Chronology of Shakespeare's Works. 81 delighted in moral worth in uncouth, nay, in coarse, forms. We meet characters of a more refined, more ideal type in "The Merchant of Venice," whose central figure is the high-spirited Portia, with the sinister but imposing figure of Shylock as a contrast. But the thought which runs through the first two works—that it is not outward show and appearance, but genuine worth, that tells—is here again dwelt upon with great emphasis, and strikingly symbolized.

And that this thought continues to occupy the poet's mind is evidenced by his next great work, that stupendous series of historical dramas which begins with "Richard II." and ends with "Henry V."—a work unmatched in its kind in any other literature—with its prodigious wealth of creations (I shall remind you only of the figure of Sir John Falstaff) and its wonderful political wisdom. We see the poet concerned not only with the past, but with the future of his country,
and while he describes the characters and fortunes of three of the English kings with historical impartiality and the keen-sighted vision of a prophet, he pictures the youngest of them, Henry of Monmouth (afterward Henry V.), as the ideal of sturdy manhood on the throne, a type of the simple, thoroughly human, God-fearing, heroic German king of the people. "Man should act, earn his reward." Shakespeare felt this need, too, especially now when he was rapidly approaching the meridian of life. In what does a man's worth consist? What are the practical ideals toward which he should strive? These are the questions Shakespeare put, and answered in his own way. It is nothing that his hero is a king and he himself a poet and actor. The attribute of real manhood they both possess in common. And what it is that constitutes true greatness, true honour, the poet shows us in his favourite character among kings.
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From the serious, exhausting labour of his historical dramas Shakespeare, as if in need of recreation, now turned again to comedy. First he gave the great series a mirthful afterpiece in "The Merry Wives of Windsor," and then he wrote those three immortal plays in which his humour and his powers of comic creation are at their highest, those delicate flowers of his fancy, "Much Ado about Nothing," "As You Like It," and "Twelfth Night; or, What You Will." They transport us to an Arcadian world, amid charmingly romantic surroundings, and among a people who live,—it being virtually their only concern,—a life of the emotions.

These three comedies bring us chronologically to the threshold of a new century. With the year 1601 begins a new period in Shakespeare's development, a glaring contrast to the one preceding it. It is as if one stepped from a radiant, sunlit landscape into a bleak mountain
region with its topmost summits shrouded in mist. How can we account for this complete change in Shakespeare's mood? The history of the time and the occurrence of certain events give us the explanation. At the beginning of the year 1601 London was agitated by the conspiracy and rebellion of the Earl of Essex. What relations existed between Shakespeare and the brilliant and once so powerful favourite of the queen, is, indeed, not quite clearly established. Everything points to the fact, however, that Essex took a very deep interest in the poet's works, and that the poet followed the eventful career of the earl with warm and eager sympathy. It is, of course, well known that Essex and many of his followers expiated their desperate deed upon the scaffold, and that the Earl of Southampton, Shakespeare's friend, although his life was spared, remained in prison until the end of Elizabeth's reign. The grave feelings aroused in Shakes-
peare by these events caused him to turn his attention once more to affairs of state. The ancient world with its sublime figures, made familiar to him through Plutarch (in Sir Thomas North’s translation), now recurred vividly to his fancy, and as before he alluded in “The Merchant of Venice” to the “ancient Roman honour,” and to “Cato’s daughter, Brutus’ Portia,” so now he brings this Roman Portia herself upon the scene, and in her husband pictures one of the noblest representatives of Roman honour, drawn by a tragic destiny into a fatal conspiracy. The tragedy of “Julius Cæsar” forms the opening of the third period and of the series of Roman plays, which the editors of the Folio class among the tragedies, rightly distinguishing them from the historical dramas of the English kings. From a more critical standpoint they occupy an intermediate position between the two classes of plays, particularly “Julius Cæsar,” which, therefore,
appropriately marks the close of the preceding and the opening of the third period.

Immediately after "Julius Cæsar" followed a tragedy which also in its way marks the beginning of a new epoch, although it is closely connected in many respects with the dramas just spoken of. I mean "Hamlet." "Hamlet" marks the moment when Shakespeare had reached the fullest maturity and mastery in his own most special domain, the domain of tragedy. It stands deservedly at the head of the dramas known under the name of "the tragedies," those grandest creations of the tragic Muse in all literature. Each one has its own peculiar excellences, some points in which it surpasses the others. None of them can rival "Hamlet" in its truth to nature, and its wealth of psychological delineation. "Othello," which follows directly upon "Hamlet" (1604), surpasses all the others in the strength of its dramatic effects, culminat-
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ing in the third act, which is indeed, dramatically, the most thrilling act in all his writings. The succeeding tragedy, "Macbeth," stands alone by its grand simplicity of conception and the originality of its execution, giving us in a few bold strokes a consummate picture of the strange workings of a human soul. But it is in "King Lear" that the poet attains the summit of his tragic powers. We shall, later on, give more detailed attention to this play.

Higher than in "Lear" Shakespeare could not rise. Yet the plays which he next wrote show in no way a diminution of his poetic powers. There is nothing more amazing than Shakespeare's productivity at this period, the first eight years of the seventeenth century. Works of richest content and most consummate art follow each other, stroke upon stroke. But before we continue to consider them in their regular order we must retrace our steps, and at least mention two plays
which we have overlooked, two comedies, fraught with profound meaning—one, written not long before, the other, not long after, "Hamlet": "All's Well That Ends Well" and "Measure for Measure," in many respects closely related to each other. A woman is the central figure in both dramas; in "All's Well That Ends Well" the strong, high-minded Helena, who loves the unworthy Bertram, and, undaunted by his coldness and treacherous disloyalty, does not rest until she has conquered his affections, when, from the vantage ground of love, she may make him happy and a worthier man. In "Measure for Measure," which, by its sombre tone no less than by the weight of the problem it treats, oversteps the bounds of comedy and suggests tragedy, we have Isabella, a grave and impressive Portia, who preaches the duty of mercy as well as justice, and contrasts human and divine justice with sublime irony; who, to save her brother's life would gladly sacrifice her own, but
who values virtue more than life itself, more than the life of her brother.

In the tragedy which succeeds upon "Lear," in "Coriolanus," we meet with a new type of woman, though akin to the character of Isabella: the type of the Roman matron of the good old time, elevated by the practice of womanly and patriotic duties, rivalling, nay, surpassing, men in their sense of honour, as exemplified in the venerable figure, unbent by the weight of years, of Volumnia, the mother of Coriolanus. In Coriolanus himself the poet represents the lofty aristocrat, the proudly modest hero, glowing with fiery patriotism, who loves glory above all else; who, infuriated by the coarse vulgarity and the ingratitude of the populace, which rewards his services by banishing him from Rome, strikes at the very root of his life's ideal, and joins the enemies of his country. It is only his mother who succeeds in winning him back to the path of duty, where, as he has foreseen, he meets
an inglorious death. We have in this tragedy the same leading ideas as in “Macbeth” and “Lear”—ambition and the results of ingratitude, here blended together, and transferred to the field of history and politics. “Coriolanus” is likewise remarkable for its depth of political insight, its subtlety of psychological intuition, and the living power of its dramatic construction.

