misunderstood.¹

Act iii. sc. 3. Servant’s speech:—

How fairly this lord strives to appear foul!—takes virtuous copies to be wicked; *like those that under hot, ardent, zeal would set whole realms on fire.* Of such a nature is his politic love.

This latter clause I grievously suspect to have been an addition of the players, which had hit, and, being constantly applauded, procured a settled occupancy in the prompter’s copy. Not that Shakspeare does not elsewhere sneer at the Puritans; but here it is introduced so *volenter volenter* (excuse the phrase) by the head and shoulders!—and is besides so much more likely to have been conceived in the age of Charles I.

Act iv. sc. 2. Timon’s speech:—

Raise me this beggar, and *deny’t* that lord.—

Warburton reads ‘denude.’

¹ *Your* is the received reading now. *Ed.*
Notes on Romeo and Juliet

I cannot see the necessity of this alteration. The editors and commentators are, all of them, ready enough to cry out against Shakspeare's laxities and licenses of style, forgetting that he is not merely a poet, but a dramatic poet; that, when the head and the heart are swelling with fulness, a man does not ask himself whether he has grammatically arranged, but only whether (the context taken in) he has conveyed, his meaning. 'Deny' is here clearly equal to 'withhold;' and the 'it,' quite in the genius of vehement conversation, which a syntagist explains by ellipses and subauditurs in a Greek or Latin classic, yet triumphs over as ignorances in a contemporary, refers to accidental and artificial rank or elevation, implied in the verb 'raise.' Besides, does the word 'denude' occur in any writer before, or of, Shakspeare's age?

ROMEO AND JULIET.

I have previously had occasion to speak at large on the subject of the three unities of time, place, and action, as applied to the drama in the abstract, and to the particular stage for which Shakspeare wrote, as far as he can be said to have written for any stage but that of the universal mind. I hope I have in some measure succeeded in demonstrating that the former two, instead of being rules, were mere inconveniences attached to the local peculiarities of the Athenian drama; that the last alone deserved the name of a principle, and that in the preservation of this unity Shakspeare stood pre-eminent. Yet, instead of unity of action, I should greatly prefer the more appropriate, though scholastic and uncouth, words homogeneity, proportionateness, and totality of interest,—expressions, which involve the distinction, or rather the essential difference, betwixt the shaping skill of mechanical talent, and the creative, productive, life-power of inspired genius. In the former each part is separately conceived, and then by a succeeding act put together;—not as watches are made for wholesale,—for there each part supposes a preconception of the whole in some mind)—but more like pictures on a motley screen. Whence arises the harmony that strikes us in the wildest natural landscapes,—in the relative shapes of rocks, the harmony of colours.
in the heaths, ferns, and lichens, the leaves of the beech and the oak, the stems and rich brown branches of the birch and other mountain trees, varying from verging autumn to returning spring,—compared with the visual effect from the greater number of artificial plantations?
—From this, that the natural landscape is effected, as it were, by a single energy modified ab intra in each component part. And as this is the particular excellence of the Shaksperean drama generally, so is it especially characteristic of the Romeo and Juliet.

The groundwork of the tale is altogether in family life, and the events of the play have their first origin in family feuds. Filmy as are the eyes of party-spirit, at once dim and truculent, still there is commonly some real or supposed object in view, or principle to be maintained; and though but the twisted wires on the plate of rosin in the preparation for electrical pictures, it is still a guide in some degree, an assimilation to an outline. But in family quarrels, which have proved scarcely less injurious to states, wilfulness, and precipitancy, and passion from mere habit and custom, can alone be expected. With his accustomed judgment, Shakspeare has begun by placing before us a lively picture of all the impulses of the play; and, as nature ever presents two sides, one for Heraclitus, and one for Democritus, he has, by way of prelude, shown the laughable absurdity of the evil by the contagion of it reaching the servants, who have so little to do with it, but who are under the necessity of letting the superfluity of sensoreal power fly off through the escape-valve of witcombats, and of quarrelling with weapons of sharper edge, all in humble imitation of their masters. Yet there is a sort of unhired fidelity, an ourishness about all this that makes it rest pleasant on one’s feelings. All the first scene, down to the conclusion of the Prince’s speech, is a motley dance of all ranks and ages to one tune, as if the horn of Huon had been playing behind the scenes.

Benvolio’s speech—

Madam, an hour before the worshipp’d sun
Peer’d forth the golden window of the east—

and, far more strikingly, the following speech of old Montague—

Many a morning hath be there been seen
With tears augmenting the fresh morning’s dew—
prove that Shakspeare meant the Romeo and Juliet to approach to a poem, which, and indeed its early date, may be also inferred from the multitude of rhyming couplets throughout. And if we are right, from the internal evidence, in pronouncing this one of Shakspeare's early dramas, it affords a strong instance of the fineness of his insight into the nature of the passions, that Romeo is introduced already love-bewildered. The necessity of loving creates an object for itself in man and woman; and yet there is a difference in this respect between the sexes, though only to be known by a perception of it. It would have displeased us if Juliet had been represented as already in love, or as fancying herself so;—but no one, I believe, ever experiences any shock at Romeo's forgetting his Rosaline, who had been a mere name for the yearning of his youthful imagination, and rushing into his passion for Juliet. Rosaline was a mere creation of his fancy; and we should remark the boastful positiveness of Romeo in a love of his own making, which is never shown where love is really near the heart.

When the devout religion of mine eye
Maintains such falsehood, then turn tears to fires!

*  *  *

One fairer than my love! the all-seeing sun
Ne'er saw her match, since first the world begun.

The character of the Nurse is the nearest of any thing in Shakspeare to a direct borrowing from mere observation; and the reason is, that as in infancy and childhood the individual in nature is a representative of a class,—just as in describing one larch tree, you generalize a grove of them,—so it is nearly as much so in old age. The generalization is done to the poet's hand. Here you have the garrulity of age strengthened by the feelings of a long-trusted servant, whose sympathy with the mother's affections gives her privileges and rank in the household; and observe the mode of connection by accidents of time and place, and the childlike fondness of repetition in a second childhood, and also that happy, humble, ducking under, yet constant resurgence against, the check of her superiors!—

Yes, madam!—Yet I cannot choose but laugh, &c.

In the fourth scene we have Mercutio introduced to us. O! how shall I describe that exquisite ebullience and
overflow of youthful life, wafted on over the laughing waves of pleasure and prosperity, as a wanton beauty that distorts the face on which she knows her lover is gazing enraptured, and wrinkles her forehead in the triumph of its smoothness! Wit ever wakeful, fancy busy and pro-creative as an insect, courage, an easy mind that, without cares of its own, is at once disposed to laugh away those of others, and yet to be interested in them,—these and all congenial qualities, melting into the common copula of them all, the man of rank and the gentleman, with all its excellences and all its weaknesses, constitute the character of Mercutio!

Act i. sc. 5.

Tyb. It fits when such a villain is a guest;
I'll not endure him.
Cap. He shall be endur'd.
What, goodman boy!—I say, he shall:—Go to;—
Am I the master here, or you?—Go to.
You'll not endure him!—God shall mend my soul—
You'll make a mutiny among my guests!
You will set cock-a-hoop! you'll be the man!
Tyb. Why, uncle, 'tis a shame.
Cap. Go to, go to,
You are a saucy boy! &c.—

How admirable is the old man's impetuosity at once contrasting, yet harmonized, with young Tybalt's quarrel-some violence! But it would be endless to repeat observations of this sort. Every leaf is different on an oak tree; but still we can only say—our tongues defrauding our eyes—'This is another oak-leaf!'

Act ii. sc. 2. The garden scene:

Take notice in this enchanting scene of the contrast of Romeo's love with his former fancy; and weigh the skill shown in justifying him from his inconstancy by making us feel the difference of his passion. Yet this, too, is a love in, although not merely of, the imagination.

Ib.

Jul. Well, do not swear; although I joy in thee,
I have no joy of this contract to-night:
It is too rash, too unadvis'd, too sudden, &c.

With love, pure love, there is always an anxiety for the safety of the object, a disinterestedness, by which it is distinguished from the counterfeits of its name. Compare
this scene with Act iii. sc. 1. of the Tempest. I do not
know a more wonderful instance of Shakspeare's mastery
in playing a distinctly rememberable variety on the same
remembered air, than in the transporting love confessions
of Romeo and Juliet and Ferdinand and Miranda. There
seems more passion in the one, and more dignity in the
other; yet you feel that the sweet girlish lingering and busy
movement of Juliet, and the calmer and more maidenly
fondness of Miranda, might easily pass into each other.

Ib. sc. 3. The Friar's speech:

The reverend character of the Friar, like all Shakspeare's
representations of the great professions, is very delightfull
and tranquillizing, yet it is no digression, but immediately
necessary to the carrying on of the plot.

Ib. sc. 4.

Rom. Good morrow to you both. What counterieit did I give
you? &c.

Compare again, Romeo's. half-exerted, and half-real,
ease of mind with his first manner when in love with
Rosaline! His will had come to the clenching point.

Ib. sc. 6.

Rom. Do thou but close our hands with holy words,
Then love-devouring death do what he dare,
It is enough I may but call her mine.

The precipitancy, which is the character of the play, is
well marked in this short scene of waiting for Juliet's
arrival.

Act iii. sc. 1.

Mer. No, 'tis not so deep as a well, nor so wide as a church
door; but 'tis enough: 'twill serve: ask for me to-morrow, and
you shall find me a grave man, &c.

How fine an effect the wit and raillery habitual to Mer-
cutio, even struggling with his pain, give to Romeo's
following speech, and at the same time so completely
justifying his passionate revenge on Tybalt!

Ib. Benvolio's speech:

But that he tilts
With piercing steel at bold Mercutio's breast.

This small portion of untruth in Benvolio's narrative
is finely conceived.

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Ib. sc. 2.  Juliet’s speech:

For thou wilt lie upon the wings of night
Whiter than new snow on a raven’s back.—

Indeed the whole of this speech is imagination strained to the highest; and observe the blessed effect on the purity of the mind. What would Dryden have made of it?—

Ib.

_Nurse._ Shame come to Romeo.
_Jul._ Blister’d be thy tongue
_For such a wish!_

Note the Nurse’s mistake of the mind’s audible struggles with itself for its decision _in toto._

Ib. sc. 3.  Romeo’s speech:—

’Tis torture, and not mercy: heaven is here,
Where Juliet lives, &c.

All deep passions are a sort of atheists, that believe no future.

Ib. sc. 5.

_Cap._ Soft, take me with you, take me with you, wife—
_How! will she none? &c._

A noble scene! Don’t I see it with my own eyes?—Yes! but not with Juliet’s. And observe in Capulet’s last speech in this scene his mistake, as if love’s causes were capable of being generalized.

Act iv. sc. 3.  Juliet’s speech:—

O, look! methinks I see my cousin’s ghost
Seeking out Romeo, that did spit his body
Upon a rapier’s point:—Stay, Tybalt, stay!—
Romeo, I come! this do I drink to thee.

Shakspeare provides for the finest decencies. It would have been too bold a thing for a girl of fifteen;—but she swallows the draught in a fit of fright.

Ib. sc. 5.

As the audience know that Juliet is not dead, this scene is, perhaps, excusable. But it is a strong warning to minor dramatists not to introduce at one time many separate characters agitated by one and the same circumstance. It is difficult to understand what effect, whether that of pity or of laughter, Shakspeare meant to produce;—the occasion and the characteristic speeches are so
little in harmony! For example, what the Nurse says is excellently suited to the Nurse's character, but grotesquely unsuited to the occasion.

Act v. sc. 1. Romeo's speech:—

O mischief! thou art swift
To enter in the thoughts of desperate men!
I do remember an apothecary, &c.

This famous passage is so beautiful as to be self-justified; yet, in addition, what a fine preparation it is for the tomb scene!

Ib. sc. 3. Romeo's speech:—

Good gentle youth, tempt not a desperate man,
Fly hence and leave me.

The gentleness of Romeo was shown before, as softened by love; and now it is doubled by love and sorrow and awe of the place where he is.

Ib. Romeo's speech:—

How oft when men are at the point of death
Have they been merry! which their keepers call
A lightning before death. O, how may I
Call this a lightning?—O, my love, my wife! &c.

Here, here, is the master example how beauty can at once increase and modify passion!

Ib. Last scene.

How beautiful is the close! The spring and the winter meet;—winter assumes the character of spring, and spring the sadness of winter.

SHAKSPEARE'S ENGLISH HISTORICAL PLAYS.

The first form of poetry is the epic, the essence of which may be stated as the successive in events and characters. This must be distinguished from narration, in which there must always be a narrator, from whom the objects represented receive a colouring and a manner;—whereas in the epic, as in the so called poems of Homer, the whole is completely objective, and the representation is a pure reflection. The next form into which poetry passed was
the dramatic;—both forms having a common basis with a certain difference, and that difference not consisting in the dialogue alone. Both are founded on the relation of providence to the human will; and this relation is the universal element, expressed under different points of view according to the difference of religion, and the moral and intellectual cultivation of different nations. In the epic poem fate is represented as overruling the will, and making it instrumental to the accomplishment of its designs:—

Διδ δὲ τελειωτο βουλή.

In the drama, the will is exhibited as struggling with fate, a great and beautiful instance and illustration of which is the Prometheus of Æschylus; and the deepest effect is produced, when the fate is represented as a higher and intelligent will, and the opposition of the individual as springing from a defect.

In order that a drama may be properly historical, it is necessary that it should be the history of the people to whom it is addressed. In the composition, care must be taken that there appear no dramatic improbability, as the reality is taken for granted. It must, likewise, be poetical;—that only, I mean, must be taken which is the permanent in our nature, which is common, and therefore deeply interesting to all ages. The events themselves are immaterial, otherwise than as the clothing and manifestation of the spirit that is working within. In this mode, the unity resulting from succession is destroyed, but is supplied by a unity of a higher order, which connects the events by reference to the workers, gives a reason for them in the motives, and presents men in their causative character. It takes, therefore, that part of real history which is the least known, and infuses a principle of life and organization into the naked facts, and makes them all the framework of an animated whole.

