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ON CERTAIN NEW ELUCIDATIONS OF SHAKESPEARE

L. A. Shermnan

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UNIVERSITY STUDIES

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ON CERTAIN NEW ELUCIDATIONS OF SHAKESPEARE

BY L. A. SHERMAN

The title of Quiller-Couch's recent volume,¹ would seem to promise a fresh discussion of the dramaturgic method and excellencies of this author. No promise or prospect could have been more welcome. The technic of organizing a play is a matter of no slight concern. All the dramatic world is waiting for some satisfying if not final word. There are critics and scholars who affirm that there is no such thing as dramatic construction. They would even add that there are no principles whatever which successful plays illustrate. Every playwright works out his own salvation, and is a respective and independent law unto himself. On the other hand, there are critics of perhaps superior insight and authority who insist that there are indeed laws of dramatic technic, and that no sort of play can be constructed without conforming, in essential features, to them.

Mr. Quiller-Couch furnishes no enlightenment, in the present volume, on this fundamental question. He leaves it in fact wholly unconsidered. Here and there he crosses the boundaries of dramatic technic, but for the most part deals only with the psychology of its effects. His work is thus in substance only another contribution to aesthetic criticism. This is greatly to be regretted. We have long had too little help, in attempts at resolving the riddle of Shakespeare's craftsmanship, from minds expert in the creation and management of personality. It is fair to

¹ *Notes on Shakespeare's Workmanship*. By Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, M. A. New York: Henry Holt and Company.

assume that every successful novelist, as well as playwright, might supply at least some ray towards illuminating the supreme mystery of literature. As a study in interpretation, on the other hand, the book surpasses expectation. Its criticisms are almost everywhere constructive. One finds throughout the several chapters, keen discrimination, fresh common-sense judgments, along with flashes of insight, and more than occasional intimations of this writer's creative powers. And the whole is languaged in an easy and suggestive rather than a literary or distinguished vein.

The work consists of lectures, slightly altered, which were originally "spoken before an audience in the University of Cambridge." They evince the informal and catchy character incident to such a purpose, and are as slightly academic as could be looked for from a novelist, who is also a professor of English literature and fellow of a college. Quite evidently this author is no specialist in the lore of Shakespeare. Many of his observations would have been impossible to an inquirer working with a shorter focus. On the other hand, some of his conclusions, as will probably appear, could hardly have been reached by one with less *ex itinere* motivation and approach.

Without better justification than might be claimed from necessitated and prolonged ponderings on vexed matters of Shakespeare exegesis, the writer of this appreciation proposes to examine some of the notions propounded in the pages here. He has nothing to match against the author's prestige and brilliancy except repudiations and revisions of many favorite ideas. Fortunately, Quiller-Couch's work is largely selective, and nowhere attempts the systematic or complete analysis of any single play. His plan has been mainly to consider such isolated examples of Shakespeare's art as appeal to the intuitive rather than the reflective powers of the mind.

The author bases his studies, as might have been expected, upon the workmanship of *Macbeth*. Shakespeare's dramatic instincts work nowhere else so openly. Very agreeably Quiller-Couch explains why he is thus drawn aside from the purposes usually pursued by critics:

There are of course many other aspects from which so unchallengeable a masterpiece deserves to be studied. We may seek, for example, to fix its date and define its place in order of time among Shakespeare's writings; but that has been done for us, nearly enough. Or may we search for light on Shakespeare, the man himself, and on his history—so obscure in the main, though here and there lit up by flashes of evidence, contemporary and convincing so far as they go. For my part, while admitting such curiosity to be human, and suffering myself now and again to be intrigued by it, I could never believe in it as a pursuit that really mattered. All literature must be personal: yet the artist—the great artist—dies into his work, and in that survives. . . . "Men are we," and must needs wonder, a little wistfully, concerning our forerunners, our kinsmen who, having achieved certain things we despair to improve or even to rival, have gone their way, leaving so much to be guessed. "How splendid," we say, "to have known them! Let us delve back and discover all we can about them!"

"Brave lads in olden musical centuries
Sang, night by night, adorable choruses,
Sat late by alehouse doors in April,
Chaunting in joy as the moon was rising.
Moon-seen and merry, under the trellises,
Flush-faced they played with old polysyllables;
Spring scents inspired, old wine diluted,
Love and Apollo were there to chorus.
Now these, the songs remain to eternity,
Those, only those, the bountiful choristers
Gone—those are gone, those unremembered
Sleep and are are silent in earth forever."