In “Antony and Cleopatra,” the third in the series of Roman dramas, we see, for the first time since “Romeo and Juliet,” a woman share on an equal footing with the principal character in the action of a Shakesperean tragedy. But what a contrast between Juliet and Cleopatra: one, a young girl, scarce more than a child, whom the might of a pure and unselfish passion transforms into a woman, whose whole being is absorbed by this love which consummates her character and her life; the other, a courtesan of genius, if I may say so, with experi-
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tence of life and the world, devoted to pleasure, practised in all the arts of seduction, endowed by nature with an alluring witchery, to whom the fire of her love for Antony alone lends a glimmer of womanly dignity. Artistically considered, Cleopatra is, perhaps, the masterpiece among Shakespeare's female characters; given the problem, Shakespeare has solved it as no one else could have done. But what conflicts must his soul have endured, what bitter experiences must he have passed through, to have set himself such a problem, to have created a woman so widely different from all those he had pictured before—a woman so devoid of the ideal womanly graces, yet so irresistible, for whose sake Antony sacrifices the dominion of the world.

The poet's mood grows ever more gloomy and bitter. Upon "Antony and Cleopatra" follows "Troilus and Cressida," neither tragedy nor comedy, but a sting-
ing satire. Here, too, the poet represents a courtesan, but one devoid of Cleopatra's demonic fascination—an ordinary coquette, a sensual, wanton, faithless woman, like so many of her kind. With merciless hand Shakespeare rends the rosy veil which Chaucer’s optimism had cast over this subject; and as Cressida is an ordinary courtesan, so is Troilus a melancholy, sensual, sentimental dreamer; Pandarus, simply the common pander.

And just as ruthlessly does he demolish the tradition nourished in the Middle Ages regarding the legend of Troy and its heroes, and dispel the glamour of chivalry with which the mediæval poets had invested them. Even the simple greatness of Homer, as revealed to him through Chapman’s translation, cannot convert him from his pessimism; on the contrary, the character of Thersites, which he takes from the Iliad, plays in his drama a very different part from that in the epic.
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In spite of the admirable characterization in "Troilus and Cressida," and in spite of the host of imperishable sayings marked by a wealth of practical wisdom, there is no other drama of Shakespeare which appeals to us so little, which creates so unsparing an impression.

But this bitterness of spirit had not yet reached its climax: it only culminates in the Titanic outbursts of fury of Timon, who, from being an unreasoning philanthropist, becomes a raging misanthrope—becomes transformed into a Lear, and, if I may so express it, into a systematic Lear, to whose eyes all nature seems to partake of the degenerateness of the human race, and who includes in his curse, upon which he rings so many changes with a grim delight, all created things.

In the course of the year 1608 a reaction takes place in the poet's mind. With diffidence we question his biography to see whether it can throw any light on the matter. The answer we
receive is of great significance. In December of the preceding year Shakespeare’s youngest brother, the actor, died. The death of this poor fellow, who had chosen a vocation whose reproach Shakespeare had grown to feel more and more intensely, and which he contemplated soon leaving himself, may have been one of the elements which roused him to the mood in which "Timon" was written. But already in the preceding June a joyous event had taken place in the poet’s family: his oldest daughter, Susanna, then twenty-four years of age, had been married to a physician of Stratford, who was held in high esteem and had a large practice. The first and only fruit of this union, Elizabeth Hall, Shakespeare’s granddaughter, was born in February, 1608. We can imagine how this event helped to mark an era in the poet’s inner life. There is nothing so well calculated to vanquish pessimism, to revive hope in the future and pleasure in life, as the
actual experience of seeing our own life renewed and rejuvenated in a new generation. Even the death of Shakespeare's mother, which occurred in September of the same year, painfully as it must have affected the poet, must under the circumstances have been easier to bear; it may have rendered him tender and brooding, but not harsh.

The dramatic production of this epoch is "Pericles," which, like "Timon," is only partially the work of our poet; but how different from "Timon"! Joyless, gloomy, at its inception, all here takes a favourable turn. Marina, born upon the sea, richly endowed by the gods, parted from her parents, after passing through varied fortunes, and escaping victorious from trying temptations, is by the grace of the gods and her own maidenly dignity reunited with her people. Thus does she restore to the world herself and her father, who, so long and so sorely tried, had been plunged in deepest melancholy. It is
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precisely this story of Marina that forms Shakespeare's part of the play.

Soon after writing "Pericles" Shakespeare left London and returned to Stratford. Perhaps he had the intention to bid farewell to poetry as well. If such was the case, he was soon to learn that an old love cannot be discarded. As affairs of business,—and perhaps not these alone,—still often led him to make short visits to London, so did the dramatic Muse more than once appear to him in his rural seclusion.

The three dramas which specially mark this Stratford period—"The Tempest," "Cymbeline," and "The Winter's Tale"—bear distinct traces of the time and place of their origin. They breathe the fresh scent of wood and meadow, and a reflection of the cheerful calm of rural life lies spread over them. Of the requirements of the stage these plays take less heed. Whether they should be classed rather under comedy or tragedy, it is difficult to say;
they are romantic dramas in which the action, earnest, almost tragic, yet culminates happily. Passion does not here reach the height it attained in the great tragedies; but in psychological truth, in poetical creative power, in profundity of thought, these plays are in no wise inferior. A development which is characteristic of the poet's whole career here reaches its climax: year by year we see the substance, as opposed to the form, assuming mightier proportions, decidedly subordinating the latter. Here it has come to a point where the substance almost threatens the destruction of form. Ideas crowd upon the poet so thick and fast that he no longer pauses to express each individual one clearly. Shakespeare's diction, which in the first period bears a strong lyric stamp, in the great historical plays a rhetorical colouring, and which in the great tragedies grows more and more terse and dramatic, assumes here a form so condensed, frequently frag-
mentary, with images and varied forms of expression crowding upon each other, that the meaning often becomes obscure and enigmatical. And in a like manner does his verse in these dramas of the last period assume the greatest degree of freedom; it has become an instrument which he treats with a royal arbitrariness, which he often shatters, but which still resounds with the irresistible torrent of his thoughts.

The spirit which animates these dramas is that wisdom which finds a joy in living, and accepts all things with cheerful resignation, with a quiet faith in the higher powers which guide the world, and an all-embracing and all-forgiving love. Joy, reconciliation, is the final accord in them all.