In my happier days, while I had yet hope and onward-looking thoughts, I planned an historical drama of King Stephen, in the manner of Shakspeare. Indeed it would be desirable that some man of dramatic genius should dramatize all those omitted by Shakspeare, as far down as Henry VII. Perkin Warbeck would make a most interesting drama. A few scenes of Marlow's Edward II. might be preserved. After Henry VIII., the events are too well
and distinctly known, to be, without plump inverisimilitude, crowded together in one night's exhibition. Whereas, the history of our ancient kings—the events of their reigns, I mean—are like stars in the sky;—whatever the real interspaces may be, and however great, they seem close to each other. The stars—the events—strike us and remain in our eye, little modified by the difference of dates. An historic drama is, therefore, a collection of events borrowed from history, but connected together in respect of cause and time, poetically and by dramatic fiction. It would be a fine national custom to act such a series of dramatic histories in orderly succession, in the yearly Christmas holidays, and could not but tend to counteract that mock cosmopolitism, which under a positive term really implies nothing but a negation of, or indifference to, the particular love of our country. By its nationality must every nation retain its independence;—I mean a nationality quoad the nation. Better thus;—nationality in each individual, quoad his country, is equal to the sense of individuality quoad himself; but himself as subsensuous, and central. Patriotism is equal to the sense of individuality reflected from every other individual. There may come a higher virtue in both—just cosmopolitism. But this latter is not possible but by antecedence of the former.

Shakspeare has included the most important part of nine reigns in his historical dramas—namely—King John, Richard II.—Henry IV. (two)—Henry V.—Henry VI. (three) including Edward V. and Henry VIII., in all ten plays. There remain, therefore, to be done, with the exception of a single scene or two that should be adopted from Marlow—eleven reigns—of which the first two appear the only unpromising subjects;—and those two dramas must be formed wholly or mainly of invented private stories, which, however, could not have happened except in consequence of the events and measures of these reigns, and which should furnish opportunity both of exhibiting the manners and oppressions of the times, and of narrating dramatically the great events;—if possible, the death of the two sovereigns, at least of the latter, should be made to have some influence on the finale of the story. All the rest are glorious subjects; especially Henry I st. (being the struggle between the men of arms and of letters, in the
persons of Henry and Becket,) Stephen, Richard I., Edward II., and Henry VII.

KING JOHN.

Act i. sc. 1.

_Bast._ James Gurney, wilt thou give us leave awhile?
_Gur._ Good leave, good Philip.
_Bast._ Philip? _sparrow_! James, &c.

Theobald adopts Warburton’s conjecture of ‘spare me.’

O true Warburton! and the _sancia simplicitas_ of honest dull Theobald’s faith in him! Nothing can be more lively or characteristic than ‘Philip? Sparrow!’ Had Warburton read old Skelton’s ‘Philip Sparrow,’ an exquisite and original poem, and, no doubt, popular in Shakspeare’s time, even Warburton would scarcely have made so deep a plunge into the _bathetic _as to have deathified ‘sparrow’ into ‘spare me!’

Act iii. sc. 2. Speech of Faulconbridge.—

Now, by my life, this day grows wondrous hot;
Some _airy_ devil hovers in the sky, &c.

Theobald adopts Warburton’s conjecture of ‘fiery.’

I prefer the old text: the word ‘devil’ implies ‘fiery.’
You need only read the line, laying a full and strong emphasis on ‘devil,’ to perceive the uselessness and tastelessness of Warburton’s alteration.

RICHARD II.

I have stated that the transitional link between the epic poem and the drama is the historic drama; that in the epic poem a pre-announced fate gradually adjusts and employs the will and the events as its instruments, whilst the drama, on the other hand, places fate and will in opposition to each other, and is then most perfect, when the victory of fate is obtained in consequence of imperfections in the opposing will, so as to leave a final impression that the fate itself is but a higher and a more intelligent will.
Historical Plays

From the length of the speeches, and the circumstance that, with one exception, the events are all historical, and presented in their results, not produced by acts seen by, or taking place before, the audience, this tragedy is ill suited to our present large theatres. But in itself, and for the closet, I feel no hesitation in placing it as the first and most admirable of all Shakspeare's purely historical plays. For the two parts of Henry IV. form a species of themselves, which may be named the mixed drama. The distinction does not depend on the mere quantity of historical events in the play compared with the fictions; for there is as much history in Macbeth as in Richard, but in the relation of the history to the plot. In the purely historical plays, the history forms the plot; in the mixed, it directs it; in the rest, as Macbeth, Hamlet, Cymbeline, Lear, it subserves it. But, however unsuited to the stage this drama may be, God forbid that even there it should fall dead on the hearts of jacobinized Englishmen! Then, indeed, we might say—præterit gloria mundi! For the spirit of patriotic reminiscence is the all-permeating soul of this noble work. It is, perhaps, the most purely historical of Shakspeare's dramas. There are not in it, as in the others, characters introduced merely for the purpose of giving a greater individuality and realness, as in the comic parts of Henry IV., by presenting, as it were, our very selves. Shakspeare avails himself of every opportunity to effect the great object of the historic drama, that, namely, of familiarizing the people to the great names of their country, and thereby of exciting a steady patriotism, a love of just liberty, and a respect for all those fundamental institutions of social life, which bind men together:

This royal throne of kings, this scepter'd isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise;
This fortress, built by nature for herself,
Against infection, and the hand of war;
This happy breed of men, this little world
This precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall,
Or as a moat defensive to a home,
Against the envy of less happier lands;
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,
This nurse, this teeming womb of royal kings,
Fear'd by their breed, and famous by their birth, &c.
This England never did, nor ever shall,  
Lie at the proud foot of a conqueror,  
But when it first did help to wound itself.  
Now these her princes are come home again,  
Come the three corners of the world in arms,  
And we shall shock them: nought shall make us rue,  
If England to itself do rest but true.

And it certainly seems that Shakspeare's historic dramas produced a very deep effect on the minds of the English people, and in earlier times they were familiar even to the least informed of all ranks, according to the relation of Bishop Corbett. Marlborough, we know, was not ashamed to confess that his principal acquaintance with English history was derived from them; and I believe that a large part of the information as to our old names and achievements even now abroad is due, directly or indirectly, to Shakspeare.

Admirable is the judgment with which Shakspeare always in the first scenes prepares, yet how naturally, and with what concealment of art, for the catastrophe. Observe how he here presents the germ of all the after events in Richard's insincerity, partiality, arbitrariness, and favoritism, and in the proud, tempestuous, temperament of his barons. In the very beginning, also, is displayed that feature in Richard's character, which is never forgotten throughout the play—his attention to decorum, and high feeling of the kingly dignity. These anticipations show with what judgment Shakspeare wrote, and illustrate his care to connect the past and future, and unify them with the present by forecast and reminiscence.

It is interesting to a critical ear to compare the six opening lines of the play—

Old John of Gaunt, time-honour'd Lancaster,  
Hast thou, according to thy oath and band, &c.

each closing at the tenth syllable, with the rhythmless metre of the verse in Henry VI. and Titus Andronicus, in order that the difference, indeed, the heterogeneity, of the two may be felt etiam in simillimis prima superficie. Here the weight of the single words supplies all the relief afforded by intercurrent verse, while the whole represents the mood.
Historical Plays

And compare the apparently defective metre of Bolingbroke's first line,—

Many years of happy days befall—

with Prospero's,

Twelve years since, Miranda! twelve years since—

The actor should supply the time by emphasis, and pause on the first syllable of each of these verses.

Act i. sc. 1. Bolingbroke's speech:—

First, (heaven be the record to my speech!)
In the devotion of a subject's love, &c.

I remember in the Sophoclean drama no more striking example of the τὸ πρέπον καὶ σεμνὸν than this speech; and the rhymes in the last six lines well express the preconcertedness of Bolingbroke's scheme so beautifully contrasted with the vehemence and sincere irritation of Mowbray.

Ib. Bolingbroke's speech:—

Which blood, like sacrificing Abel's, cries,
Even from the tongueless caverns of the earth,
To me, for justice and rough chastisement.

Note the δεινον of this 'to me,' which is evidently felt by Richard:—

How high a pitch his resolution soars!

and the affected depreciation afterwards:—

As he is but my father's brother's son.

Ib. Mowbray's speech:—

In haste whereof, most heartily I pray
Your highness to assign our trial day.

The occasional interspersion of rhymes, and the more frequent winding up of a speech therewith—what purpose was this designed to answer? In the earnest drama, I mean. Deliberateness? An attempt, as in Mowbray, to collect himself and be cool at the close?—I can see that in the following speeches the rhyme answers the end of the Greek chorus, and distinguishes the general truths from the passions of the dialogue; but this does not exactly justify the practice, which is unfrequent in proportion to the excellence of Shakspeare's plays. One thing, however,
Shakspeare’s English

is to be observed,—that the speakers are historical, known, and so far formal, characters, and their reality is already a fact. This should be borne in mind. The whole of this scene of the quarrel between Mowbray and Bolingbroke seems introduced for the purpose of showing by anticipation the characters of Richard and Bolingbroke. In the latter there is observable a decorous and courtly checking of his anger in subservience to a predetermined plan, especially in his calm speech after receiving sentence of banishment compared with Mowbray’s unaffected lamentation. In the one, all is ambitious hope of something yet to come; in the other it is desolation and a looking backward of the heart.

Ib. sc. 2.

*Gaunt*  
Heaven’s is the quarrel; for heaven’s substitute,  
His deputy anointed in his right,  
Hath caus’d his death: the which, if wrongfully,  
Let heaven revenge; for I may never lift  
An angry arm against his minister.

Without the hollow extravagance of Beaumont and Fletcher’s ultra-royalism, how carefully does Shakspeare acknowledge and reverence the eternal distinction between the mere individual, and the symbolic or representative, on which all genial law, no less than patriotism, depends. The whole of this second scene commences, and is anticipative of, the tone and character of the play at large.

Ib. sc. 3. In none of Shakspeare’s fictitious dramas, or in those founded on a history as unknown to his auditors generally as fiction, is this violent rupture of the succession of time found:—a proof, I think, that the pure historic drama, like Richard II. and King John, had its own laws.

Ib. Mowbray’s speech:—

*A dearer merit*  
Have I deserved at your highness’ hands.

O, the instinctive propriety of Shakspeare in the choice of words!

Ib. Richard’s speech:

*Nor never by advised purpose meet,*  
*To plot, contrive, or complot any ill,*  
*'Gainst us, our state, our subjects, or our land.*

Already the selfish weakness of Richard’s character
Historical Plays

opens. Nothing will such minds so readily embrace, as indirect ways softened down to their quasi-consciences by policy, expedition, &c.

Ib. Mowbray's speech:—

' . . . . . All the world's my way.'

'The world was all before him.'—Milt.

Ib.

Boling. How long a time lies in our little word!

Four lagging winters, and four wanton springs,

End in a word: such is the breath of kings.

Admirable anticipation!

Ib. sc. 4. This is a striking conclusion of a first act,—letting the reader into the secret;—having before impressed us with the dignified and kingly manners of Richard, yet by well managed anticipations leading us on to the full gratification of pleasure in our own penetration. In this scene a new light is thrown on Richard's character. Until now he has appeared in all the beauty of royalty; but here, as soon as he is left to himself, the inherent weakness of his character is immediately shown. It is a weakness, however, of a peculiar kind, not arising from want of personal courage, or any specific defect of faculty, but rather an intellectual femininess, which feels a necessity of ever leaning on the breasts of others, and of reclining on those who are all the while known to be inferiors. To this must be attributed as its consequences all Richard's vices, his tendency to concealment, and his cunning, the whole operation of which is directed to the getting rid of present difficulties. Richard is not meant to be a debauchee; but we see in him that sophistry which is common to man, by which we can deceive our own hearts, and at one and the same time apologize for, and yet commit, the error. Shakspeare has represented this character in a very peculiar manner. He has not made him amiable with counterbalancing faults; but has openly and broadly drawn those faults without reserve, relying on Richard's disproportionate sufferings and gradually emergent good qualities for our sympathy; and this was possible, because his faults are not positive vices, but spring entirely from defect of character.

Act ii. sc. i.

K. Rich. Can sick men play so nicely with their names?
Yes! on a death-bed there is a feeling which may make all things appear but as puns and equivocations. And a passion there is that carries off its own excess by plays on words as naturally, and, therefore, as appropriately to drama, as by gesticulations, looks, or tones. This belongs to human nature as such, independently of associations and habits from any particular rank of life or mode of employment; and in this consists Shakspeare's vulgarisms, as in Macbeth's—

The devil damn thee black, thou cream-fac'd loon! &c.

This is (to equivocate on Dante's words) in truth the nobile vulgare eloquenza. Indeed it is profoundly true that there is a natural, an almost irresistible, tendency in the mind, when immersed in one strong feeling, to connect that feeling with every sight and object around it; especially if there be opposition, and the words addressed to it are in any way repugnant to the feeling itself, as here in the instance of Richard's unkind language:

Misery makes sport to mock itself.

No doubt, something of Shakspeare's punning must be attributed to his age, in which direct and formal combats of wit were a favourite pastime of the courtly and accomplished. It was an age more favourable, upon the whole, to vigour of intellect than the present, in which a dread of being thought pedantic dispirits and flattens the energies of original minds. But independently of this, I have no hesitation in saying that a pun, if it be congruous with the feeling of the scene, is not only allowable in the dramatic dialogue, but oftentimes one of the most effectual intensives of passion.

K. Rich. Right; you say true: as Hereford's love, so his; As theirs, so mine; and all be as it is.

The depth of this compared with the first scene:

How high a pitch, &c.

There is scarcely anything in Shakspeare in its degree, more admirably drawn than York's character; his religious loyalty struggling with a deep grief and indignation at the king's follies; his adherence to his word and faith, once given in spite of all, even the most natural, feelings. You see in him the weakness of old age, and the overwhelming-
ness of circumstances, for a time surmounting his sense of duty,—the junction of both exhibited in his boldness in words and feebleness in immediate act; and then again his effort to retrieve himself in abstract loyalty, even at the heavy price of the loss of his son. This species of accidental and adventitious weakness is brought into parallel with Richard’s continually increasing energy of thought, and as constantly diminishing power of acting;—and thus it is Richard that breathes a harmony and a relation into all the characters of the play.

Ib. sc. 2.

*Queen.* To please the king I did; to please myself
I cannot do it; yet I know no cause
Why I should welcome such a guest as grief,
Save bidding farewell to so sweet a guest
As my sweet Richard; yet again, methinks,
Some unborn sorrow, ripe in sorrow’s womb,
Is coming toward me; and my inward soul
With nothing trembles: at something it grieves,
More than with parting from my lord the king.