No: it is no ignoble quarrel we hold with Time over these men. But after all, the moral is summed up in a set of verses ascribed to Homer, in which he addresses the Delian women. "Farewell to you all," he says, "and remember me in time to come: and when any one of men on earth, a stranger from far, shall enquire of you, 'O maidens, who is the sweetest of minstrels here about? and in whom do you most delight?' then make answer modestly, 'Sir, it is a blind man, and he lives in steep Chios.'"

But the shutters are up at *The Mermaid*: and, after all, it is the masterpiece that matters—the Sphinx herself, the *Iliad*, the Parthenon, the Perseus, the song of the old Héaulmières, *Tartufe*, *Macbeth*.

Lastly, I shall not attempt a *general* criticism of *Macbeth*, because that work has been done, exquisitely and (I think) perdurably, by Dr. Bradley, in his published *Lectures on Shakespearian Tragedy* . . . a book which I hold to belong to the first order of criticism, to be a true ornament of our times. Here and there, to be sure, I cannot accept Dr. Bradley's judg-

ment: but it would profit my readers little to be taken point by point through these smaller questions at issue, and (what is more) I have not the necessary self-confidence.

If, however, we spend a little while in considering *Macbeth* as a *piece of workmanship* (or artistry, if you prefer it), we shall be following a new road which seems worth a trial—perhaps better worth a trial just because it lies off the trodden way; and whether it happen or not to lead us out upon some fresh and lively view of this particular drama, it will at least help us by the way to clear our thoughts upon dramatic writing and its method: while I shall not be false to my belief in the virtue of starting upon any chosen work of literature *absolutely*, with minds intent on discovering just that upon which the author's mind was intent.

The first of Quiller-Couch's eighteen lectures is thus frankly discursive and general. We have quoted here at length from its opening paragraphs as perhaps the most suggestive and characteristic part of the whole work. Having explained and justified his special purpose, in the series, the author proceeds to treat of the 'conditions' under which Shakespeare wrought out his plays. He touches upon features of the Globe theater, the quality of its patrons, and its handicap in having its female parts sustained by boys. Then, quoting the four passages from Holinshed which Shakespeare used as the raw material for *Macbeth*, the author propounds suggestively the first of his many theses in this form:

Tragedy demands some sympathy with the fortunes of its hero: but where is there room for sympathy in the fortunes of a disloyal, self-seeking murderer?

This syllogism, on the instant, gives us pause. There is a flaw in the reasoning somewhere. It is not in the major premise, for of course no play can be a tragedy unless there is sympathy with the hero. But we all have sympathy, and a good deal of it, with the hero of *Macbeth*. Clearly, then, it is the implied minor premise—later formally affirmed as the subject of the second lecture—that is unsound. *Macbeth* to us, except constructively and with qualifications, is no disloyal, self-seeking murderer.

Thus the fault in the logic is due to an 'ambiguous middle term.' If *Macbeth* were regarded at the beginning as an absolute traitor, an unmitigated self-seeker, a malicious and unrelenting murderer, there could have been no play. Historically, *Macbeth*

has equal rights in the crown with his cousin Duncan, who is of age no greater. But Shakespeare ignores this fact, which might, as Quiller-Couch observes, have helped his purpose, and makes Duncan much older, though perhaps not feebler, than his original. Duncan has proved a worthless guardian of Scotland. Sedition and violence are rife. Foreign banners flout the sky, and fan the people cold. Macbeth and Banquo are the hope and mainstay of the kingdom. Duncan can match their bravery only with his cowardice. His rebellious subjects, as averred by Holinshed, look upon him as "a faint-hearted milkesop, more meet to gouverne a sort of idle monks in some cloister, than to haue the rule of such valiant and hardie men of warre as the Scots were." Shakespeare accepts and presents him unmistakably as of this character. The second scene of *Macbeth* shows him withdrawn from even sight of the battle that is to fix his fate. Macbeth almost single-handed wins the fight which his subjects have precipitated against him, and sets back, *without conditions*, his throne beneath him. He has thus been making Duncan's kingship possible, we are to understand, from the beginning of the 'seditious commotions' that have vexed the state. To do this does not argue unqualified disloyalty, self-seeking, or assassination.

But a general who sustains an incapable monarch is likely to have moments of impatience and disaffection. Macbeth is the *de facto* master of the country, and he knows it. Doubtless he sometimes cries out in anguish of spirit, 'When shall Scotland be saved from this helpless, doddering misrule? I am tired of pretending to respect imbecillity. Curse the fate that gave the crown to Duncan, and left me the stultifying duty of trying to keep it on his head. Who ever heard of a king that cannot personally lead his forces against an enemy, or pose as at least a figurehead before his army?'