That which was done by anticipation, as one might say, in the three brilliant comedies of the second period appears here as the perfectly ripened fruit of a life rich in experience, like gold that emerges
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tried and proved from the fire after a long process of refinement. Here, too, are we transported to Arcadia, but never more to leave it. Thus we see some of the motives of the comedies of the last period reappear, but in variations of a richer, graver character. We are reminded of "As You Like It" in all three of the dramas, but notably in "The Tempest," where, in the exiled Prospero, living on the lonely island, we have the good duke of the forest of Arden in an idealized form. The Hero of "Much Ado about Nothing" rises in "A Winter's Tale" to the lofty figure of Hermione, and Imogen, in "Cymbeline," reminds us in many ways of Viola in "Twelfth Night." All these characters bear marks of having passed the tests of the tragic period; and we also have a return of personages and ideas that figured in the great tragedies. Prospero's mildness and wisdom shine out in bright contrast to Lear and Timon. Othello's jealousy reappears in Post-
humus and Leontes. And, to make the circle quite complete, the poet recurs to his first comedies. Everywhere the miraculous interposition of the higher powers, whether they reveal themselves through the voice of an oracle, or, as to the sleeping Posthumus, in "Cymbeline," appear in a visible shape. The grave passages in the "Comedy of Errors," that has so miraculously happy an ending, are symbolic of all these dramas. And "A Midsummer Night's Dream," too, is revived in "The Tempest," where the poet's fancy soars with still mightier flights into the regions of the spirit world, and produces, besides, in his Caliban, the most daring creation of his genius, a being hovering on the borderland between man and beast.

After "The Tempest," "Cymbeline," and "The Winter's Tale." Shakespeare seized his pen once more, to write in conjunction with the poet Fletcher the play of "Henry VIII.," and there to
delineate, above all, the majestic figure of Katharine.

These were the last utterances of his poetic genius. In this gentle, lofty spirit, this peaceful, tranquil mood, he bade farewell to art. And thus must he, a few years later have closed his life.
THIRD LECTURE

SHAKESPEARE AS DRAMATIST
SHAKESPEARE AS DRAMATIST.

Much as judgments may differ regarding Shakespeare, all critics may be said to agree in acknowledging him to be pre-eminent among dramatists, either of all times, or at least of modern ages as contrasted with classic antiquity. And to dispute this judgment would least of all befit Germans, whose own classic writers, and especially those distinguished for dramatic power, have evidently learned so much from Shakespeare; to whose stage, since it cannot subsist upon the novelties of the day alone, Shakespeare is more indispensable than any other poet.

If we want to see clearly at a glance what Shakespeare signifies to us as a dramatist, let us imagine the repertory of our stage without "Hamlet," "Macbeth,"
"Othello," "A Midsummer Night's Dream," "The Winter's Tale," "Julius Cæsar," "Coriolanus," "The Taming of the Shrew," "Twelfth Night," and whatever other Shakespearean plays are presented to us; imagine us without Schiller, or at least with an entirely different, much tamer Schiller in his place; imagine that we had only half a Lessing, half a Grillparzer, no Kleist, and no Hebbel; then estimate what this would mean in the development of our drama, of the histrionic art, and, furthermore, in the realm of poetry, of æsthetics, nay, in our whole culture.

No modern dramatist can even approach comparison with Shakespeare. Just figure to yourself the prodigious fertility of this poet, the multitude of his dramatic productions; and in this multitude we find no zeros, nor any mere numbers, pieces which the memory is in danger of confounding one with another, as may easily happen with the purely
superficial Spanish writers, who were even more prolific than Shakespeare. For each one of his dramas has a distinct form and physiognomy which stamp themselves indelibly upon the mind; each one represents a small world within itself—and in each of these worlds what teeming abundance of life! what rich variety of characters! Nothing enables us to estimate so clearly the creative power of a dramatist as the effort to bring before our minds bodily, as it were, the characters who owe him their being. No poet can enable us to do this as readily as Shakespeare; no poet can summon up such a host of spirits, with forms so palpable, colouring so vivid.

It holds good of all works produced from the depths of the human soul that we think the work does not give the full measure of the artist. The greatness of the work leads us to imagine the greatness of the artist, and we conceive him as rising above it. High as his achievement
may have been, his design, or at least his aim, was still higher. Much of what the artist has seen and felt is lost on its arduous passage through the material at his command—becomes, as it were, entangled in it. This is true of the poet, too, who for his representations has to make use of the most volatile, the most spiritual, of all substances—language. This is true, too, of Shakespeare. We conceive the poet Shakespeare greater than what he has created. But he was fortunate beyond many others in that he could express so great a part of what he felt in a form so entirely conformable to his nature—the dramatic form. None of our great poets was so wholly possessed by the genius of the drama as Shakespeare. It is impossible to conceive of him as other than a dramatist.

The loss would be irreparable were we to be deprived of the sonnets, those little masterpieces of art, like chiselled marble, so clear cut, so delicately wrought,
breathing such glowing life. But even the sonnets recall the dramatic poet, not only because taken in connection they are related to a real and most moving drama, but because at many points the poem in its stormy course and its daring use of metaphors betrays real dramatic intensity.

But the dramatist appears much more clearly in his epic attempts, in “Venus and Adonis” and in “Lucrece,” not to the advantage of the effect produced by these poems. The very thing that constitutes the greatest strength of the poet here appears as a weakness. The abundance, the clearness, the intensity, of his conceptions prove an injury to him here, because the means to which he is accustomed are not here at his disposal. The stage he knows intimately; he comes into daily and closest contact with his audience; he knows what will produce an effect upon the stage, and what kind of an effect; all its artifices are at his command.
If he wishes to represent a character, a situation, he has the greatest variety of means at his disposal, besides the speech, the play of features, and the gestures of the actors, to whom he need but give hints. Here, furthermore, the meaning of everything is brought out by its accompaniments—the cause by the effect it produces, the character of a man by the impression he makes upon others, the speech by its answer. Shakespeare has all the resources of theatrical illusion in his mind when writing his dramas, and he has complete command of them. In epic poetry he must renounce the methods so familiar to him. He knows this; he knows that it is his words alone which must produce the effect upon the senses; he thinks, therefore, that he must give more than mere allusions if he wants to make his readers see things as he sees them—and he always sees them vividly, bodily, before him. He endeavours to express everything, and the consequence is
that we have an overwhelming abundance of details which do not combine to give us a comprehensive view of the whole; it is poetry which, in spite of the wonderful beauty of its lavishly scattered details, as a whole leaves us unmoved.