It is clear that Shakspeare never meant to represent Richard as a vulgar debauchee, but a man with a wantonness of spirit in external show, a feminine *friendism*, an intensity of woman-like love of those immediately about him, and a mistaking of the delight of being loved by him for a love of him. And mark in this scene Shakspeare’s gentleness in touching the tender superstitious, the *terra incognitae* of presentiments, in the human mind; and how sharp a line of distinction he commonly draws between these obscure forecastings of general experience in each individual, and the vulgar errors of mere tradition. Indeed it may be taken once for all as the truth, that Shakspeare, in the absolute universality of his genius, always reverences whatever arises out of our moral nature; he never profanes his muse with a contemptuous reasoning away of the genuine and general, however unaccountable, feelings of mankind.

The amiable part of Richard’s character is brought full upon us by his queen’s few words—

* . . . . so sweet a guest
As my sweet Richard;—

and Shakspeare has carefully shown in him an intense love of his country, well-knowing how that feeling would, in a pure
historic drama, redeem him in the hearts of the audience. Yet even in this love there is something feminine and personal:—

Dear earth, I do salute thee with my hand,—
As a long parted mother with her child
Plays fondly with her tears, and smiles in meeting;
So weeping, smiling, greet I thee, my earth,
And do thee favour with my royal hands.

With this is combined a constant overflow of emotions from a total incapability of controlling them, and thence a waste of that energy, which should have been reserved for actions, in the passion and effort of mere resolves and menaces. The consequence is moral exhaustion, and rapid alternations of unmanly despair and ungrounded hope,—every feeling being abandoned for its direct opposite upon the pressure of external accident. And yet when Richard’s inward weakness appears to seek refuge in his despair, and his exhaustion counterfeits repose, the old habit of kingliness, the effect of flatterers from his infancy, is ever and anon producing in him a sort of wordy courage which only serves to betray more clearly his internal impotence. The second and third scenes of the third act combine and illustrate all this:—

_Aumerle._ He means, my lord, that we are too remiss;
Whilst Bolingbroke, through our security,
Grows strong and great, in substance, and in friends.

_K. Rich._ Discomfortable cousin! know’st thou not,
That when the searching eye of heaven is hid
Behind the globe, and lights the lower world,
Then thieves and robbers range abroad unseen,
In murders and in outrage, boldly here;
But when, from under this terrestrial ball,
It fires the proud tops of the eastern pines,
And darts his light through every guilty hole,
Then murders, treasons, and detested sins,
The cloke of night being pluck’d from off their backs,
Stand bare and naked, trembling at themselves?
So when this thief, this traitor, Bolingbroke, &c.

*Aumerle._ Where is the Duke my father with his power?

_K. Rich._ No matter where; of comfort no man speak:
Let’s talk of graves, of worms, and epitaphs,
Make dust our paper, and with rainy eyes
Write sorrow on the bosom of the earth, &c.

_Aumerle._ My father hath a power, enquire of him;
And learn to make a body of a limb.
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K. Rich. Thou chid'st me well: proud Bolingbroke, I come
To change blows with thee for our day of doom.
This ague-fit of fear is over-blown;
An easy task it is to win our own.

Scrump. Your uncle York is join'd with Bolingbrok.—

K. Rich. Thou hast said enough,
Beshrew thee, cousin, which didst lead me forth
Of that sweet way I was in to despair!
What say you now? what comfort have we now?
By heaven, I'll hate him eternally,
That bids me be of comfort any more.

Act iii. sc. 3. Bolingbroke's speech:

Noble lord,
Go to the rude ribs of that ancient castle, &c.

Observe the fine struggle of a haughty sense of power and ambition in Bolingbroke with the necessity for dissimulation.

Ib. sc. 4. See here the skill and judgment of our poet in giving reality and individual life, by the introduction of accidents in his historic plays, and thereby making them dramas, and not histories. How beautiful an islet of repose—a melancholy repose, indeed—is this scene with the Gardener and his Servant. And how truly affecting and realizing is the incident of the very horse Barbary, in the scene with the Groom in the last act!—

Groom. I was a poor groom of thy stable, King,
When thou wert King; who, travelling towards York,
With much ado, at length have gotten leave
To look upon my sometimes master's face.
O, how it yearned my heart, when I beheld,
In London streets, that coronation day,
When Bolingbroke rode on roan Barbary!
That horse, that thou so often hast bestrid;
That horse, that I so carefully have dress'd!

K. Rich. Rode he on Barbary?

Bolingbroke's character, in general, is an instance how Shakespeare makes one play introductory to another; for it is evidently a preparation for Henry IV., as Gloster in the third part of Henry VI. is for Richard III.

I would once more remark upon the exalted idea of the only true loyalty developed in this noble and impressive play. We have neither the rants of Beaumont and
Shakspeare's English

Fletcher, nor the sneers of Massinger;—the vast importance of the personal character of the sovereign is distinctly enounced, whilst, at the same time, the genuine sanctity which surrounds him is attributed to, and grounded on, the position in which he stands as the convergence and exponent of the life and power of the state.

The great end of the body politic appears to be to humanize, and assist in the progressiveness of, the animal man;—but the problem is so complicated with contingencies as to render it nearly impossible to lay down rules for the formation of a state. And should we be able to form a system of government, which should so balance its different powers as to form a check upon each, and so continually remedy and correct itself, it would, nevertheless, defeat its own aim;—for man is destined to be guided by higher principles, by universal views, which can never be fulfilled in this state of existence,—by a spirit of progressiveness which can never be accomplished, for then it would cease to be. Plato's Republic is like Bunyan's Town of Man-Soul,—a description of an individual, all of whose faculties are in their proper subordination and interdependence; and his it is assumed may be the prototype of the state as one great individual. But there is this sophism in it, that it is forgotten that the human faculties, indeed, are parts and not separate things; but that you could never get chiefs who were wholly reason, ministers who were wholly understanding, soldiers all wrath, labourers all concupiscence, and so on through the rest. Each of these partakes of, and interferes with, all the others.

HENRY IV. PART I.

Act i. sc. i. King Henry's speech:

No more the thirsty entrance of this soil
Shall daub her lips with her own children's blood.

A most obscure passage: but I think Theobald's interpretation right, namely, that 'thirsty entrance' means the dry penetrability, or bibulous drought, of the soil. The obscurity of this passage is of the Shakspearian sort.

Ib. sc. 2. In this, the first introduction of Falstaff,
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observe the consciousness and the intentionality of his wit, so that when it does not flow of its own accord, its absence is felt, and an effort visibly made to recall it. Note also throughout how Falstaff's pride is gratified in the power of influencing a prince of the blood, the heir apparent, by means of it. Hence his dislike to Prince John of Lancaster, and his mortification when he finds his wit fail on him:—

P. John. Fare you well, Falstaff: I, in my condition,
    Shall better speak of you than you deserve.
Fal. I would you had but the wit; 'twere better than your dukedom.—Good faith, this same young sober-blooded boy doth not love me;—nor a man cannot make him laugh.

Act ii. sc. 1. Second Carrier's speech:—

... breeds fleas like a loach.

Perhaps it is a misprint, or a provincial pronunciation, for 'leach,' that is, blood-suckers. Had it been gnats, instead of fleas, there might have been some sense, though small probability, in Warburton's suggestion of the Scottish 'loch.' Possibly 'loach,' or 'lutch,' may be some lost word for dovecote, or poultry-lodge, notorious for breeding fleas. In Stevens's or my reading, it should properly be 'loaches,' or 'leeches,' in the plural; except that I think I have heard anglers speak of trouts like a salmon.

Act iii. sc. 1.

Glend. Nay, if you melt, then will she run mad.

This 'nay' so to be dwelt on in speaking, as to be equivalent to a dissyllable -o, is characteristic of the solemn Glendower; but the imperfect line

She bids you
    On the wanton rushes lay you down, &c.

is one of those fine hair-strokes of exquisite judgment peculiar to Shakspere;—thus, detaching the Lady's speech, and giving it the individuality and entireness of a little poem, while he draws attention to it.
Act ii. sc. 2.

P. Hen. Sup any women with him?
Page. None, my lord, but old mistress Quickly, and mistress Doll Tear-sheet.

* * * * *

P. Hen. This Doll Tear-sheet should be some road.

I am sometimes disposed to think that this respectable young lady's name is a very old corruption for Tear-street—street-walker, terere stratam (viam.) Does not the Prince's question rather show this?—

'This Doll Tear-street should be some road?'

Act iii. sc. 1. King Henry's speech:

. . . . Then, happy low, lie down;
Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown.

I know no argument by which to persuade any one to be of my opinion, or rather of my feeling; but yet I cannot help feeling that 'Happy low-lie-down!' is either a proverbal expression, or the burthen of some old song, and means, 'Happy the man, who lays himself down on his straw bed or chaff pallet on the ground or floor!'

Ib. sc. 2. Shallow's speech:—

Rah, tah, tah, would 'a say; bounce, would 'a say, &c.

That Beaumont and Fletcher have more than once been guilty of sneering at their great master, cannot, I fear, be denied; but the passage quoted by Theobald from the Knight of the Burning Pestle is an imitation. If it be chargeable with any fault, it is with plagiarism, not with sarcasm.

HENRY V.

Act i. sc. 2. Westmoreland's speech:—

They know your grace hath cause, and means, and might;
So hath your highness; never King of England
Had nobles richer, &c.

Does 'grace' mean the king's own peculiar domains and legal revenue, and 'highness' his feudal rights in the
military service of his nobles?—I have sometimes thought it possible that the words ‘grace’ and ‘cause’ may have been transposed in the copying or printing;—

They know your cause hath grace, &c.

What Theobald meant, I cannot guess. To me his pointing makes the passage still more obscure. Perhaps the lines ought to be recited dramatically thus:

They know your Grace hath cause, and means, and might:—
So hath your Highness—never King of England
Had nobles richer, &c.

He breaks off from the grammar and natural order from earnestness, and in order to give the meaning more passionately.

Ib. Exeter’s speech:—

Yet that is but a crush’d necessity.

Perhaps it may be ‘crash’ for ‘crass’ from crassus, clumsy; or it may be ‘curt,’ defective, imperfect: anything would be better than Warburton’s ‘scus’d,’ which honest Theobald, of course, adopts. By the by, it seems clear to me that this speech of Exeter’s properly belongs to Canterbury, and was altered by the actors for convenience.

Act iv. sc. 3. K. Henry’s speech:—

We would not die in that man’s company
That fears his fellowship to die with us.

Should it not be ‘live’ in the first line?

Ib. sc. 5.

Const. O diable!
Orl. O seigneur! le jour est perdu, tout est perdu!
Dan. Mort de ma vie! all is confounded, all!
Reproach and everlasting shame
Sit mocking in our plumes!—O meschante fortune!
Do not run away!

Ludicrous as these introductory scraps of French appear, so instantly followed by good, nervous mother-English, yet they are judicious, and produce the impression which Shakspeare intended,—a sudden feeling struck at once on the ears, as well as the eyes, of the audience, that ‘here come the French, the baffled French braggards!’—And this will appear still more judicious, when we reflect on the scanty apparatus of distinguishing dresses in Shakspeare’s tyring-room.
Shakspeare's English

HENRY VI. PART I.

Act i. sc. i. Bedford's speech:—

Hung be the heavens with black, yield day to night!
Comets, importing change of times and states,
Brandish your crystal tresses in the sky;
And with them scourge the bad revolting stars,
That have consented unto Henry's death!
King Henry the fifth, too famous to live long!
England ne'er lost a king of so much worth.

Read aloud any two or three passages in blank verse even from Shakspeare's earliest dramas, as Love's Labour's Lost, or Romeo and Juliet; and then read in the same way this speech, with especial attention to the metre; and if you do not feel the impossibility of the latter having been written by Shakspeare, all I dare suggest is, that you may have ears,—for so has another animal,—but an ear you cannot have, me judice.

RICHARD III.

This play should be contrasted with Richard II. Pride of intellect is the characteristic of Richard, carried to the extent of even boasting to his own mind of his villany, whilst others are present to feed his pride of superiority; as in his first speech, act ii. sc. i. Shakspeare here, as in all his great parts, develops in a tone of sublime morality the dreadful consequences of placing the moral, in subordination to the mere intellectual, being. In Richard there is a predominance of irony, accompanied with apparently blunt manners to those immediately about him, but formalized into a more set hypocrisy towards the people as represented by their magistrates.

LEAR.

Of all Shakspeare's plays Macbeth is the most rapid, Hamlet the slowest, in movement. Lear combines length with rapidity,—like the hurricane and the whirlpool, absorbing while it advances. It begins as a stormy day
in summer, with brightness; but that brightness is lurid, and anticipates the tempest.

It was not without forethought, nor is it without its due significance, that the division of Lear's kingdom is in the first six lines of the play stated as a thing already determined in all its particulars, previously to the trial of professions, as the relative rewards of which the daughters were to be made to consider their several portions. The strange, yet by no means unnatural, mixture of selfishness, sensibility, and habit of feeling derived from, and fostered by, the particular rank and usages of the individual;—the intense desire of being intensely beloved,—selfish, and yet characteristic of the selfishness of a loving and kindly nature alone;—the self-supportless leaning for all pleasure on another's breast;—the craving after sympathy with a prodigal disinterestedness, frustrated by its own ostentation, and the mode and nature of its claims;—the anxiety, the distrust, the jealousy, which more or less accompany all selfish affections, and are amongst the surest contradistinctions of mere fondness from true love, and which originate Lear's eager wish to enjoy his daughter's violent professions, whilst the inveterate habits of sovereignty convert the wish into claim and positive right, and an incompliance with it into crime and treason;—these facts, these passions, these moral verities, on which the whole tragedy is founded, are all prepared for, and will to the retrospect be found implied, in these first four or five lines of the play. They let us know that the trial is but a trick; and that the grossness of the old king's rage is in part the natural result of a silly trick suddenly and most unexpectedly baffled and disappointed.