Can any one pretend that he is not in sympathy, in circumstances of this kind, with the party of the second part? Is not all the world agreed that any man, incapable and yet responsible for the public safety, if he will not give place to a better, is a criminal? A pilot at the wheel, who sees that his course must be

altered to escape breakers, but, lacking strength to turn the rudder sharply, refuses to let another take the ship, is practically if not consciously a murderer. On his head be the blood of those who perish. How much less is Duncan chargeable for the lives of those who fall in wars to keep Scotland in his hands?

So there is nothing mysterious about our sympathy with Macbeth. Shakespeare simply appeals to our sense of his deserts as against the King's and Malcolm's presumption. Can he intensify this sympathy to the point of making us consent to unseat Duncan?

To Shakespeare's insight, the means lies ready, in the narrative of Holinshed, to his hand. Where there are possibilities of evil, the tempter will be present to transfigure them to fancy. His agents are already posted on the road from victory, to meet with and greet Macbeth. What easier than to accost the fittest to rule with the prophecy that rule he must and shall? Does Macbeth receive the word with feelings of pride and satisfaction? On the contrary, he starts and seems to fear. We are in no doubt of what he is afraid. Duncan is king, and will consent to remain king as long as Macbeth is willing to hold him in that office. No one else can keep him there. This prophecy postulates that even he, Macbeth, is destined to cease this rôle. That will mean giving over the devotion of which he is so proud. That will mean having something to regret,—presumably, inevitably, a wound to loyalty and conscience. He has long realized that he has the power to unseat Duncan, and become another Mac-Donwald. But to contemplate it as an actuality dismays him.

Also the mystery of this prophecy, our certitude—from the first scene—that supernatural forces are at work, appeals to us strongly. We are aware that there is something uncanny and unrighteous on the inside of this business, but we go consentingly in the line of Macbeth's temptation. The romantic appentencies in us outstrip the justice of Macbeth's cause, and we side with the witches. Macbeth has made the rebellious Scotsmen take to their heels. He has brought the proud Sweno to terms, as we have heard Ross report to Duncan. The promise is that Scotland shall have a king who will do yet grander deeds than the

bleeding sergeant forgets his hurts and almost swoons to tell. This lure is potent with us. We hear Macbeth's decision to play a passive part, and let chance crown him, with disapproval. Face it as we may our sympathy is such that we crave to have Macbeth act in his own behalf, though he be *himself unwilling*. This, the technicians tell us, is the first step in involving the plot.

The second step follows hard upon. Duncan, now withdrawing to his castle, sends Ross back to greet Macbeth as thane of Cawdor.² Macbeth and Banquo, not sent for, have in the meantime set out to seek the king at Forres. What can he offer his deliverer? What reward were fit? He will of course fall upon his kinsman's neck, and weep tears of gratitude. He does not, but reserves that effusive distinction for Banquo. To Macbeth he says officially and formally what any one of us would have tried to say,—

O worthiest cousin!

The sin of my ingratitude even now

Was heavy on me. . . .

More is thy due than more than all can pay.

But after that we should hardly have withheld something more personally appropos. Could it have been less than this?

Once again hast thou shown thy mastery for Scotland. It is our weakness that we still wish to keep the crown. But thou shalt at least succeed us. We shall not always impose on thy loyalty and strength.

Indeed, have the bystanders, from the king's last sentence, understood him to mean much less? But he goes on to say instead that

² We note that Ross, on finding Macbeth, pronounces (I. iii. 89-100) some dozen lines of appreciation and praise that Duncan has not authorized. Angus adds, with even greater liberty,—

We are sent

To give thee from our royal master thanks—

Only to herald thee into his sight,

Not pay thee.

Then Ross amazingly takes upon himself to preface the message of the king with this,—

And, *for an earnest of a greater honor!*

It is clear how these and probably the other loyal thanes expect Macbeth will be rewarded.

he has begun to plant Macbeth, and will labor to make him full of growing. Then he caps the climax of absurdity by embracing Banquo and asserting, though no proof of such merit³ has come to him, that this man's desert is no whit less.

This would be unaccountable enough if it were all. But immediately, asserting his divine right, and assuming security for all the future through Macbeth's continued homage, Duncan serves notice upon his kinsman and all the company that he fixes the succession upon Malcolm. This is the prince who has just been saved, by the 'bleeding sergeant,' from becoming captive and hostage to Macdonwald. 'Macbeth,' says Holinshed, 'was sore troubled herewith, for that he saw by this means his hope sore hindered.' What his hope was is evident. Why indeed has Duncan chosen this of all times, since he is not expecting to be soon cut off from life, to fix the succession? Northern and other thrones were often filled by election. Evidently he designs to inhibit Macbeth from any thought of candidacy. Is it not wholly an insult to Macbeth, not wholly a surrender of noblesse oblige? Is it not that he holds a weak supposal of Macbeth's worth, and assumes that he has not manhood enough to care? Is it above imbecillity to expect that Macbeth *and Scotland* will allow Duncan to perpetuate misrule in the person of this callow and unmanly son?