Nothing of epic delight in these poems; everywhere the most intense tension, keeping the reader in almost breathless suspense. Full of passionate sympathy for his subject, the poet endeavours to exploit all the elements of it, to illuminate them on every side; everywhere we wish the action to proceed, and we feel it retarded. And there is, besides, the true dramatic striving to attribute a symbolic significance to every part of the action, to spiritualize every material detail. We find this illustrated in the description of Tarquin’s passage in the night from his own chamber to that of the heroine: how he forces open the locks of the doors through which he must pass, and how at this every lock cries out indignantly; how
the door creaks on its hinges to betray him; how the weasels prowling about at night frighten him with their screeching; how the wind, penetrating through the cracks and crannies, wages war with the torch he holds in his hand, blowing the smoke into his face, and extinguishing the light; but how he rekindles it with the breath hot from his burning heart. All this is conceived in a dramatic, by no means in an epic, sense.

But here arises the question: How can it be accounted for that Shakespeare, so normal, healthy, and simple a nature, is gifted so exclusively for the drama, not at all for epic poetry, while it is precisely epic poetry that flourishes in ages characterized by a simple, healthy spirit? Let us pause a moment at this question.

Real epic poetry proceeds from a joyous love of life, and its effect is to enhance that joy. A thorough optimism characterizes the true epic bard, and he
presupposes his readers to be endowed with the same quality. He calculates mainly upon their impulse to admire great heroic figures, mighty deeds, strange destinies; even where deep sympathy is aroused in the fate of the hero it is grounded upon admiration: an Achilles who dies an early death, a Siegfried who is treacherously murdered. And how characteristic of the ancient Homeriæ that they do not represent at all the death of Achilles, but simply let us feel that it is an event certain before long to take place. To the epic poet almost all that he describes is beautiful and worthy; that which is ugly or contemptible is only introduced for the sake of contrast; and he knows how to idealize even what is ugly and contemptible. He invests the objects and concerns of everyday life with a golden glow which makes them appear attractive and important; every warrior becomes to him upon occasion a hero; the hero rises to a demigod,
nay, at times dares to engage in combat with the gods themselves.

The epic poet is instinct with exuberant life, and he enhances this feeling, and the feeling of joy in existence, in his hearers. Naturally he arouses a longing, too, for a beautiful, vanished age; but it is longing of a kind which childhood, living in a fairy world, experiences—a kind that finds its gratification in the poem itself. This is true of even so tragic an epic as Milton's "Paradise Lost"; here, of course, the representation turns upon the irrevocable loss, but very essentially, too, upon a vivid presentment of what was lost, upon a description of paradise.

How totally different the drama! The dramatist, also, leads us into an ideal world, but never to show it to us in its unclouded purity, always picturing it in a state of conflict and confusion. The drama, too, places heroes before us, but what renders these heroes dramatically effective is not the qualities which make
them heroes, but those which make them men. The dramatic hero is, above all else, a man—that is to say, a combatant.

Conflict is the essential thing in the drama—conflict in all its detail, in its origin and its development; it does not depend for its effect upon the strength and the courage of the victor; on the contrary, those dramatic struggles are the most impressive where the hero is finally vanquished. In the drama we do not want to have our admiration aroused, but to be stirred by a living sympathy; even if it move us to tears of intensest pity, if it convulse the very depths of our being, we want to share, within ourselves, in the hero's struggle, whether it have a happy or an unhappy issue, whether it be followed by the hero's ruin, or only by his punishment or mortification. But to this end we must become most intimately acquainted with the cause and the circumstances of the conflict, as well as with the character of the hero. We must see
the inevitableness of the struggle, how it is evolved through the action and reaction between the character, desires, aims, of the hero, on the one hand, and his environment on the other. We must feel convinced that the hero in a given situation could, to be true to his nature, have acted only as he did, and not otherwise. Only then shall we see ourselves pictured in him, only then put ourselves in his place, identify ourselves with him, suffer with his sorrow and rejoice in his joy; only then, too, will the laughter which he compels be the outburst of a full heart, affording us genuine spiritual relief.

The drama, then, as opposed to the epic, is at once more spiritual and more effective. It allows us to penetrate more deeply into the inner being of the characters; cause and effect are closely linked together; we are more powerfully moved by it to laughter or to tears. These highest effects of the drama are only attain-
able, however, if we actually witness the action; and, on the other hand, if a dramatic performance were presented before us without producing any such effects, it would soon grow wearisome and annoying.

The more ambitious, the more powerful, the artistic means employed to impress the sense, the more powerful should the effect prove. Only an action that really stirs us, and keeps us in vivid suspense, should be dramatically represented. To create this effect there must be a consonance between the matter and the form and between both and the theatrical presentation.

As the epic is the poetry of the youth of mankind, so is the drama the poetry of its manhood. It flourishes in epochs which no longer cherish much faith in the golden age, among men who see life as it is, as a struggle, and who, at the same time, seek strength and refreshment for this struggle in the contemplation of
ideal conflicts which bring before them an image of their own inmost life.

To return to Shakespeare. His early youth passed like an idyl replete with epic joyousness, but without rousing within him the desire to enhance that joyousness artistically. To this simple man the calm life in communion with the nature which surrounded him was sufficient; no models pointed the way toward epic creation; no vision of literary renown passed in alluring colours before his soul. Perfect content needs no artistic utterance; great inner wealth is self-sufficient. Scarce had he entered upon manhood when the idyl drew to its close; his heart was stirred by mighty passions, a tremendous conflict rent his soul, the battle of life had begun for him, and uninterrupted through the best years of his life, nay, beyond that period, he had to fight this battle in many forms, and was thus ever reminded of the limitations of human nature.
Shakespeare as Dramatist.

So it fell out that Shakespeare came to London, became acquainted with the stage, where Marlowe's art, then enjoying its first triumphs, took our poet's fancy captive. Need we wonder that Shakespeare became a dramatist, that he developed with a certain exclusiveness into a dramatic artist, since his outward as well as his inward life, since the whole time to which he belonged, impelled him to it?

But it is time that we should observe more accurately how Shakespeare conceived and carried out his art.

It is the task of every art, in every individual instance, to so fashion an object out of a given substance that it will represent an idea or arouse a certain state of feeling. The material, be it stone or bronze, colour or tone or word, determines the manner of representation in one art as distinguished from another. The drama, like all poesy, has language as its material to work in, but it commands,
besides this, the histrionic art. The entire personality of the actors, the whole stage apparatus, form a part of the dramatic artist's material; he is thus not the sole, but only the foremost, the leading artist. Language is the stuff in which he works, but he must picture to himself as he labours the effect which the theatrical presentation of his work is to produce.

The subject of the dramatic poet's work consists in the story or plot. It may be handed down by history, or be based upon some event of the day; it may belong to myth or legend, or be the result of pure invention. In the last case the poet may himself have invented the plot, but this rarely happens; as a rule, the story is handed down to the poet, and it is indeed the greatest poets who trouble themselves least with the invention of a new plot.