It may here be worthy of notice, that Lear is the only serious performance of Shakspeare, the interest and situations of which are derived from the assumption of a gross improbability; whereas Beaumont and Fletcher's tragedies are, almost all of them, founded on some out of the way accident or exception to the general experience of mankind. But observe the matchless judgment of our Shakespeare. First, improbable as the conduct of Lear is in the first scene, yet it was an old story rooted in the popular faith,—a thing taken for granted already, and consequently without any of the effects of improbability. Secondly, it is merely the canvass for the characters and
passions,—a mere occasion for,—and not, in the manner
of Beaumont and Fletcher, perpetually recurring as the
cause, and *sine qua non* of,—the incidents and emotions.
Let the first scene of this play have been lost, and let it
only be understood that a fond father had been duped by
hypocritical professions of love and duty on the part of two
daughters to disinherit the third, previously, and de-
servedly, more dear to him;—and all the rest of the
tragedy would retain its interest undiminished, and be
perfectly intelligible. The accidental is nowhere the
groundwork of the passions, but that which is catholic,
which in all ages has been, and ever will be, close and
native to the heart of man,—parental anguish from filial
ingratitude, the genuineness of worth, though confined in
bluntness, and the execrable vileness of a smooth iniquity.
Perhaps I ought to have added the Merchant of Venice;
but here too the same remarks apply. It was an old tale;
and substitute any other danger than that of the pound of
flesh (the circumstance in which the improbability lies),
yet all the situations and the emotions appertaining to
them remain equally excellent and appropriate. Where-
as take away from the Mad Lover of Beaumont and
Fletcher the fantastic hypothesis of his engagement to cut
out his own heart, and have it presented to his mistress,
and all the main scenes must go with it.

Kotzebue is the German Beaumont and Fletcher, with-
out their poetic powers, and without their *vis comica.*
But, like them, he always deduces his situations and
passions from marvellous accidents, and the trick of bring-
ing one part of our moral nature to counteract another;
as our pity for misfortune and admiration of generosity
and courage to combat our condemnation of guilt, as in
adultery, robbery, and other heinous crimes;—and, like
them too, he excels in his mode of telling a story clearly
and interestingly, in a series of dramatic dialogues. Only
the trick of making tragedy-heroes and heroines out of
shopkeepers and barmaids was too low for the age, and
too unpoetic for the genius, of Beaumont and Fletcher,
inferior in every respect as they are to their great pre-
deecessor and contemporary. How inferior would they
have appeared, had not Shakspeare existed for them to
imitate;—which in every play, more or less, they do, and
in their tragedies most glaringly:—and yet—(O shame!
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shame!)—they miss no opportunity of sneering at the divine man, and sub-detracting from his merits!

To return to Lear. Having thus in the fewest words, and in a natural reply to as natural a question,—which yet answers the secondary purpose of attracting our attention to the difference or diversity between the characters of Cornwall and Albany,—provided the premisses 'and data, as it were, for our after insight into the mind and mood of the person, whose character, passions, and sufferings are the main subject-matter of the play;—from Lear, the *persona patiens* of his drama, Shakspeare passes without delay to the second in importance, the chief agent and prime mover, and introduces Edmund to our acquaintance, preparing us with the same felicity of judgment, and in the same easy and natural way, for his character in the seemingly casual communication of its origin and occasion. From the first drawing up of the curtain Edmund has stood before us in the united strength and beauty of earliest manhood. Our eyes have been questioning him. Gifted as he is with high advantages of person, and further endowed by nature with a powerful intellect and a strong energetic will, even without any concurrence of circumstances and accident, pride will necessarily be the sin that most easily besets him. But Edmund is also the known and acknowledged son of the princely Gloster: he, therefore, has both the germ of pride, and the conditions best fitted to evolve and ripen it into a predominant feeling. Yet hitherto no reason appears why it should be other than the not unusual pride of person, talent, and birth,—a pride auxiliary, if not akin, to many virtues, and the natural ally of honourable impulses. But alas! in his own presence his own father takes shame to himself for the frank avowal that he is his father,—he has 'blushed so often to acknowledge him that he is now brazed to it!' Edmund hears the circumstances of his birth spoken of with a most degrading and licentious levity,—his mother described as a wanton by her own paramour, and the remembrance of the animal sting, the low criminal gratifications connected with her wantonness and prostituted beauty, assigned as the reason, why 'the whoreson must be acknowledged!' This, and the consciousness of its notoriety; the gnawing conviction that every show of respect is an effort of courtesy, which recalls,
while it represses, a contrary feeling;—this is the ever
trickling flow of wormwood and gall into the wounds of
pride,—the corrosive virus which inoculates pride with
a venom not its own, with envy, hatred, and a lust for that
power which in its blaze of radiance would hide the dark
spots on his disc,—with pangs of shame personally un-
deserved, and therefore felt as wrongs, and with a blind
ferment of vindictive working towards the occasions
and causes, especially towards a brother, whose stainless
birth and lawful honours were the constant remembrancers
of his own debasement, and were ever in the way to prevent
all chance of its being unknown, or overlooked and for-
gotten. Add to this, that with excellent judgment, and
provident for the claims of the moral sense,—for that
which, relatively to the drama, is called poetic justice, and
as the fittest means for reconciling the feelings of the
spectators to the horrors of Gloster’s after sufferings,—
at least, of rendering them somewhat less unendurable;—
(for I will not disguise my conviction, that in this one
point the tragic in this play has been urged beyond the
outermost mark and ne plus ultra of the dramatic)—Shak-
spere has precluded all excuse and palliation of the guilt
incurred by both the parents of the base-born Edmund, by
Gloster’s confession that he was at the time a married man,
and already blest with a lawful heir of his fortunes. The
mournful alienation of brotherly love, occasioned by the
law of primogeniture in noble families, or rather by the
unnecessary distinctions engrafted thereon, and this in
children of the same stock, is still almost proverbial on
the continent,—especially, as I know from my own observa-
tion, in the south of Europe,—and appears to have been
scarcely less common in our own island before the Revolu-
tion of 1688, if we may judge from the characters and
sentiments so frequent in our elder comedies. There is
the younger brother, for instance, in Beaumont and
Fletcher’s play of the Scornful Lady, on the one side, and
Oliver in Shakspeare’s As You Like It, on the other.
Need it be said how heavy an aggravation, in such a case,
the stain of bastardy must have been, were it only that
the younger brother was liable to hear his own dishonour
and his mother’s infamy related by his father with an
excusing shrug of the shoulders, and in a tone betwixt
waggery and shame!
Notes on Lear

By the circumstances here enumerated as so many predisposing causes, Edmund's character might well be deemed already sufficiently explained; and our minds prepared for it. But in this tragedy the story or fable constrained Shakspere to introduce wickedness in an outrageous form in the persons of Regan and Goneril. He had read nature too heedfully not to know, that courage, intellect, and strength of character are the most impressive forms of power, and that to power in itself, without reference to any moral end, an inevitable admiration and complacency appertains, whether it be displayed in the conquests of a Buonaparte or Tamerlane, or in the foam and the thunder of a cataract. But in the exhibition of such a character it was of the highest importance to prevent the guilt from passing into utter monstrosity,—which again depends on the presence or absence of causes and temptations sufficient to account for the wickedness, without the necessity of recurring to a thorough fiendishness of nature for its origination. For such are the appointed relations of intellectual power to truth, and of truth to goodness, that it becomes both morally and poetically unsale to present what is admirable,—what our nature compels us to admire—in the mind, and what is most detestable in the heart, as co-existing in the same individual without any apparent connection, or any modification of the one by the other. That Shakspere has in one instance, that of Iago, approached to this, and that he has done it successfully, is, perhaps, the most astonishing proof of his genius, and the opulence of its resources. But in the present tragedy, in which he was compelled to present a Goneril and a Regan, it was most carefully to be avoided;—and therefore the only one conceivable addition to the insidious influences on the pre-formation of Edmund's character is given, in the information that all the kindly counteractions to the mischievous feelings of shame, which might have been derived from co-domestication with Edgar and their common father, had been cut off by his absence from home, and foreign education from boyhood to the present time, and a prospect of its continuance, as if to preclude all risk of his interference with the father's views for the elder and legitimate son:

He hath been out nine years, and away he shall again.
Notes on Lear

Act i. sc. 1.

Cor. Nothing, my lord.
Lear. Nothing? 
Cor. Nothing.
Lear. Nothing can come of nothing: speak again.
Cor. Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave
My heart into my mouth: I love your majesty
According to my bond; nor more, nor less.

There is something of disgust at the ruthless hypocrisy of her sisters, and some little faulty admixture of pride and sullenness in Cordelia’s ‘Nothing;’ and her tone is well contrived, indeed, to lessen the glaring absurdity of Lear’s conduct, but answers the yet more important purpose of forcing away the attention from the nursery-tale, the moment it has served its end, that of supplying the canvass for the picture. This is also materially furthered by Kent’s opposition, which displays Lear’s moral incapability of resigning the sovereign power in the very act of disposing of it. Kent is, perhaps, the nearest to perfect goodness in all Shakspeare’s characters, and yet the most individualized. There is an extraordinary charm in his bluntness, which is that only of a nobleman arising from a contempt of overstrained courtesy, and combined with easy placability where goodness of heart is apparent. His passionate affection for, and fidelity to, Lear act on our feelings in Lear’s own favour: virtue itself seems to be in company with him.

Ib. sc. 2. Edmund’s speech:

Who, in the lusty stealth of nature, take
More composition and fierce quality
Than doth, &c.

Warburton’s note upon a quotation from Vanini.

Poor Vanini!—Any one but Warburton would have thought this precious passage more characteristic of Mr. Shandy than of atheism. If the fact really were so, (which it is not, but almost the contrary,) I do not see why the most confirmed theist might not very naturally utter the same wish. But it is proverbial that the youngest son in a large family is commonly the man of the greatest talents in it; and as good an authority as Vanini has said—\textit{incalescere in venerem ardentius, spei sobolis injuriosum esse}. 
Notes on Lear

In this speech of Edmund you see, as soon as a man cannot reconcile himself to reason, how his conscience flies off by way of appeal to nature, who is sure upon such occasions never to find fault, and also how shame sharpens a predisposition in the heart to evil. For it is a profound moral, that shame will naturally generate guilt; the oppressed will be vindictive, like Shylock, and in the anguish of undeserved ignominy the delusion secretly springs up, of getting over the moral quality of an action by fixing the mind on the mere physical act alone.

Ib. Edmund’s speech:—

This is the excellent foppery of the world! that, when we are sick in fortune, (often the surfeit of our own behaviour,) we make guilty of our disasters, the sun, the moon, and the stars, &c.

Thus scorn and misanthropy are often the anticipations and mouth-pieces of wisdom in the detection of superstitions. Both individuals and nations may be free from such prejudices by being below them, as well as by rising above them.

Ib. sc. 3. The Steward should be placed in exact antithesis to Kent, as the only character of utter irredeemable baseness in Shakspeare. Even in this the judgment and invention of the poet are very observable;—for what else could the willing tool of a Goneril be? Not a vice but this of baseness was left open to him.

Ib. sc. 4. In Lear old age is itself a character,—its natural imperfections being increased by life-long habits of receiving a prompt obedience. Any addition of individuality would have been unnecessary and painful; for the relations of others to him, of wondrous fidelity and of frightful ingratitude, alone sufficiently distinguish him. Thus Lear becomes the open and ample play-room of nature’s passions.

Ib.

Knight. Since my young lady’s going into France, Sir; the fool hath much pin’d away.

The Fool is no comic buffoon to make the groundlings laugh,—no forced condescension of Shakspeare’s genius to the taste of his audience. Accordingly the poet prepares for his introduction, which he never does with any of his common clowns and fools, by bringing him into living connection with the pathos of the play. He is as wonderful
Notes on Lear

a creation as Caliban;—his wild babblings, and inspired idiocy, articulate and gauge the horrors of the scene.

The monster Goneril prepares what is necessary, while the character of Albany renders a still more maddening grievance possible, namely, Regan and Cornwall in perfect sympathy of monstrosity. Not a sentiment, not an image, which can give pleasure on its own account, is admitted; whenever these creatures are introduced, and they are brought forward as little as possible, pure horror reigns throughout. In this scene and in all the early speeches of Lear, the one general sentiment of filial ingratitude prevails as the main spring of the feelings;—in this early stage the outward object causing the pressure on the mind, which is not yet sufficiently familiarized with the anguish for the imagination to work upon it.

Ib.

Gon. Do you mark that, my lord?

Alb. I cannot be so partial, Goneril,
      To the great love I bear you.

Gon. Pray you content, &c.

Observe the baffled endeavour of Goneril to act on the fears of Albany, and yet his passiveness, his inertia: he is not convinced, and yet he is afraid of looking into the thing. Such characters always yield to those who will take the trouble of governing them, or for them. Perhaps, the influence of a princess, whose choice of him had royalized his state, may be some little excuse for Albany’s weakness.

Ib. sc. 5.

Lear. O let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!
      Keep me in temper! I would not be mad! -

The mind’s own anticipation of madness! The deepest tragic notes are often struck by a half sense of an impending blow. The Fool’s conclusion of this act by a grotesque prattling seems to indicate the dislocation of feeling that has begun and is to be continued.

Act ii. sc. i. Edmund’s speech:—

He replied,

Thou unpossessing bastard! &c.

Thus the secret poison in Edmund’s own heart steals forth; and then observe poor Gloster’s—

Loyal and natural boy!

as if praising the crime of Edmund’s birth!
Notes on Lear

Ib. Compare Regan’s—

* What, did my father’s godson seek your life?
  He whom my father named?

with the unfeminine violence of her—

* All vengeance comes too short, &c.

and yet no reference to the guilt, but only to the accident, which she uses as an occasion for sneering at her father. Regan is not, in fact, a greater monster than Goneril, but she has the power of casting more venom.

Ib. sc. 2. Cornwall’s speech:—

This is some fellow,
  Who, having been praised for bluntness, doth affect
  A saucy roughness, &c.

In thus placing these profound general truths in the mouths of such men as Cornwall, Edmund, Iago, &c. Shakspeare at once gives them utterance, and yet shows how indefinite their application is.

Ib. sc. 3. Edgar’s assumed madness serves the great purpose of taking off part of the shock which would otherwise be caused by the true madness of Lear, and further displays the profound difference between the two. In every attempt at representing madness throughout the whole range of dramatic literature, with the single exception of Lear, it is mere lightheartedness, as especially in Otway. In Edgar’s ravings Shakspeare all the while lets you see a fixed purpose, a practical end in view;—in Lear’s, there is only the brooding of the one anguish, an eddy without progression.

Ib. sc. 4. Lear’s speech:—

The king would speak with Cornwall; the dear father
  Would with his daughter speak, &c.