Shall such a king be humored? If we could have our way, we should wish to see him led off the stage of the world by the ear. But the author does not trust the antipathy, which he has aroused in us, at its present pitch. Moreover, he has presumably not yet won all his audience over to the needs of the plot. He delays a little, in order to call out our 'sympathy' for Macbeth in a different way. He shows his hero, instead of goaded to desperation at the wilful ingratitude of the king, more moved for the moment with humiliation at being estopped from reward, in the flush of victory, by a future unmartial master:

³ We have perhaps noted Duncan's attempt to manufacture such evidence (I. ii. 33, 34) out of the sergeant's testimony:

Dismay'd not this
Our captains, Macbeth *and Banquo*?

The Prince of Cumberland! That is a step
On which I must fall down, or else o'er leap,
For in my way it lies. Stars, hide your fires!

He begins to harbor black designs against this defective stripling, whom Shakespeare has brought back here for us to see. Does not the contrast, thus forced upon us breed deadly disgust for the whole family, father and sons alike? But people in a theater are often slow as a whole to react to such appeals. Shakespeare will aid his purpose now with an expedient, tried repeatedly in earlier days,⁴ which will carry us and everybody over—even princes of the blood and James himself, when they shall see this play—into murderous consent⁵ against King Duncan's life.

Macbeth seems unable to hold Duncan, his playmate in youth perhaps, as well as comrade in later years, as altogether responsible for his career or conduct. Not so his wife, the Lady Gruach. Macbeth is not unwilling that she should indulge her impatience against his doddering, helpless cousin. Duncan is none of hers, and she has a wife's contempt of her husband's rival. She has always worshipped the kingly possibilities in Macbeth, and her faith, her enthusiasm, have been sweet to him. So he has written her what the witches prophesy—some critics say, to arouse her. No, not to arouse her. She has afflicted him enough already with her arousals. But the prediction will bring her a new and unlooked for satisfaction. So he has sent, at the earliest moment possible, the news of his victory and of the greeting. Holinshed says it was Lady Macbeth's ambition to be a queen. We are not so sure but that it was rather that Macbeth should be king.

Glamis thou art, and Cawdor, *and shalt be*
What thou art promised.

⁴ Compare his use of Portia's enthusiasm, in II. iv of *Julius Caesar*, for her husband's purpose, as aid to ensure assent to the taking off of the title character. What women like Portia desire, the audience will desire with them.

⁵ Consent, which is at least dramatic, but not necessarily immoral. We may entertain for the instant romantic and imaginative impulses for which we are not in the slightest danger of becoming *de facto* chargeable. Shakespeare must enforce such consent from his audience here, or the play will stop.

It is not her future that she sees in her mind's eye, but her husband's. The affection of this wife has long had the will, and shall perhaps now find the way to achieve the sole sway and masterdom that he has so long believed his due. He is too fond of his wife's idealizing confidence to resist her now. At least, he will play for time.

And of what sort is this Lady Macbeth, this importunate, compelling genius of the play? Perhaps it is not strange that actresses and critics have conceived her as at heart a monster, a Borgia, unsexed, inhuman. But would a woman, inhuman and unsexed indeed, have prayed to the ministers of murder to *make* her denatured, bloodthirsty? Such a creature would have felt the course conceived a normal procedure, and gloried in the chance. But Lady Macbeth finds herself incapable, and cries out to the powers of evil to take her milk for gall, to turn her motherly instincts deadly, lest her purpose fail. Thanks to Shakespeare's mind and art, her prayer will remain unanswered. Shakespeare has made her crave, for her husband's sake, that the supremely evil deed be brought to pass. But he has also left her powerless to effect it. By creating her of such a nature that she will thus wish, and quail, he has made us votaries of her cause, and of his purpose.

The author has now involved the plot a second time, and in a larger, or 'major', way. Malcolm as crown prince, by the word of Duncan, blocks Macbeth's career. We would not have it so, and are willing 'dramatically', that either, or both of these obstructions shall be eliminated. The first involvement or obstruction, as we remember, lies in Macbeth's resolve to remain inactive. He has said,—

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

and he has not yet changed his mind. We would have him change it. And he will change it, resolving thus this 'minor,' or first obstruction.⁶ He will consent to be the means himself of

⁶ Differently from other dramatists, Shakespeare uses but two obstructions, to involve the plot. The minor one as here is subjective, consisting merely of a state of mind, either in the title character or some other prin-

fulfilling the witches' prophecy. But how can Shakespeare make him thus consent without destroying all worthiness in his hero?