The reason of this may be easily comprehended. The story is the substance which the dramatist shapes in accordance
Shakespeare as Dramatist

with his own ideas. Shall he, then, first create this substance, and afterward elaborate it to suit his higher purposes? If so, it were much simpler for him to be governed by these purposes in inventing his plot; that is, to take an idea which he wishes to convey as a starting point, and seek a concrete embodiment of that idea. Many dramas are formed on this principle,—the modern French stage might offer us numerous examples,—and such dramas may be very effective. Yet, as a rule, there is something artificial about them; they are apt to create an impression, fatal to the success of any poetic production, of something forced. It appears too evident that the whole thing is conceived merely to illustrate an idea, that the action takes place only to prove some abstract proposition—and the consequence is that it is our intelligence alone that is concerned, our hearts remain cold; we may be pleasantly animated, perhaps excited, but we are not thrilled by it.
The normal course is that some occurrence—in life, in history, in conversation—or the substance of some tale, has so powerfully wrought upon the poet that it has stirred the creative vein within him.

And so it was in the case of Shakespeare. Rarely, perhaps never, did he invent his plot for himself, different as the extent and the significance of what he owes to his sources may be. He shows himself most independent, perhaps, in "Love's Labour's Lost," where, although we can prove certain motives and situations to be reminiscences of older works, we can nowhere find a model for the groundwork of the action as a whole. Yet who knows but that life itself offered what literature has so far not disclosed to us? As a rule, we are able to authenticate his sources, be they histories, novels, or dramas; and a comparative study teaches us with what freedom, with what entire absence of timidity,
he drew from those sources. Shakespeare has been called the great adapter, and with justice; but he who thinks that by this designation he can rob him of even the smallest leaf of his laurel crown knows not what poetic originality signifies in the history of literature. "Je prends mon bien où je le trouve," said Molière, and this is the maxim that all great conquerors in the realm of the mind have followed. The essential question is not how much one has appropriated, but what he makes of the thing he appropriates. And who, indeed, could urge grounds of complaint against Shakespeare's proceeding? The authors whom he has made use of? But did they not themselves likewise, nay, still more comprehensively, make use of their predecessors? And then—do not most of them owe their immortality solely to Shakespeare? Who would now read their writings were it not on account of Shakespeare?

The dramatist, then, must shape the
story handed down to him into dramatic action. In this he is governed by the ideas which possess his soul, often without his full consciousness, as a vague impulse, a compelling force. How does Shakespeare proceed to mould the story into dramatic action? Regarded on the surface, we observe the greatest variety in his methods, and in vain should one labour to extract from a study of his dramas any sort of prescription for the benefit of incipient dramatists. Now we see Shakespeare following his sources as closely as possible, deviating only in details, apparently in matters of no significance, and again we find him transforming the story in its most essential points; now endeavouring to simplify the story, and again complicating it by combining it with other tales and other motives. Already in one of his first dramas—"A Comedy of Errors"—the poet makes use of no less than four different sources in order to produce a most highly involved
Shakespeare as Dramatist.

and yet readily comprehended action; in his next comedy the action is as simple as possible, one might almost say inadequate.—What is it, then, that is common to methods differing so widely from each other, that is characteristic of them all? One might say: Shakespeare always condenses the dramatic action, draws it together more closely, in order to bring out forcibly the chief elements of the play, and glides lightly over the mere connecting links. True as this may be, yet in view of the fact that he frequently amplifies the main plot, interweaves it with others, or introduces some episode into the action, the truth of the remark would hardly be evident. One might, on the other hand, say: Shakespeare is always intent upon joining the members of the action in closer union by strengthening the motive, laying greater stress upon the relation between cause and effect, impressing upon the whole development of the piece the stamp of necessity. This
might also be very true; yet here, too, individual instances can be cited in apparent contradiction to that proposition. We find that Shakespeare’s plots, particularly toward the close of his dramas, are occasionally somewhat loosely constructed. Or how else should we term it when, in “As You Like It,” the usurper Frederick, who has driven his brother, the good duke, from the throne, toward the end of the drama, as we are told (for we see none of it), surrounds the wood where the latter abides with his army, intending to seize and kill him; there he meets with an old monk or hermit, who after some talk converts him, so that he not only abandons his purpose, but retires from the world and restores to his brother the crown of which he had robbed him. Here Shakespeare has, indeed, been easy-going in the matter of motive.

Did we wish to characterize Shakespeare’s method in a manner that should fitly apply to all cases, we should have to
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make prominent, above all, the unfailingness with which he seizes the gist of his plot, and develops the whole from that point; the mastery with which he so organizes it that, starting with very simple premises, all seems to follow with the inevitableness of nature's laws; that we are prepared in advance for every incident, and that it, in its turn, prepares us for what is to follow, all the wheels working into each other; every feature, even the most insignificant, contributes to the development of the whole. All this, however, is only to say that Shakespeare is unapproached in the dramatic conception of a given material, in the genius with which he moulds the story in accordance with his ideas.

Everything, therefore, depends upon the idea which fills the poet's mind or which is aroused by the story. What, then, are we to understand by this idea in Shakespeare? German aesthetics laboured many years to prove that there is
in every Shakespearean drama a so-called fundamental idea concealed behind the action. Particularly in those plays where the action is a complicated one, not easily to be grasped as a unity, did they seek with all the more ardour for a unity of idea. By this they understood, as a rule, some general proposition, or, at any rate, an abstract formula: for instance, the relation of man to possession; or the necessity of guarding against extremes in passion—for instance, in love; or the inquiry as to the just balance between reflection and action. Wearied by the multitude of artificial deductions by means of which they arrived at such often very trivial results, they have, indeed, more recently gone over to the other extreme, "throwing out the child along with the bath." Many deny the necessity of a unity of idea for the drama, and the existence of such an idea has, in "Twelfth Night," for example, been even lately disputed.
It all depends upon what is understood by the dramatic idea.

In reality, this means nothing but the point of view from which the poet regards the plot. This point of view must be unitary, yet we often feel the resulting unity of action without distinctly recognizing it. We are not always able to trace it back to a general proposition.