* * *

No, but not yet: may be he is not well, &c.

The strong interest now felt by Lear to try to find excuses for his daughter is most pathetic.

Ib. Lear’s speech:—

———Beloved Regan,

Thy sister’s naught;—O Regan, she hath tied
Sharp-tooth’d unkindness, like a vulture, here.
I can scarce speak to thee;—thou’lt not believe
With how deprav’d a quality—O Regan!
Notes on Lear

Reg. I pray you, Sir, take patience; I have hope,
You less know how to value her desert,
Than she to scant her duty.
Lear. Say, how is that?

Nothing is so heart-cutting as a cold unexpected defence
or palliation of a cruelty passionately complained of, or so
expressive of thorough hard-heartedness. And feel the
excessive horror of Regan's 'O, Sir, you are old!'—and
then her drawing from that universal object of reverence
and indulgence the very reason for her frightful con-
clusion—

Say, you have wrong'd her!

All Lear's faults increase our pity for him. We refuse to
know them otherwise than as means of his sufferings, and
aggravations of his daughter's ingratitude.

Ib. Lear's speech:

O, reason not the need: our basest beggars
Are in the poorest thing superfluous, &c.

Observe that the tranquillity which follows the first
stunning of the blow permits Lear to reason.

Act iii. sc. 4. O, what a world's convention of agonies
is here! All external nature in a storm, all moral nature
convulsed,—the real madness of Lear, the feigned madness
of Edgar, the babbling of the Fool, the desperate fidelity of
Kent—surely such a scene was never conceived before or
since! Take it but as a picture for the eye only, it is more
terrific than any which a Michel Angelo, inspired by a
Dante, could have conceived, and which none but a Michel
Angelo could have executed. Or let it have been uttered
to the blind, the howlings of nature would seem converted
into the voice of conscious humanity. This scene ends
with the first symptoms of positive derangement; and
the intervention of the fifth scene is particularly judicious,
—the interruption allowing an interval for Lear to appear
in full madness in the sixth scene.

Ib. sc. 7. Gloster's blinding:

What can I say of this scene?—There is my reluctance to
think Shakspere wrong, and yet—

Act iv. sc. 6. Lear's speech:

Ha! Goneril!—with a white beard!—They flattered me like a
dog; and told me, I had white hairs in my beard, ere the black
Notes on Hamlet

ones were there. To say Ay and No to every thing that I said!—Ay and No too was no good divinity. When the rain came to wet me once, &c.

The thunder recurs, but still at a greater distance from our feelings.

Ib. sc. 7. Lear's speech:—

Where have I been? Where am I?—Fair daylight?—I am mightily abused.—I should even die with pity. To see another thus, &c.

How beautifully the affecting return of Lear to reason, and the mild pathos of these speeches prepare the mind for the last sad, yet sweet, consolation of the aged sufferer's death!

HAMLET.

Hamlet was the play, or rather Hamlet himself was the character, in the intuition and exposition of which I first made my turn for philosophical criticism, and especially for insight into the genius of Shakspeare, noticed. This happened first amongst my acquaintances, as Sir George Beaumont will bear witness; and subsequently, long before Schlegel had delivered at Vienna the lectures on Shakspeare, which he afterwards published, I had given on the same subject eighteen lectures substantially the same, proceeding from the very same point of view, and deducing the same conclusions, so far as I either then agreed, or now agree, with him. I gave these lectures at the Royal Institution, before six or seven hundred auditors of rank and eminence, in the spring of the same year, in which Sir Humphrey Davy, a fellow-lecturer, made his great revolutionary discoveries in chemistry. Even in detail the coincidence of Schlegel with my lectures was so extraordinary, that all who at a later period heard the same words, taken by me from my notes of the lectures at the Royal Institution, concluded a borrowing on my part from Schlegel. Mr. Hazlitt, whose hatred of me is in such an inverse ratio to my zealous kindness towards him, as to be defended by his warmest admirer, Charles Lamb—(who, God bless him! besides his characteristic obstinacy of adherence to old friends, as long at least as they are at all
down in the world, is linked as by a charm to Hazlitt’s conversation)—only as ‘frantic’;—Mr. Hazlitt, I say, himself replied to an assertion of my plagiarism from Schlegel in these words;—“That is a lie; for I myself heard the very same character of Hamlet from Coleridge before he went to Germany, and when he had neither read nor could read a page of German!” Now Hazlitt was on a visit to me at my cottage at Nether Stowey, Somerset, in the summer of the year 1798, in the September of which year I first was out of sight of the shores of Great Britain. Recorded by me, S. T. Coleridge, 7th January, 1819.

The seeming inconsistencies in the conduct and character of Hamlet have long exercised the conjectural ingenuity of critics; and, as we are always loth to suppose that the cause of defective apprehension is in ourselves, the mystery has been too commonly explained by the very easy process of setting it down as in fact inexplicable, and by resolving the phenomenon into a misgrowth or luxus of the capricious and irregular genius of Shakspeare. The shallow and stupid arrogance of these vulgar and indolent decisions I would fain do my best to expose. I believe the character of Hamlet may be traced to Shakspeare’s deep and accurate science in mental philosophy. Indeed, that this character must have some connection with the common fundamental laws of our nature may be assumed from the fact, that Hamlet has been the darling of every country in which the literature of England has been fostered. In order to understand him, it is essential that we should reflect on the constitution of our own minds. Man is distinguished from the brute animals in proportion as thought prevails over sense: but in the healthy processes of the mind, a balance is constantly maintained between the impressions from outward objects and the inward operations of the intellect;—for if there be an overbalance in the contemplative faculty, man thereby becomes the creature of mere meditation, and loses his natural power of action. Now one of Shakspeare’s modes of creating characters is, to conceive any one intellectual or moral faculty in morbid excess, and then to place himself, Shakspeare, thus mutilated or diseased, under given circumstances. In Hamlet he seems to have wished to exemplify the moral necessity of a due balance between our attention to the objects of our senses, and our meditation on the workings of our
Notes on Hamlet

minds,—an *equilibrium* between the real and the imaginary worlds. In Hamlet this balance is disturbed: his thoughts, and the images of his fancy, are far more vivid than his actual perceptions, and his very perceptions, instantly passing through the *medium* of his contemplations, acquire, as they pass, a form and a colour not naturally their own. Hence we see a great, an almost enormous, intellectual activity, and a proportionate aversion to real action, consequent upon it, with all its symptoms and accompanying qualities. This character Shakspeare places in circumstances, under which it is obliged to act on the spur of the moment:—Hamlet is brave and careless of death; but he vacillates from sensibility, and procrastinates from thought, and loses the power of action in the energy of resolve. Thus it is that this tragedy presents a direct contrast to that of Macbeth; the one proceeds with the utmost slowness, the other with a crowded and breathless rapidity.

The effect of this overbalance of the imaginative power is beautifully illustrated in the everlasting broodings and superfluous activities of Hamlet’s mind, which, unseated from its healthy relation, is constantly occupied with the world within, and abstracted from the world without,—giving substance to shadows, and throwing a mist over all common-place actualities. It is the nature of thought to be indefinite;—definiteness belongs to external imagery alone. Hence it is that the sense of sublimity arises, not from the sight of an outward object, but from the beholder’s reflection upon it;—not from the sensuous impression, but from the imaginative reflex. Few have seen a celebrated waterfall without feeling something akin to disappointment: it is only subsequently that the image comes back full into the mind, and brings with it a train of grand or beautiful associations. Hamlet feels this; his senses are in a state of trance, and he looks upon external things as hieroglyphics. His soliloquy—

O! that this too too solid flesh would melt, &c.

springs from that craving after the indefinite—for that which is not—which most easily besets men of genius; and the self-delusion* common to this temper of mind is finely exemplified in the character which Hamlet gives of himself:—

E*
Notes on Hamlet

—It cannot be
But I am pigeon-livered, and lack gall
To make oppression bitter.

He mistakes the seeing his chains for the breaking them,
delays action till action is of no use, and dies the victim
of mere circumstance and accident.

There is a great significance in the names of Shakspeare’s
plays. In the Twelfth Night, Midsummer Night’s Dream,
As You Like It, and Winter’s Tale, the total effect is
produced by a co-ordination of the characters as in a
wreath of flowers. But in Coriolanus, Lear, Romeo and
Juliet, Hamlet, Othello, &c. the effect arises from the
subordination of all to one, either as the prominent person,
or the principal object. Cymbeline is the only exception;
and even that has its advantages in preparing the audience
for the chaos of time, place, and costume, by throwing the
date back into a fabulous king’s reign.

But as of more importance, so more striking, is the
judgment displayed by our truly dramatic poet, as well
as poet of the drama, in the management of his first scenes.
With the single exception of Cymbeline, they either place
before us at one glance both the past and the future in
some effect, which implies the continuance and full agency
of its cause, as in the feuds and party-spirit of the servants
of the two houses in the first scene of Romeo and Juliet;
or in the degrading passion for shews and public spectacles,
and the overwhelming attachment for the newest success-
ful war-chief in the Roman people, already become a
populacc, contrasted with the jealousy of the nobles in
Julius Cæsar;—or they at once commence the action so
as to excite a curiosity for the explanation in the following
scenes, as in the storm of wind and waves, and the boat-
swain in the Tempest, instead of anticipating our curiosity,
as in most other first scenes, and in too many other first
acts;—or they act, by contrast of diction suited to the
characters, at once to heighten the effect, and yet to give
a naturalness to the language and rhythm of the principal
personages, either as that of Prospero and Miranda by the
appropriate lowness of the style,—or as in King Johns,
by the equally appropriate stateliness of official harangues
or narratives, so that the after blank verse seems to belong
to the rank and quality of the speakers, and not to the
poet;—or they strike at once the key-note, and give the
predominant spirit of the play, as in the Twelfth Night and in Macbeth;—or finally, the first scene comprises all these advantages at once, as in Hamlet.

Compare the easy language of common life, in which this drama commences, with the direful music and wild wayward rhythm and abrupt lyrics of the opening of Macbeth. The tone is quite familiar;—there is no poetic description of night, no elaborate information conveyed by one speaker to another of what both had immediately before their senses—(such as the first distich in Addison’s Cato, which is a translation into poetry of ‘Past four o’clock and a dark morning!’);—and yet nothing bordering on the comic on the one hand, nor any striving of the intellect on the other. It is precisely the language of sensation among men who feared no charge of effeminacy for feeling what they had no want of resolution to bear. Yet the armour, the dead silence, the watchfulness that first interrupts it, the welcome relief of the guard, the cold, the broken expressions of compelled attention to bodily feelings still under control—all excellently accord with, and prepare for, the after gradual rise into tragedy;—but, above all, into a tragedy, the interest of which is as eminently ad et apud intra, as that of Macbeth is directly ad extra.

In all the best attested stories of ghosts and visions, as in that of Brutus, of Archbishop Cranmer, that of Benvenuto Cellini recorded by himself, and the vision of Galileo communicated by him to his favourite pupil Torricelli, the ghost-seers were in a state of cold or chilling damp from without, and of anxiety inwardly. It has been with all of them as with Francisco on his guard,—alone, in the depth and silence of the night;—‘twas bitter cold, and they were sick at heart, and not a mouse stirring.’ The attention to minute sounds,—naturally associated with the recollection of minute objects, and the more familiar and trifling, the more impressive from the unusualness of their producing any impression at all—gives a philosophic pertinency to this last image; but it has likewise its dramatic use and purpose. For its commonness in ordinary conversation tends to produce the sense of reality, and at once hides the poet, and yet approximates the reader or spectator to that state in which the highest poetry will appear, and in its component
parts, though not in the whole composition, really is, the language of nature. If I should not speak it, I feel that I should be thinking it;—the voice only is the poet's,—the words are my own. That Shakspeare meant to put an effect in the actor's power in the very first words—"Who's there?"—is evident from his impatience expressed by the startled Francisco in the words that follow—"Nay, answer me: stand and unfold yourself." A brave man is never so peremptory, as when he fears that he is afraid. Observe the gradual transition from the silence and the still recent habit of listening in Francisco's—"I think I hear them"—to the more cheerful call out, which a good actor would observe, in the—"Stand ho! Who is there?" Bernardo's inquiry after Horatio, and the repetition of his name and in his own presence indicate a respect or an eagerness that implies him as one of the persons who are in the foreground; and the scepticism attributed to him,—

Horatio says, 'tis but our fantasy;
And will not let belief take hold of him—

prepares us for Hamlet's after eulogy on him as one whose blood and judgment were happily commingled. The actor should also be careful to distinguish the expectation and gladness of Bernardo's 'Welcome, Horatio!' from the mere courtesy of his 'Welcome, good Marcellus!'

Now observe the admirable indefiniteness of the first opening out of the occasion of all this anxiety. The preparation informative of the audience is just as much as was precisely necessary, and no more;—it begins with the uncertainty appertaining to a question:—

Mar. What, has this thing appear'd again to-night?—

Even the word 'again' has its credibilizing effect. Then Horatio, the representative of the ignorance of the audience, not himself, but by Marcellus to Bernardo, anticipates the common solution—'tis but our fantasy!' upon which Marcellus rises into

This dreaded sight, twice seen of us—

which immediately afterwards becomes 'this apparition,' and that, too, an intelligent spirit, that is, to be spoken to! Then comes the confirmation of Horatio's disbelief;—

Tush! tush! 'twill not appear!—
and the silence, with which the scene opened, is again restored in the shivering feeling of Horatio sitting down, at such a time, and with the two eye-witnesses, to hear a story of a ghost, and that, too, of a ghost which had appeared twice before at the very same hour. In the deep feeling which Bernardo has of the solemn nature of what he is about to relate, he makes an effort to master his own imaginative terrors by an elevation of style,—itself a continuation of the effort,—and by turning off from the apparition, as from something which would force him too deeply into himself, to the outward objects, the realities of nature, which had accompanied it:—

*Ber.* Last night of all,  
When yon same star, that's westward from the pole  
Had made his course to illume that part of heaven  
Where now it burns, Marcellus and myself,  
The bell then beating one—

This passage seems to contradict the critical law that what is told, makes a faint impression compared with what is beheld; for it does indeed convey to the mind more than the eye can see; whilst the interruption of the narrative at the very moment when we are most intensely listening for the sequel, and have our thoughts diverted from the dreaded sight in expectation of the desired, yet almost dreaded, tale—this gives all the suddenness and surprise of the original appearance;—

*Mar.* Peace, break thee off; look, where it comes again!—

Note the judgment displayed in having the two persons present, who, as having seen the Ghost before, are naturally eager in confirming their former opinions,—whilst the sceptic is silent, and after having been twice addressed by his friends, answers with two hasty syllables—'Most like,'—and a confession of horror:

—It harrows me with fear and wonder.

O heaven! words are wasted on those who feel, and to those who do not feel the exquisite judgment of Shakespeare in this scene, what can be said?—Hume himself could not but have had faith in this Ghost dramatically, let his anti-ghostism have been as strong as Sampson against other ghosts less powerfully raised.
Notes on Hamlet

Act i. sc. i.

Mar. Good now, sit down, and tell me, he that knows,
Why this same strict and most observant watch, &c.

How delightfully natural is the transition to the retrospective narrative! And observe, upon the Ghost’s re-appearance, how much Horatio’s courage is increased by having translated the late individual spectator into general thought and past experience,—and the sympathy of Marcellus and Bernardo with his patriotic surmises in daring to strike at the Ghost; whilst in a moment, upon its vanishing the former solemn awe-stricken feeling returns upon them:—

We do it wrong, being so majestical,
To offer it the show of violence.—

Ib. Horatio’s speech:—

I have heard,
The cock, that is the trumpet to the morn,
Doth with his lofty and shrill-sounding throat
Awake the god of day, &c.

No Addison could be more careful to be poetical in diction than Shakspeare in providing the grounds and sources of its propriety. But how to elevate a thing almost mean by its familiarity, young poets may learn in this treatment of the cock-crow.

Ib. Horatio’s speech:—

And, by my advice,
Let us impart what we have seen to-night
Unto young Hamlet; for, upon my life,
This spirit, dumb to us, will speak to him.

Note the inobtrusive and yet fully adequate mode of introducing the main character, ‘young Hamlet,’ upon whom is transferred all the interest excited for the acts and concerns of the king his father.

Ib. sc. 2. The audience are now relieved by a change of scene to the royal court, in order that Hamlet may not have to take up the leavings of exhaustion. In the king’s speech, observe the set and pedantically antithetic form of the sentences when touching that which galled the heels of conscience,—the strain of undignified rhetoric,—and yet in what follows concerning the public weal, a certain appropriate majesty. Indeed was he not a royal brother?—
Notes on Hamlet

Ib. King's speech:—

And now, Laertes, what's the news with you? 

Thus with great art Shakspeare introduces a most important, but still subordinate character first, Laertes, who is yet thus graciously treated in consequence of the assistance given to the election of the late king's brother instead of his son by Polonius.

Ibb.

Ham. A little more than kin, and less than kind.

King. How is it that the clouds still hang on you?

Ham. Not so, my lord, I am too much i' the sun.

Hamlet opens his mouth with a playing on words, the complete absence of which throughout characterizes Macbeth. This playing on words may be attributed to many causes or motives, as either to an exuberant activity of mind, as in the higher comedy of Shakspeare generally;—or to an imitation of it as a mere fashion, as if it were said—'Is not this better than groaning?'—or to a contemptuous exultation in minds vulgarized and overset by their success, as in the poetic instance of Milton's Devils in the battle;—or it is the language of resentment, as is familiar to every one who has witnessed the quarrels of the lower orders, where there is invariably a profusion of punning invective, whence, perhaps, nicknames have in a considerable degree sprung up;—or it is the language of suppressed passion, and especially of a hardly smothered personal dislike. The first and last of these combine in Hamlet's case; and I have little doubt that Farmer is right in supposing the equivocation carried on in the expression 'too much i' the sun,' or son.

Ibb.

Ham. Ay, madam, it is common.

Here observe Hamlet's delicacy to his mother, and how the suppression prepares him for the overflow in the next speech, in which his character is more developed by bringing forward his aversion to externals, and which betrays his habit of brooding over the world within him, coupled with a prodigality of beautiful words, which are the half embodyings of thought, and are more than thought, and have an outness, a reality sui generis, and yet retain their correspondence and shadowy affinity to the images and movements within. Note also Hamlet's silence to the
Notes on Hamlet

long speech of the king which follows, and his respectful, but general, answer to his mother.

Ib. Hamlet's first soliloquy:—

O, that this too too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew! &c.

This tedium vita is a common oppression on minds cast in the Hamlet mould, and is caused by disproportionate mental exertion, which necessitates exhaustion of bodily feeling. Where there is a just coincidence of external and internal action, pleasure is always the result; but where the former is deficient, and the mind's appetency of the ideal is unchecked, realities will seem cold and unmoving. In such cases, passion combines itself with the indefinite alone. In this mood of his mind the relation of the appearance of his father's spirit in arms is made all at once to Hamlet:—it is—Horatio's speech, in particular—a perfect model of the true style of dramatic narrative;—the purest poetry, and yet in the most natural language, equally remote from the inkhorn and the plough.

Ib. sc. 3. This scene must be regarded as one of Shakespeare's lyric movements in the play, and the skill with which it is interwoven with the dramatic parts is peculiarly an excellence of our poet. You experience the sensation of a pause without the sense of a stop. You will observe in Ophelia's short and general answer to the long speech of Laertes the natural carelessness of innocence, which cannot think such a code of cautions and prudences necessary to its own preservation.

Ib. Speech of Polonius:—(in Stockdale's edition.)

Or (not to crack the wind of the poor phrase,)
Wronging it thus, you'll tender me a fool.

I suspect this 'wronging' is here used much in the same sense as 'wringing' or 'wrenching'; and that the parenthesis should be extended to 'thus.'

Ib. Speech of Polonius:—

——How prodigal the soul
Lends the tongue vows:—these blazes, daughter, &c.

A spondee has, I doubt not, dropped out of the text. Either insert 'Go to' after 'vows';—

---It is so pointed in the modern editions.—Ed.
Lends the tongue vows: Go to, these blazes, daughter—
or read

Lends the tongue vows:—These blazes, daughter, mark you—

Shakspeare never introduces a catalectic line without
intending an equivalent to the foot omitted in the pauses,
or the dwelling emphasis, or the diffused retardation. I
do not, however, deny that a good actor might by employ-
ing the last mentioned means, namely, the retardation, or
solemn knowing drawl, supply the missing spondee with
good effect. But I do not believe that in this or any other
of the foregoing speeches of Polonius, Shakspeare meant
to bring out the senility or weakness of that personage’s
mind. In the great ever-recurring dangers and duties
of life, where to distinguish the fit objects for the applica-
tion of the maxims collected by the experience of a long
life, requires no fineness of tact, as in the admonitions to
his son and daughter, Polonius is uniformly made respect-
able. But if an actor were even capable of catching these
shades in the character, the pit and the gallery would be
malcontent at their exhibition. It is to Hamlet that
Polonius is, and is meant to be, contemptible, because in
inwardness and uncontrollable activity of movement,
Hamlet’s mind is the logical contrary to that of Polonius,
and besides, as I have observed before, Hamlet dislikes
the man as false to his true allegiance in the matter of the
succession to the crown.

Ib. sc. 4. The unimportant conversation with which
this scene opens is a proof of Shakspeare’s minute know-
ledge of human nature. It is a well established fact, that
on the brink of any serious enterprise, or event of moment,
men almost invariably endeavour to elude the pressure of
their own thoughts by turning aside to trivial objects and
familiar circumstances: thus this dialogue on the platform
begins with remarks on the coldness of the air, and inquiries,
obliquely connected, indeed, with the expected hour of
the visitation, but thrown out in a seeming vacuity of
topics, as to the striking of the clock and so forth. The
same desire to escape from the impending thought is carried
on in Hamlet’s account of, and moralizing on, the Danish
custom of wassailing: he runs off from the particular to the
universal, and, in his repugnance to personal and individual
concerns, escapes, as it were, from himself in generaliza-
Notes on Hamlet

tions, and smothers the impatience and uneasy feelings of the moment in abstract reasoning. Besides this, another purpose is answered;—for by thus entangling the attention of the audience in the nice distinctions and parenthetical sentences of this speech of Hamlet's, Shakspeare takes them completely by surprise on the appearance of the Ghost, which comes upon them in all the suddenness of its visionary character. Indeed, no modern writer would have dared, like Shakspeare, to have preceded this last visitation by two distinct appearances,—or could have contrived that the third should rise upon the former two in impressiveness and solemnity of interest.

But in addition to all the other excellences of Hamlet's speech concerning the wassel-music—so finely revealing the predominant idealism, the ratiocinative meditativeness, of his character—it has the advantage of giving nature and probability to the impassioned continuity of the speech instantly directed to the Ghost. The momentum had been given to his mental activity; the full current of the thoughts and words had set in, and the very forgetfulness, in the fervour of his argumentation, of the purpose for which he was there, aided in preventing the appearance from benumbing the mind. Consequently, it acted as a new impulse,—a sudden stroke which increased the velocity of the body already in motion, whilst it altered the direction. The co-presence of Horatio, Marcellus, and Bernardo is most judiciously contrived; for it renders the courage of Hamlet and his impetuous eloquence perfectly intelligible. The knowledge,—the unthought of consciousness,—the sensation,—of human auditors,—of flesh and blood sympathists—acts as a support and a stimulation a tergo, while the front of the mind, the whole consciousness of the speaker, is filled, yea, absorbed, by the apparition. Add too, that the apparition itself has by its previous appearances been brought nearer to a thing of this world. This accrescence of objectivity in a Ghost that yet retains all its ghostly attributes and fearful subjectivity, is truly wonderful.

Ib. sc. 5. Hamlet's speech:—

O all you host of heaven! O earth! What else?
And shall I couple hell?—

I remember nothing equal to this burst unless it be the
first speech of Prometheus in the Greek drama, after the exit of Vulcan and the two Afrites. But Shakspeare alone could have produced the vow of Hamlet to make his memory a blank of all maxims and generalized truths, that 'observation had copied there,'—followed immediately by the speaker noting down the generalized fact,

That one may smile, and smile, and be a villain!

Ib.

Mar. Hillo, ho, ho, my lord!

Ham. Hillo, ho, ho, boy! come bird, come, &c.

This part of the scene after Hamlet’s interview with the Ghost has been charged with an improbable eccentricity. But the truth is, that after the mind has been stretched beyond its usual pitch and tone, it must either sink into exhaustion and inanity, or seek relief by change. It is thus well known, that persons conversant in deeds of cruelty contrive to escape from conscience by connecting something of the ludicrous with them, and by inventing grotesque terms and a certain technical phraseology to disguise the horror of their practices. Indeed, paradoxical as it may appear, the terrible by a law of the human mind always touches on the verge of the ludicrous. Both arise from the perception of something out of the common order of things—something, in fact, out of its place; and if from this we can abstract danger, the uncommonness will alone remain, and the sense of the ridiculous be excited. The close alliance of these opposites—they are not contraries—appears from the circumstance, that laughter is equally the expression of extreme anguish and horror as of joy: as there are tears of sorrow and tears of joy, so is there a laugh of terror and a laugh of merriment. These complex causes will naturally have produced in Hamlet the disposition to escape from his own feelings of the overwhelming and supernatural by a wild transition to the ludicrous, —a sort of cunning bravado, bordering on the flights of delirium. For you may, perhaps, observe that Hamlet’s wildness is but half false; he plays that subtle trick of pretending to act only when he is very near really being what he acts.

The subterraneous speeches of the Ghost are hardly defensible:—but I would call your attention to the characteristic difference between this Ghost, as a superstition
connected with the most mysterious truths of revealed religion,—and Shakspeare’s consequent reverence in his treatment of it,—and the foul earthly witcheries and wild language in Macbeth.

Act ii. sc. 1. Polonius and Reynaldo.

In all things dependent on, or rather made up of, fine address, the manner is no more or otherwise rememberable than the light motions, steps, and gestures of youth and health. But this is almost everything:—no wonder, therefore if that which can be put down by rule in the memory should appear to us as mere poring, maudlin, cunning,—slyness blinking through the watery eye of superannuation. So in this admirable scene, Polonius, who is throughout the skeleton of his own former skill and statecraft, hunts the trail of policy at a dead scent, supplied by the weak fever-smell in his own nostrils.

Ib. sc. 2. Speech of Polonius:—

My liege, and madam, to expostulate, &c.

Warburton’s note.

Then as to the jingles, and play on words, let us but look into the sermons of Dr. Donne (the wittiest man of that age) and we shall find them full of this vein.

I have, and that most carefully, read Dr. Donne’s sermons, and find none of these jingles. The great art of an orator—to make whatever he talks of appear of importance—this, indeed, Donne has effected with consummate skill.

Ib.

*Ham.* Excellent well;
You are a fishmonger.

That is, you are sent to fish out this secret. This is Hamlet’s own meaning.

Ib.

*Ham.* For if the sun breeds maggots in a dead dog,
Being a god, kissing carrion—

These purposely obscure lines, I rather think, refer to some thought in Hamlet’s mind, contrasting the lovely daughter with such a tedious old fool, her father, as he, Hamlet, represents Polonius to himself:—‘Why, fool as he is, he is some degrees in rank above a dead dog’s carcase; and if the sun, being a god that kisses carrion, can raise life out
of a dead dog,—why may not good fortune, that favours fools, have raised a lovely girl out of this dead-alive old fool? Warburton is often led astray, in his interpretations, by his attention to general positions without the due Shaksporean reference to what is probably passing in the mind of his speaker, characteristic, and expository of his particular character and present mood. The subsequent passage,—

O Jephtha, judge of Israel! what a treasure hadst thou!

is confirmatory of my view of these lines.
Ib.

Ham. You cannot, Sir, take from me any thing that I will more willingly part withal; except my life, except my life, except my life.

This repetition strikes me as most admirable.
Ib.

Ham. Then are our beggars, bodies; and our monarchs, and out-stretched heroes, the beggars' shadows.

I do not understand this; and Shakspere seems to have intended the meaning not to be more than snatched at:—'By my fay, I cannot reason!'
Ib.

The rugged Pyrrhus—he whose sable arms, &c.

This admirable substitution of the epic for the dramatic, giving such a reality to the impassioned dramatic diction of Shakspere's own dialogue, and authorized too, by the actual style of the tragedies before his time (Porrex and Ferrex, Titus Andronicus, &c.)—is well worthy of notice. The fancy, that a burlesque was intended, sinks below criticism: the lines, as epic narrative, are superb.