Yet it were perhaps better to abandon the field of abstractions, and make our meaning clearer by taking a concrete example. For this purpose let us select a drama which is familiar to you all—one, besides, where, regarded purely on the surface, the dramatist owes apparently almost everything to the source from which he drew: "Romeo and Juliet." Gustav Freytag has, in his "Technology of the Drama," compared in a very attractive manner the action in this tragedy with the story upon which it is founded; yet his presentation contains some errors, which are to be mainly
attributed to his lack of acquaintance, or at least to his insufficient acquaintance, with the actual source of the drama. The distinction between the mere action of the play and the story which the poet made use of is not nearly as great as Freytag points out; the difference, however, between the tragedy and the tale upon which it is based is none the less great; but this difference does not lie alone, nor even chiefly, in the construction of the plot, but in the treatment of the characters, in the dramatic structure, in the aptness of the language for the stage—in short, in the execution in its most comprehensive sense. The play will, on that account, serve best to teach us how all these elements are related to each other.

The sources of the Romeo and Juliet legend are, as is well known, Italian. Shakespeare, however, became acquainted with it through two English adaptations, both of which can be traced back through
a French medium to the Italian original: the prose presentation by William Paynter, which appeared in the year 1567, and especially the versified tale of Arthur Brooke, which was printed as early as 1562. Paynter's prose is essentially a close reproduction of his French model, whereas we find a considerable development in Brooke's poetical version, the details variously modified and enriched. Notwithstanding its somewhat Old Frankish tone, this poem evinces genuine feeling and pronounced talent; that Shakespeare made it the groundwork of his drama is its highest acknowledgment.

Shakespeare found his material in Brooke's poem, by no means in a raw state, but in a very advanced stage—not only the chief characters, but nearly all the minor ones, all the more important and a great number of subordinate motives, the plan of entire scenes, the ideas of numerous passages. What remained, then, for the poet to do, and
what was his share of the work? Well, Shakespeare has created an irresistibly fascinating, thrilling tragedy out of an interesting, touching romance, a work of art of imperishable worth out of a poem of ephemeral value. This, I think, were enough. But how has he done it?

He who would give a categorical, objective account of the contents of Shakespeare's tragedy, on the one hand, and of Brooke's versified romance, on the other, would present two tales which deviate very little from each other, nay, which superficial readers would regard as exactly identical. But what a difference in their way of looking at the story, in the idea which each conceives of his subject! Both Shakespeare and Brooke have taken the trouble to intimate briefly in a sonnet the substance of their poems. It is instructive to compare the two sonnets with each other.

This is how Brooke conceives his subject: Love has enkindled two hearts at
first sight, and they accomplish their desires. They are secretly united by a monk, and enjoy for a time the highest bliss. Inflamed to fury by Tybalt’s wrath, Romeo kills him and is obliged to flee into banishment. Juliet is to be forced into another marriage; to escape this she takes a draught which has the effect of making her appear as if dead; while in this sleep she is buried alive. Her husband receives information of her death, and takes poison. And she, when she awakes, kills herself with Romeo’s dagger. This is all; not a word about the feud between the two houses of Verona, the Montagues and Capulets; although the poem makes mention of all these things, they are evidently of no real interest to the poet; he perceives no deeper connection between the family feud and the fate of his main characters. It is a touching love story to him, and nothing more.

And Shakespeare? I will not translate here the familiar sonnet which precedes
the tragedy. But this is his idea of the story: Two young beings endowed by Nature with her most charming gifts, created as if for each other, glow with the purest, most ardent love. But fate has placed them in a rude, hostile world; their passion blossoms and grows in the midst of the most inflamed party and family hatred. A peaceful development, one that would lead to a happy consummation, is here impossible. Completely possessed by their love, they forget the hate which divides their families, enjoy for a few brief moments a happiness which transports them to the summit of human experience. Then they are torn asunder by the hostile powers. A last flickering of hope, a daring attempt to lead the Fates in accordance with their desires, and immediately thereafter the fatal error which plunges them in the cold embrace of death. But in death they are lastingly united, their burning longing is now stilled forever; and as
they themselves have found peace, so does their blood quench the flames of the hatred which has disunited their families. Over their lifeless bodies the fathers join their hands in a brotherly grasp, and their monument becomes a symbol of the love that conquered hate.

This is the way that Shakespeare regarded his subject; this, the idea he sought to impress upon his material; from this conception sprang all the deviations from his model, sprang the entire structure of the tragedy.

Shakespeare's object is to arouse the deepest sympathy, the most heartfelt pity, for his lovers, to thrill us with their tragic destiny, but at the same time to lift us to a point whence we can feel a reconciling element even in this cruel fate.

All that can serve this double purpose is brought into play, all opposing elements are discarded.

Let us consider a few details. In Brooke's narrative the action extends
over a greater period of time, over several months; Shakespeare has concentrated it into a few days. Why this change? It was not the arrangements or the usages of his stage which determined him to it. In these respects, on the contrary, Shakespeare exercised the utmost freedom. He was guided solely by his sure dramatic instinct. For how was that long space of time in the narrative filled up? Three months does Brooke allow the secretly united pair to enjoy their happiness in peace. Then only does the event occur which parts them. Who does not feel that the delicate bloom which clings to Shakespeare's characters would be at once dispelled by the admixture of this feature? Who does not feel that the infinite pathos of their fate, as well, would sink to an everyday level? Besides, if they could be secretly happy for three months, why does not their happiness last longer? It is mere chance which brings it to an end. How different with
Shakespeare! These two glorious creatures are made for each other; but the world, the Fates, do not will them to be united. And not for a moment does the poet leave us in uncertainty about their tragic destiny. They may enjoy their love but a few short hours, and that only when their fate is already sealed, when Tybalt is dead and Romeo banished. Not for a moment the feeling of undisturbed possession, and upon this brief joy follows at once the eternal parting. This is poetry, this is tragedy. You see how infinitely much depends upon this one little deviation in regard to time. And still more depends on it. This concentration of the action is in most perfect keeping with the condensed structure of this dramatic gem.

This quicker tempo at the same time attunes us to the heated atmosphere which breathes in this tragedy, to the sudden kindling, the rapid development, of glowing love, the rude outburst of wild
hatred. The striking truth to nature of the tone and colouring of "Romeo and Juliet" has long been commented upon. One is everywhere reminded that the action takes place under an Italian sky. Neither does the poet neglect to bring clearly before us the season in which the tragedy develops, although some critics have been mistaken about it. It was in the hot summer days:

"I pray thee, good Mercutio, let's retire;
The day is hot, the Capulets abroad,
And if we meet, we shall not scape a brawl;
For now, these hot days, is the mad blood stirring."

The dawn follows close upon the twilight. In the scenes between the two lovers we seem to breathe the air of the brief Italian night.

Over this scene Shakespeare has spread all the witchery of his art, infused it with all the ardour of his young and loving heart. Only three times does the poet represent Romeo and Juliet to-
gather, living, and in a fully developed scene: first, the decisive meeting at the ball; then the balcony scene immediately following it; finally, the farewell of the young pair after their first and last night of love. Nothing more touching or beautiful has ever been written. The climax, however, is perhaps reached in the balcony scene. The fact alone that here lay the most dangerous rock in the path makes it pre-eminent, for there is nothing more difficult and dangerous for the dramatist than the attempt to rival the musician and the lyric poet, to which such extremely simple situations invite him. Other great poets,—and Shakespeare as well, on certain occasions,—have recourse to this or that artifice: they allow the dialogue to be interrupted once or even oftener,—I may remind you of the celebrated garden scene in Goethe's "Faust,"—they intimate more than they represent, allow the largest and best part to be divined, while some attractive,
childish byplay lends animation to the scene. The lovers do not entertain each other with speaking of their emotions; they relate incidents of their past, talk of their everyday life. There is nothing of all this in "Romeo and Juliet." With a genuine scorn of death Shakespeare launches the ship of his fancy, with all sails set, upon the high sea of emotion, regardless of the perils which threaten its course, but which cannot harm it. At such points we ought to compare Brooke's poem with the drama. In the poem Juliet sees Romeo first, then he her; both are elated with joy, yet she the most; then she thinks of the danger hovering over him, and begins to speak amid her tears. In Shakespeare Romeo beholds Juliet appear at the window, and listens, unseen by her, to her monologue. When he has thus learned her tender secret, he discovers himself to her.

Admirable, too, is the art with which Shakespeare shows how the character of
his lovers is developed in and through their love. Admirable, yet not astonishing! For the conception of his characters is with him indissolubly united with his conception of the dramatic action. Therein lies his greatness: that just as he regards all things in their connection, so does he create them in their connection. The psychological depth and truth of his characters, the fulness of life they breathe, the consistency of their development, the necessity with which their actions follow from their nature and position, are universally marvelled at; but the greatest wonder, after all, is how these characters in their gradations, in the way they complement, and, by their contrast, stand out in bold relief against each other, are so totally controlled by the idea of the action. Let us observe Romeo and Juliet—what they were before their love, and what love makes of them.

The greatest transformation takes place in Romeo. A youth with noble senti-
ments, fine culture, keen powers of observation, and ready wit, he seems at the beginning of the play to be pining away from a superabundance of emotion and fancy. The world that surrounds him is too rough and too sober for him. He isolates himself from it entirely, beholds it only as through a veil, and adapts himself more and more to his inner world—a world of dreams, of imaginary joys and sorrows. The poet has retained from Brooke's poem Romeo's sentimental, unrequited love for Rosaline, without presenting Rosaline herself. Her personality is of no concern to us—it might be she or another. Her image is only meant to fill a void in Romeo's inner world; she is merely the object toward which Romeo's deep longing first turns until the proper object appears. From the moment when he beholds Juliet a transformation takes place within him. He is still the youthful dreamer, the poet, that he was, but he begins to act. The con-
sciousness that his love is returned restores him to himself and to the world. His changed being at once strikes his friend: "Why, is not this better than groaning for love? Now art thou sociable, now art thou Romeo; now art thou what thou art by art as well as by nature."

When he is hurled from the heaven of bliss into the wretchedness of banishment, he loses all self-control, breaks out into unmeasured lamentations, into impotent rage against fate. Hope once more revives him. Then, when he finally learns that all is at an end, his decision is at once taken; all gone is his youthful loquacity; happiness and misfortune have completed his education: he has become a man.

In Shakespeare, Juliet is a girl of fourteen, two years younger than in his model. She is for that reason so much more touching a figure: a child who through a great, pure love becomes a woman. She, too, stands isolated in the
world, yet not, like Romeo, because she is by nature a dreamer. She is at first quite unconscious of her position; it is only her experiences after she has met Romeo that reveal to her how foreign to her her parents and surroundings really are. Her nature is simpler, but stronger, her love much more unselfish, than Romeo's. Completely possessed by one idea, she at once comes to a decision, is intent upon practical action. The strength of her love overcomes maidenly shyness, womanly timidity, and allows her to look death in the face. The unfolding of her character in the course of the soliloquy before she takes the sleeping potion is significant. In that nightly hour, on the threshold of the decisive moment, horrid visions rise up before her. Finally she fancies she beholds the awful form of the murdered Tybalt. We find this feature also in Brooke's poem. But there Juliet finally hastily drinks down the contents of the vial, lest fear, after longer re-
fection, should deter her. Shakespeare's Juliet beholds her Romeo threatened by Tybalt, and swiftly seizes the only means of sharing his danger:

"Romeo, I come! this do I drink to thee."

Regarding the characters which group themselves partly about the hero and partly about the heroine, I shall speak but briefly. Excellently drawn is the figure of the old, hasty, passionate Capulet. His wife, very much younger than himself, appeals very feebly to our sympathies; her relations to her husband are in the main of a superficial nature, and even to her child she is bound only by the ties of blood, not by any soulful or spiritual union. And then the nurse, a type of the vulgar, garrulous female, her individuality brought out with masterly realism, and, in spite of Goethe's well-known dictum, an indispensable figure to the drama, serving as a foil to the character of Juliet, as well as to make us
comprehend her total isolation in her parents' house.

Romeo's parents, as befits the story, remain more in the background. On the other hand, we become acquainted with his friends: the calm, moderate Benvolio; the light-hearted, good-natured, impudent, witty Mercutio. This last figure is altogether Shakespeare's creation; in Brooke's poem he is introduced only once, and then merely by allusion. Mercutio,—an image of the exuberance of virile youth in the plenitude of its strength; a humourist who enjoys life and is, at the same time, a shrewd observer,—throws a bright radiance over the first half of the drama. His figure is of the greatest significance, not only in so much as it elucidates Romeo's character, but also on account of the manner in which Shakespeare involves him in the drama of the family feud.

To this side of his subject, to the tragedy of hate, Shakespeare has devoted
scarcely less care than to the tragedy of love, which, indeed, only becomes a tragedy through the other. Shakespeare does not content himself with presenting to our minds the tragic end of his lovers as a motive, strong as this motive, furnished by the story, was. He is intent from the first upon working upon our feelings, prepares us at the outset for the tragic result, knows how to produce in us by a thousand artifices the impression that this thing cannot now or ever reach a happy consummation. Everything must serve this purpose: the character of his lovers, Juliet's youth, her complete isolation, her ignorance of the world, the fatal rapidity with which her love is developed, the dark presentiments which, at the decisive moment, arise in her soul. But this end is served above all by the family feud, so vividly presented to our view; and here we see the art with which Shakespeare constructs his drama, brings his various motives before us. Already
in the first scene we are initiated into these relations. From insignificant, nay, ridiculous beginnings a serious, violent quarrel is evolved. Only the interposition of the prince, who asserts his authority in the most energetic manner, is sufficient to ward off extremes. And already in the first scene Shakespeare introduces Tybalt, Juliet's cousin, the wild, turbulent youth, who embodies most intensely the family hatred. In the ball scene Tybalt is again present, outraged at Romeo's audacity, restrained only with difficulty by his old uncle, and giving vent to the wrath which he is now prevented from satisfying in vows of vengeance:

"But this intrusion shall
Now seeming sweet convert to bitter gall."