In the thoughts, and even in the separate parts of the diction, this description is highly poetical: in truth, taken by itself, that is its fault that it is too poetical!—the language of lyric vehemence and epic pomp, and not of the drama. But if Shakspere had made the diction truly dramatic, where would have been the contrast between Hamlet and the play in Hamlet?
Ib.

— had seen the mobled queen, &c.

A mob-cap is still a word in common use for a morning
Notes on Hamlet

cap, which conceals the whole head of hair, and passes under the chin. It is nearly the same as the night-cap, that is, it is an imitation of it, so as to answer the purpose ("I am not drest for company"), and yet reconciling it with neatness and perfect purity.

Ib. Hamlet's soliloquy:

O, what a rogue and peasant slave am I! &c.

This is Shakspeare's own attestation to the truth of the idea of Hamlet which I have before put forth.

Ib.

The spirit that I have seen,
May be a devil: and the devil hath power
To assume a pleasing shape; yea, and, perhaps
Out of my weakness, and my melancholy,
(As he is very potent with such spirits)
Abuses me to damn me.

See Sir Thomas Brown:

I believe——that those apparitions and ghosts of departed persons are not the wandering souls of men, but the unquiet walks of devils, prompting and suggesting us unto mischief, blood and villany, instilling and stealing into our hearts, that the blessed spirits are not at rest in their graves, but wander solicitous of the affairs of the world. Relig. Med. Pt. I. Sect. 37.

Act iii. sc. 1. Hamlet's soliloquy:

To be, or not to be, that is the question, &c.

This speech is of absolutely universal interest,—and yet to which of all Shakspeare's characters could it have been appropriately given but Hamlet? For Jaques it would have been too deep, and for Iago too habitual a communion with the heart; which in every man belongs, or ought to belong, to all mankind.

Ib.

The undiscover'd country, from whose bourne
No traveller returns.—

Theobald's note in defence of the supposed contradiction of this in the apparition of the Ghost.

O miserable defender! If it be necessary to remove the apparent contradiction,—if it be not rather a great beauty,—surely, it were easy to say, that no traveller returns to this world, as to his home, or abiding-place.
Notes on Hamlet

Ib.

_Ham._ Ha, ha! are you honest?
_Oph._ My lord?
_Ham._ Are you fair?

Here it is evident that the penetrating Hamlet perceives, from the strange and forced manner of Ophelia, that the sweet girl was not acting a part of her own, but was a decoy; and his after speeches are not so much directed to her as to the listeners and spies. Such a discovery in a mood so anxious and irritable accounts for a certain harshness in him;—and yet a wild up-working of love, sporting with opposites in a wilful self-tormenting strain of irony, is perceptible throughout. 'I did love you once:'—'I lov'd you not:'—and particularly in his enumeration of the faults of the sex from which Ophelia is so free, that the mere freedom therefrom constitutes her character. Note Shakspeare's charm of composing the female character by the absence of characters, that is, marks and out-juttings.

Ib. Hamlet's speech:

_I say, we will have no more marriages: those that are married already, all but one, shall live: the rest shall keep as they are._

Observe this dallying with the inward purpose, characteristic of one who had not brought his mind to the steady acting point. He would fain sting the uncle's mind;—but to stab his body!—The soliloquy of Ophelia, which follows, is the perfection of love—so exquisitely unselfish!

Ib. sc. 2. This dialogue of Hamlet with the players is one of the happiest instances of Shakspeare's power of diversifying the scene while he is carrying on the plot.

Ib.

_Ham._ My lord, you play'd once i' the university, you say? (To Polonius.)

To have kept Hamlet's love for Ophelia before the audience in any direct form, would have made a breach in the unity of the interest;—but yet to the thoughtful reader it is suggested by his spite to poor Polonius, whom he cannot let rest.

Ib. The style of the interlude here is distinguished from the real dialogue by rhyme, as in the first interview with the players by epic verse.
Notes on Hamlet

Ib.

Ros. My lord, you once did love me.
Ham. So I do still, by these pickers and stealers.

I never heard an actor give this word 'so' its proper emphasis. Shakspeare's meaning is—'lov'd you? Hum!—so I do still, &c.' There has been no change in my opinion:—I think as ill of you as I did. Else Hamlet tells an ignoble falsehood, and a useless one, as the last speech to Guildenstern—'Why, look you now,' &c.—proves.

Ib. Hamlet's soliloquy:—

Now could I drink hot blood,
And do such bitter business as the day
Would quake to look on.

The utmost at which Hamlet arrives, is a disposition, a mood, to do something:—but what to do, is still left undecided, while every word he utters tends to betray his disguise. Yet observe how perfectly equal to any call of the moment is Hamlet, let it only not be for the future.

Ib. sc. 4. Speech of Polonius. Polonius's volunteer obtrusion of himself into this business, while it is appropriate to his character, still itching after former importance, removes all likelihood that Hamlet should suspect his presence, and prevents us from making his death injure Hamlet in our opinion.

Ib. The king's speech:—

O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven, &c.

This speech well marks the difference between crime and guilt of habit. The conscience here is still admitted to audience. Nay, even as an audible soliloquy, it is far less improbable than is supposed by such as have watched men only in the beaten road of their feelings. But the final—'all may be well!' is remarkable;—the degree of merit attributed by the self-flattering soul to its own struggle, though baffled, and to the indefinite half-promise, half-command, to persevere in religious duties. The solution is in the divine medium of the Christian doctrine of expiation:—not what you have done, but what you are, must determine.
Notes on Hamlet

Ib. Hamlet’s speech:

Now might I do it, pat, now he is praying:
And now I’ll do it:—And so he goes to heaven:
And so am I revenged? That would be scann’d, &c.

Dr. Johnson’s mistaking of the marks of reluctance and procrastination for impetuous, horror-striking, fiendishness! — Of such importance is it to understand the germ of a character. But the interval taken by Hamlet’s speech is truly awful! And then—

My words fly up, my thoughts remain below:
Words, without thoughts, never to heaven go,—

O what a lesson concerning the essential difference between wishing and willing, and the folly of all motive-mongering, while the individual self remains!

Ib. sc. 4.

_Ham._ A bloody deed;—almost as bad, good mother,
As kill a king, and marry with his brother.
_Queen._ As kill a king?

I confess that Shakspeare has left the character of the Queen in an unpleasant perplexity. Was she, or was she not, conscious of the fratricide?

Act iv. sc. 2.

_Ros._ Take you me for a sponge, my lord?
_Ham._ Ay, Sir; that soaks up the King’s countenance, his rewards, his authorities, &c.

Hamlet’s madness is made to consist in the free utterance of all the thoughts that had passed through his mind before; — in fact, in telling home-truths.

Act iv. sc. 5. Ophelia’s singing. O, note the conjunction here of these two thoughts that had never subsisted in disjunction, the love for Hamlet, and her filial love, with the guileless floating on the surface of her pure imagination of the cautions so lately expressed, and the fears not too delicately avowed, by her father and brother, concerning the dangers to which her honour lay exposed. Thought, affliction, passion, murder itself—she turns to favour and prettiness. This play of association is instanced in the close:—

My brother shall know of it, and so I thank you for your good counsel.
Notes on Hamlet

Ib. Gentleman’s speech:—

And as the world were now but to begin
Antiquity forgot, custom not known,
The ratified and props of every word—
They cry, &c.

Fearful and self-suspicious as I always feel, when I seem to see an error of judgment in Shakspeare, yet I cannot reconcile the cool, and, as Warburton calls it, ‘rational and consequential,’ reflection in these lines with the anonymousness, or the alarm, of this Gentleman or Messenger, as he is called in other editions.

Ib. King’s speech:—

There’s such divinity doth hedge a king,
That treason can but peep to what it would,
Acts little of his will.

Proof, as indeed all else is, that Shakspeare never intended us to see the King with Hamlet’s eyes; though, I suspect, the managers have long done so.

Ib. Speech of Laertes:—

To hell, allegiance! vows, to the blackest devil!
Laertes is a good character, but, &c. Warburton.

Mercy on Warburton’s notion of goodness! Please to refer to the seventh scene of this act;—

I will do it;
And for that purpose I’ll anoint my sword, &c.

uttered by Laertes after the King’s description of Hamlet;—

He being remiss,
Most generous, and free from all contriving,
Will not peruse the foils.

Yet I acknowledge that Shakspeare evidently wishes, as much as possible, to spare the character of Laertes,—to break the extreme turpitude of his consent to become an agent and accomplice of the King’s treachery;—and to this end he re-introduces Ophelia at the close of this scene to afford a probable stimulus of passion in her brother.

Ib. sc. 6. Hamlet’s capture by the pirates. This is almost the only play of Shakspeare, in which mere accidents, independent of all will, form an essential part of the plot; —but here how judiciously in keeping with the character
Notes on Hamlet

of the over-meditative Hamlet, ever at last determined by accident or by a fit of passion!

Ib. sc. 7. Note how the King first awakens Laertes's vanity by praising the reporter, and then gratifies it by the report itself, and finally points it by—

Sir, this report of his
Did Hamlet so envenom with his envy!—

Ib. King's speech:

For goodness, growing to a pleurisy,
Dies in his own too much.

Theobald's note from Warburton, who conjectures 'plethora.'

I rather think that Shakspeare meant 'pleurisy,' but involved in it the thought of plethora, as supposing pleurisy to arise from too much blood; otherwise I cannot explain the following line—

And then this should is like a spendthrift sigh,
That hurts by easing.

In a stitch in the side every one must have heaved a sigh that 'hurt by easing.'

Since writing the above I feel confirmed that 'pleurisy' is the right word; for I find that in the old medical dictionaries the pleurisy is often called the 'plethora.'

Ib.

Queen. Your sister's drown'd, Laertes.
Laer. Drown'd! O, where?

That Laertes might be excused in some degree for not cooling, the Act concludes with the affecting death of Ophelia,—who in the beginning lay like a little projection of land into a lake or stream, covered with spray-flowers, quietly reflected in the quiet waters, but at length is undermined or loosened, and becomes a faery isle, and after a brief vagrancy sinks almost without an eddy!

Act v. sc. 1. O, the rich contrast between the Clowns and Hamlet, as two extremes! You see in the former the mockery of logic, and a traditional wit valued, like truth, for its antiquity, and treasured up, like a tune, for use.

Ib. sc. 1 and 2. Shakspeare seems to mean all Hamlet's character to be brought together before his final disappearance from the scene;—his meditative excess in the
Notes on Macbeth

grave-digging, his yielding to passion with Laertes, his love for Ophelia blazing out, his tendency to generalize on all occasions in the dialogue with Horatio, his fine gentlemanly manners with Osrick, and his and Shakespeare's own fondness for presentiment:

But thou would'st not think, how ill all's here about my heart: but it is no matter.

NOTES ON MACBETH.

MACBETH stands in contrast throughout with Hamlet; in the manner of opening more especially. In the latter, there is a gradual ascent from the simplest forms of conversation to the language of impassioned intellect,—yet the intellect still remaining the seat of passion: in the former, the invocation is at once made to the imagination and the emotions connected therewith. Hence the movement throughout is the most rapid of all Shakspeare’s plays; and hence also, with the exception of the disgusting passage of the Porter (Act ii. sc. 3), which I dare pledge myself to demonstrate to be an interpolation of the actors, there is not, to the best of my remembrance, a single pun or play on words in the whole drama. I have previously given an answer to the thousand times repeated charge against Shakspeare upon the subject of his punning, and I here merely mention the fact of the absence of any puns in Macbeth, as justifying a candid doubt at least, whether even in these figures of speech and fanciful modifications of language, Shakspeare may not have followed rules and principles that merit and would stand the test of philosophic examination. And hence, also, there is an entire absence of comedy, nay, even of irony and philosophic contemplation in Macbeth,—the play being wholly and purely tragic. For the same cause, there are no reasonings of equivocal morality, which would have required a more leisurely state and a consequently greater activity of mind;—no sophistry of self-delusion,—except only that previously to the dreadful act, Macbeth mistranslates the recoilings and ominous whispers of conscience into prudent and selfish reasonings, and, after the deed done, the terrors of remorse into fear from external dangers,—
like delirious men who run away from the phantoms of their own brains, or, raised by terror to rage, stab the real object that is within their reach:—whilst Lady Macbeth merely endeavours to reconcile his and her own sinkings of heart by anticipations of the worst, and an affected bravado in confronting them. In all the rest, Macbeth’s language is the grave utterance of the very heart, conscience-sick, even to the last faintings of moral death: It is the same in all the other characters. The variety arises from rage, caused ever and anon by disruption of anxious thought, and the quick transition of fear into it.

In Hamlet and Macbeth the scene opens with superstition; but, in each it is not merely different, but opposite. In the first it is connected with the best and holiest feelings; in the second with the shadowy, turbulent, and unsanctified cravings of the individual will. Nor is the purpose the same; in the one the object is to excite, whilst in the other it is to mark a mind already excited. Superstition, of one sort or another, is natural to victorious generals; the instances are too notorious to need mentioning. There is so much of chance in warfare, and such vast events are connected with the acts of a single individual,—the representative, in truth, of the efforts of myriads, and yet to the public and, doubtless, to his own feelings, the aggregate of all,—that the proper temperament for generating or receiving superstitious impressions is naturally produced. Hope, the master element of a commanding genius, meeting with an active and combining intellect, and an imagination of just that degree of vividness which disquiets and impels the soul to try to realize its images, greatly increases the creative power of the mind; and hence the images become a satisfying world of themselves, as is the case in every poet and original philosopher:—but hope fully gratified, and yet, the elementary basis of the passion remaining, becomes fear; and, indeed, the general, who must often feel, even though he may hide it from his own consciousness, how large a share chance had in his successes, may very naturally be irresolute in a new scene, where he knows that all will depend on his own act and election.

The Weird Sisters are as true a creation of Shakspeare’s, as his Ariel and Caliban,—fates, furies, and materializing witches being the elements. They are wholly different
Notes on Macbeth

from any representation of witches in the contemporary writers, and yet presented a sufficient external resemblance to the creatures of vulgar prejudice to act immediately on the audience. Their character consists in the imaginative disconnected from the good; they are the shadowy obscure and fearfully anomalous of physical nature, the lawless of human nature,—elemental avengers without sex or kin:

Fair is foul, and foul is fair;
Hover thro' the fog and filthy air.

How much it were to be wished in playing Macbeth, that an attempt should be made to introduce the flexible character-mask of the ancient pantomime;—that Flaxman would contribute his genius to the embodying and making sensuously perceptible that of Shakspeare!

The style and rhythm of the Captain’s speeches in the second scene should be illustrated by reference to the interlude in Hamlet, in which the epic is substituted for the tragic, in order to make the latter be felt as the real-life diction. In Macbeth, the poet’s object was to raise the mind at once to the high tragic tone, that the audience might be ready for the precipitate consummation of guilt in the early part of the play. The true reason for the first appearance of the Witches is to strike the key-note of the character of the whole drama, as is proved by their reappearance in the third scene, after such an order of the king’s as establishes their supernatural power of information. I say information,—for so it only is as to Glamis and Cawdor; the ‘king hereafter’ was still contingent,—still in Macbeth’s moral will; although, if he should yield to the temptation, and thus forfeit his free agency, the link of cause and effect more physico would then commence. I need not say, that the general idea is all that can be required from the poet,—not a scholastic logical consistency in all the parts so as to meet metaphysical objectors. But O! how truly Shakspearian is the opening of Macbeth’s character given in the unpossessedness of Banquo’s mind, wholly present to the present object,—an unsullied, unscarified mirror!—And how strictly true to nature it is, that Banquo, and not Macbeth himself, directs our notice to the effect produced on Macbeth’s mind, rendered temptible by previous dalliance of the fancy with ambitious thoughts:
Notes on Macbeth

Good Sir, why do you start; and seem to fear
Things that do sound so fair?

And then, again, still unintroitive, addresses the Witches:—

I' the name of truth,
Are ye fantastical, or that indeed
Which outwardly ye show?

Banquo's questions are those of natural curiosity,—such as a girl would put after hearing a gipsy tell her school-fellow's fortune;—all perfectly general, or rather planless. But Macbeth, lost in thought, raises himself to speech only by the Witches being about to depart:—

Stay, you imperfect speakers, tell me more:—

and all that follows is reasoning on a problem already discussed in his mind,—on a hope which he welcomes, and the doubts concerning the attainment of which he wishes to have cleared up. Compare his eagerness,—the keen eye with which he has pursued the Witches' vanishing—

Speak, I charge you!

with the easily satisfied mind of the self-uninterested Banquo:—

The earth hath bubbles, as the water has,
And these are of them:—Whither are they vanished?

and then Macbeth's earnest reply,—

Into the air; and what seem'd corporal, melted
As breath into the wind.—'Would they had stand!

Is it too minute to notice the appropriateness of the simile 'as breath,' &c., in a cold climate?

Still again Banquo goes on wondering like any common spectator:

Were such things here as we do speak about?

whilst Macbeth persists in recurring to the self-concerning:—

Your children shall be kings,
Ban. You shall be king.
Macb. And thane of Cawdor too: went it not so?

So surely is the guilt in its germ anterior to the supposed cause, and immediate temptation! Before he can cool,
Notes on Macbeth

the confirmation of the tempting half of the prophecy arrives, and the concatenating tendency of the imagination is fostered by the sudden coincidence:—

Glamis, and thane of Cawdor:
The greatest is behind.

Oppose this to Banquo's simple surprise:—

What, can the devil speak true?

Ib. Banquo's speech:—

That, trusted home,
Might yet enkindle you unto the crown,
Besides the thane of Cawdor.

I doubt whether 'enkindle' has not another sense than that of 'stimulating;' I mean of 'kind' and 'kin,' as when rabbits are said to 'kindle.' However Macbeth no longer hears any thing ab extra:—

Two truths are told,
As happy prologues to the swelling act
Of the imperial theme.

Then in the necessity of recollecting himself—

1 thank you, gentlemen.

Then he relapses into himself again, and every word of his soliloquy shows the early birth-date of his guilt. He is all-powerful without strength; he wishes the end, but is irresolute as to the means; conscience distinctly warns him, and he lulls it imperfectly:—

If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me
Without my stir.

Lost in the prospective of his guilt, he turns round alarmed lest others may suspect what is passing in his own mind, and instantly vents the lie of ambition:

My dull brain was wrought
With things forgotten;—

And immediately after pours forth the promising courtesies of a usurper in intention:—

Kind gentlemen, your pains
Are register'd where every day I turn
The leaf to read them.
Notes on Macbeth

Ib. Macbeth's speech:

Present fears
Are less than horrible imaginings.

Warburton's note, and substitution of 'feats' for 'fears.'
Mercy on this most wilful ingenuity of blundering,
which, nevertheless, was the very Warburton of Warburton
—his inmost being! 'Fears,' here, are present fear-
striking objects, terribilia adstantia.
Ib. sc. 4. O! the affecting beauty of the death of
Cawdor, and the presentimental speech of the king:

There's no art
To find the mind's construction in the face:
He was a gentleman on whom I built
An absolute trust—

Interrupted by—

O worthiest cousin!

on the entrance of the deeper traitor for whom Cawdor
had made way! And here in contrast with Duncan's
'plenteous joys,' Macbeth has nothing but the common-
places of loyalty, in which he hides himself with 'our
duties.' Note the exceeding effort of Macbeth's addresses
to the king, his reasoning on his allegiance, and then
especially when a new difficulty, the designation of a
successor, suggests a new crime. This, however, seems
the first distinct notion, as to the plan of realizing his
wishes; and here, therefore, with great propriety,
Macbeth's cowardice of his own conscience discloses
itself. I always think there is something especially Shaks-
pearian in Duncan's speeches throughout this scene, such
pourings forth, such abandonments, compared with the
language of vulgar dramatists, whose characters seem to
have made their speeches as the actors learn them.
Ib. Duncan's speech:

Sons, kinsmen, thanes,
And you whose places are the nearest, know,
We will establish our estate upon
Our eldest Malcolm, whom we name hereafter
The Prince of Cumberland: which honour must
Not unaccompanied, invest him only;
But signs of nobleness, like stars, shall shine
On all deservers.

It is a fancy;—but I can never read this and the follow-
Notes on Macbeth

The speeches of Macbeth, without involuntarily thinking of the Miltonic Messiah and Satan.

Ib. sc. 5. Macbeth is described by Lady Macbeth so as at the same time to reveal her own character. Could he have every thing he wanted, he would rather have it innocently;—ignorant, as alas! how many of us are, that he who wishes a temporal end for itself, does in truth will the means; and hence the danger of indulging fancies. Lady Macbeth, like all in Shakspcare, is a class individualized:—of high rank, left much alone, and feeding herself with day-dreams of ambition, she mistakes the courage of fantasy for the power of bearing the consequences of the realities of guilt. Hers is the mock fortitude of a mind deluded by ambition; she shames her husband with a superhuman audacity of fancy which she cannot support, but sinks in the season of remorse, and dies in suicidal agony. Her speech:

Come, all you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here, &c.

is that of one who had habitually familiarized her imagination to dreadful conceptions, and was trying to do so still more. Her invocations and requisitions are all the false efforts of a mind accustomed only hitherto to the shadows of the imagination, vivid enough to throw the every-day substances of life into shadow, but never as yet brought into direct contact with their own correspondent realities. She evinces no womanly life, no wisely joy, at the return of her husband, no pleased terror at the thought of his past dangers, whilst Macbeth bursts forth naturally—

My dearest love—

and shrinks from the boldness with which she presents his own thoughts to him. With consummate art she at first uses as incentives the very circumstances, Duncan’s coming to their house, &c. which Macbeth’s conscience would most probably have adduced to her as motives of abhorrence or repulsion. Yet Macbeth is not prepared:

We will speak further.

Ib. sc. 6. The lyrical movement with which this scene opens, and the free and unengaged mind of Banquo, loving nature, and rewarded in the love itself, form a highly
dramatic contrast with the laboured rhythm and hypocritical over-much of Lady Macbeth's welcome, in which you cannot detect a ray of personal feeling, but all is thrown upon the 'dignities,' the general duty.

Ib. sc. 7. Macbeth's speech:

We will proceed no further in this business:
He hath honor'd me of late; and I have bought
Golden opinions from all sorts of people,
Which would be worn now in their newest gloss,
Not cast aside so soon.

Note the inward pangs and warnings of conscience interpreted into prudential reasonings.

Act ii. sc. i. Banquo's speech:

A heavy summons lies like lead upon me,
And yet I would not sleep. Merciful powers!
Restrain in me the cursed thoughts, that nature
Gives way to in repose.

The disturbance of an innocent soul by painful suspicions of another's guilty intentions and wishes, and fear of the cursed thoughts of sensual nature.

Ib. sc. 2. Now that the deed is done or doing—now that the first reality commences, Lady Macbeth shrinks. The most simple sound strikes terror, the most natural consequences are horrible, whilst previously every thing, however awful, appeared a mere trifle; conscience, which before had been hidden to Macbeth in selfish and prudential fears, now rushes in upon him in her own veritable person:

Methought I heard a voice cry—Sleep no more!
I could not say Amen,
When they did say, God bless us!

And see the novelty given to the most familiar images by a new state of feeling.

Ib. sc. 3. This low soliloquy of the Porter and his few speeches afterwards, I believe to have been written for the mob by some other hand, perhaps with Shakspeare's consent; and that finding it take, he with the remaining ink of a pen otherwise employed, just interpolated the words—

I'll devil-porter it no further: I had thought to have let in some of all professions, that go the primrose way to th' everlasting bonfire.
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Of the rest not one syllable has the ever-present being of Shakspeare.

Act iii. sc. 1. Compare Macbeth's mode of working on the murderers in this place with Schiller's mistaken scene between Butler, Devereux, and Macdonald in Wallenstein. (Part II. act iv. sc. 2.) The comic was wholly out of season. Shakspeare never introduces it, but when it may react on the tragedy by harmonious contrast.
Ib. sc. 2. Macbeth's speech:

But let the frame of things disjoint, both the worlds suffer,
Ere we will eat our meal in fear, and sleep
In the affliction of these terrible dreams
That shake us nightly.

Ever and ever mistaking the anguish of conscience for fears of selfishness, and thus as a punishment of that selfishness, plunging still deeper in guilt and ruin.
Ib.  Macbeth's speech:

Be innocent of the knowledge, dearest chuck,
Till thou applaud the deed.

This is Macbeth's sympathy with his own feelings, and his mistaking his wife's opposite state.
Ib. sc. 4.

Macb. It will have blood, they say; blood will have blood:
Stones have been known to move, and trees to speak;
Augurs, and understood relations, have
By magot-pies, and coughs, and rooks, brought forth
The secret'st man of blood.

The deed is done; but Macbeth receives no comfort, no additional security. He has by guilt torn himself live-asunder from nature, and is, therefore, himself in a preternatural state: no wonder, then, that he is inclined to superstition, and faith in the unknown of signs and tokens, and super-human agencies.

Act iv. sc. 1.

Len. 'Tis two or three, my lord, that bring you word,
Macduff is fled to England.

Macb. Fled to England?

The acme of the avenging conscience.

Ib. sc. 2. This scene, dreadful as it is, is still a relief, because a variety, because domestic, and therefore soothing, as associated with the only real pleasures of life. The
conversation between Lady Macduff and her child heightens the pathos, and is preparatory for the deep tragedy of their assassination. Shakspeare's fondness for children is everywhere shown;—in Prince Arthur, in King John; in the sweet scene in the Winter's Tale between Hermione and her son; nay, even in honest Evans's examination of Mrs. Page's schoolboy. To the objection that Shakspeare wounds the moral sense by the unsubdued, undisguised description of the most hateful atrocity—that he tears the feelings without mercy, and even outrages the eye itself with scenes of insupportable horror—I, omitting Titus Andronicus, as not genuine, and excepting the scene of Gloster's blinding in Lear, answer boldly in the name of Shakspeare, not guilty.

Ib. sc. 3. Malcolin's speech:

Better Macbeth,

Than such a one to reign.

The moral is—the dreadful effects even on the best minds of the soul-sickening sense of insecurity.

Ib. How admirably Macduff's grief is in harmony with the whole play! It rends, not dissolves, the heart. 'The tune of it goes manly.' Thus is Shakspeare always master of himself and of his subject,—a genuine Proteus:—we see all things in him, as images in a calm lake, most distinct, most accurate,—only more splendid, more glorified. This is correctness in the only philosophical sense. But he requires your sympathy and your submission; you must have that recipiency of moral impression without which the purposes and ends of the drama would be frustrated, and the absence of which demonstrates an utter want of all imagination, a deadness to that necessary pleasure of being innocently—shall I say, deluded?—or rather, drawn away from ourselves to the music of noblest thought in harmonious sounds. Happy he, who not only in the public theatre, but in the labours of a profession, and round the light of his own hearth, still carries a heart so pleasure-fraught!

Alas for Macbeth! now all is inward with him; he has no more prudential prospective reasonings. His wife, the only being who could have had any seat in his affections, dies; he puts on despondency, the final heart-armour of the wretched, and would fain think every thing shadowy
and unsubstantial, as indeed all things are to those who cannot regard them as symbols of goodness:—

Out out, brief candle!
Life’s but a walking shadow; a poor player,
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more; it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

NOTES ON THE WINTER’S TALE.

Although, on the whole, this play is exquisitely respondent to its title, and even in the fault I am about to mention, still a winter’s tale; yet it seems a mere indolence of the great bard not to have provided in the oracular response (Act ii. sc. 2) some ground for Hermione’s seeming death and fifteen years voluntary concealment. This might have been easily effected by some obscure sentence of the oracle, as for example:—

‘Nor shall he ever recover an heir, if he have a wife before that recovery.’

The idea of this delightful drama is a genuine jealousy of disposition, and it should be immediately followed by the perusal of Othello, which is the direct contrast of it in every particular. For jealousy is a vice of the mind, a culpable tendency of the temper, having certain well known and well defined effects and concomitants, all of which are visible in Leontes, and, I boldly say, not one of which marks its presence in Othello;—such as, first, an excitability by the most inadequate causes, and an eagerness to snatch at proofs; secondly, a grossness of conception, and a disposition to degrade the object of the passion by sensual fancies and images; thirdly, a sense of shame of his own feelings exhibited in a solitary moodiness of humour, and yet from the violence of the passion forced utter itself, and therefore catching occasions to ease mind by ambiguities, equivoces, by talking to those cannot, and who are known not to be able to understand what is said to them,—in short, by soliloquy in the fragmentary manner; fourthly, a dread of vulgar ridicule,