Shakespeare's source introduces Tybalt for the first time in the decisive scene, and in a manner totally different, though reminding one, indeed, of the scene in the first act. A street fight has arisen, Tybalt
is among the crowd; Romeo appears upon the scene, tries, like Benvolio in Shakespeare's first act, to separate the combatants. Then Tybalt suddenly attacks Romeo himself, forces him to defend himself, and in thus defending his life to kill him. In Shakespeare the development is an entirely different one, much more significant and tragic. Tybalt seeks out Romeo, challenges him to combat. Romeo refuses to fight with Juliet's cousin. All that is near to her is dear to him. Astounded and enraged at the gentle words with which his friend addresses the brawling fellow, Mercutio then asks Tybalt to walk away with him. Romeo again comes forward when the fight is at its hottest, throws himself between the two combatants, and thus becomes the innocent cause of Mercutio’s death. The end of the sturdy humourist is worthy of his life: “Ask for me tomorrow, and you shall find me a grave man. I am peppered, I warrant, for this
world. A plague o' both your houses! 'Zounds, a dog, a rat, a mouse, a cat, to scratch a man to death! a braggart, a rogue, a villain, that fights by the book of arithmetic! Why the devil came you between us? I was hurt under your arm."

"I thought all for the best," replies Romeo. With Mercutio the cheerful glow of the zest of life vanishes from the drama; the approaching night heralds its advent. The result has turned Romeo's good intentions into a calamity. His friend is killed for his sake, through his fault. It is his to avenge his death—not by accident, in the stress of self-defence, as Brooke has it, but consciously, from a feeling of duty, must he draw his sword against Juliet's cousin, and strike him down. He gives expression to his feelings after the deed is accomplished as he exclaims: "Oh, I am fortune's fool!"

With his own hand, because he could do no otherwise, Romeo gives his dream of love its death blow. Again, as in the
first scene of the play, the prince appears, then restraining and threatening, now punishing. The innocent ones, the lovers, fall a sacrifice to justice; Romeo is banished. When the prince appears the third time, the tragedy is closed. The sacrifices which love demanded have appeased the old hatred also; the prince stands there a woful, sympathetic looker-on, a witness of the peace concluded over the open grave.
FOURTH LECTURE

SHAKESPEARE AS COMIC POET
SHAKESPEARE AS COMIC POET.

The first collected edition of Shakespeare's plays, the folio of the year 1623, is divided into three parts, and contains, as well as was then possible, all the material. First come the Comedies, then the Histories, and lastly the Tragedies. Later editors and commentators have often preferred a different division: Comedies, Tragedies, and Dramas [Schau-spiele],* and the latter classification is familiar to us. Now what relation does this modern arrangement bear to the old one? Does what we term drama coincide with the historical or chronicle play? or, if this be not the case, what is the reason that in Shakespeare's time they found no

* There is no exact English equivalent for Schau-spiel, which denotes something between tragedy and comedy.
necessity of placing the drama in a different category from comedy and tragedy? and how is it that we, on the other hand, no longer recognize the "history" as a subdivision of the drama? The last question is easily disposed of.

The history is primarily so called only on account of the nature of its subject-matter. By the term *history* or *chronicle play* is understood a drama whose action is taken from English history. The history of a foreign people, for instance, the Roman, was not classed under that head; "Julius Cæsar," "Coriolanus," "Antony and Cleopatra," are accounted as tragedies. Neither does old Scottish history, nor the accounts, so rich in fable, of the old British kings, furnish material for the histories: neither "Macbeth," nor, on the other hand, "Lear" or "Cymbeline," belongs to the chronicle plays. It is, then, English history alone, in its narrower signification, that is understood; in reality, only such periods of that history as were
not too far removed from that time; periods, finally, about which they possessed abundant sources of information, and which were vividly brought before Shakespeare's contemporaries by various representations of a popular character.

Among no other nation at that time was the knowledge of their own past so generally diffused, so incorporated into their very blood, so actively effective, as among the English. And with one great period of this past the Elizabethan age was pre-eminently familiar. It is the period which separates the Anglo-Norman era from the era of the Tudors, the time in which modern England, as regards its speech, its manners, its constitution, was being evolved in ever more definite outlines: the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries. The Elizabethan epic drew its subjects chiefly from this period; it likewise furnished the material of the historical dramas. Almost all of Shakespeare’s historical pieces,
too, play in this epoch, and notably in the fifteenth century; only in his "Henry VIII." does he finally venture to portray more recent times.

It is evident that, from the standpoint of the æsthetic critic, there is no justification for the existence of the historical play as a separate species of dramatic composition, much as it may signify from the standpoint of the English patriot and politician. But it is not a question merely of names, of the fitness of the term history, and the adoption of a third species to be classed alongside of tragedy and comedy. In reality, politics and patriotism,—not æsthetics alone,—filled a very important part in the historical dramas of that time, and plays of this kind cannot, for the most part, be judged from the point of view of strict dramatic theory. The necessity of paying altogether unusual regard to the underlying story, the refractory character of that story, the abundance of facts and figures,
the multitude of inevitable premises—all this does not, in many ways, allow the poet that symmetrical working out and transparent combination of motives, that intensifying of characteristics, above all, that concentration of dramatic interest, which theory justly demands of the drama. The king who gives the name to a piece is often not its real hero; in many cases we seek for one in vain, or find, instead of one, two, three, or more, and finally grow conscious that our sympathies are enlisted less in the individuals than in the fate of the personages as a whole, that the unity of the work lies not in the powers of attraction of an individual depicted as the central figure, but in the idea which proceeds from the relations between historical facts.

Among productions of this kind, however, two distinctly different types may be distinguished: a freer and a stricter art form, more or less strongly marked according to the individuality of the poet
and the nature of the material. In the freer form the poet seeks to replace the dramatic advantages which he must dispense with, especially concentration, by other qualities—by the charm produced by the well-ordered abundance of varied events and interesting personages; by the blending of historical genre pictures, humourous scenes, with affairs of state. Historical plays constructed on this type exhibit a certain resemblance to the epic. The other form betrays the endeavour, by its condensation of the matter, by the energetic treatment and close interlacing of the chief elements, to approach the strictly dramatic form,—tragedy, in fact,—as closely as possible. In both forms Shakespeare has created unparalleled models; the freer culminates in his "Henry IV." the stricter in his "Richard III." On the whole, however, he favours the freer form, to which the story, as a rule, more readily lends itself.