Shakespeare will extort the consent which the play needs, and will achieve it without destroying the worth in Macbeth that we have recognized. Rather will he in a sense increase it. We have just heard Lady Macbeth pray fruitlessly for help to execute a deed against which her feminine and maternal being utterly revolts. No strength comes to her even for the nonce. No demoniac influences neutralize her womanhood. She is overwhelmingly conscious of the abnormalness of the end desired. So much is clear for her. Shall now Macbeth suffer the diabolism which he has not invoked and which his wife is spared? Is he to lose all sense of right and justice? Can he jeer at honor, and gloat over the chance of mischief?

Our author thinks so. The only way, he says, by which Shakespeare can make a hero (p. 23) out of a criminal [*sic*] is to have him exchange "Moral Order, Righteousness, the will of God (call it what you will) for something directly opposed to it . . . assigning the soul to Satan's terrible resolve, 'Evil, be thou my good.'"

This is in many ways surprising. Particularly is it such because it contravenes the principles that Quiller-Couch has laid down, in the opening chapter (pp. 15, 16), from Aristotle. These he presents there in the following form:

(1) A Tragedy must not be the spectacle of a perfectly good man brought from prosperity to adversity. For this merely shocks us.

(2) Nor, of course must it be that of a bad man passing from adversity to prosperity: for that is not tragedy at all, but the perversion of tragedy, and revolts the moral sense.

(3) Nor, again, should it exhibit the downfall of an utter villain: since pity is aroused by undeserved misfortunes, terror by misfortunes befalling a man like ourselves.

(4) There remains, then, as the only proper subject for Tragedy, the spectacle of a man not absolutely or eminently good or wise who is brought to disaster not by sheer depravity but by some error or frailty.

(5) Lastly, this man must be highly renowned and prosperous—an *Œdipus*, a *Thyestes*, or some other illustrious person.

cial personage. The major of the two obstacles is again as here some objective or material hindrance, often a rival to the title figure.

Of course, the play in hand can be associated with none of these propositions except the fourth. With this judgment our author substantially agrees. But he makes Macbeth to have been brought to disaster through 'error', greatly intensified by suggestion.⁷ He concedes that Shakespeare does not allow his hero to become bewitched unconsciously, against his will. The fact is merely that he has lost his moral bearings, and takes evil for its opposite.

The author is not very clear in this part of his contention, and is not convincing. The text of the play nowhere bears out the notion that Macbeth mistakes evil for good. His moral sense is neither atrophied nor addled. This is shown, it would seem indubitably, when, leaving Duncan to his wife's attentions, he goes aside (I. vii) from the banquet to think out the problem that has been forced upon him. Instead of coveting the chance to do the devil service while advantaging himself, he voices the verdict of the ages against the deed which Lady Macbeth has proposed for herself but which he knows will be left for him to carry through: 'In cases of making away with princes, judgment always overtakes the perpetrators here, in this life, so that acts of this kind amount to nothing more than lessons in murdering. When these lessons have been taught by experiments upon others, even-handed justice presents the cup of poison that we have made them drink to our own lips.' In other words, there is a Moral Order in the universe, and crime punishes itself. Then, as if to nail the argument against diabolism, Shakespeare makes this man endorse the obligations of blood, of honor, of hospitality,—and, lo, even (II. 16–20) the claims of personal goodness. 'Scotland cannot tolerate,' he finishes by saying, 'the man who abuses virtues even as valueless to the country as Duncan's. Such pity for his fate as one feels for an unsuccored new-born babe will ride like the cherubim of the Almighty upon the unseen couriers of the air

⁷ Quiller-Couch's formulating statement is "... the sight and remembrance of the Witches, with the strange fulfillment of the Second Witch's prophecy, constantly impose the hallucination upon him—'Fair is foul, and foul is fair.' 'Evil, be thou my good.'"

blowing the horror of the deed in the eyes of all the people so that their tears and wailing shall outcry the howlings of the storm."⁸ No. Macbeth has not forfeited his free agency, nor his moral sense.

But, it may be fairly urged, has not Macbeth shown himself willing (ll. 1-7), so far as the ethics of the case avails at all—provided the blow might speed—to jump the life to come?⁹ Indubitably. But let us consider the language and implications of this soliloquy more closely. We must first realize that Macbeth is under strong temptation. What man of us is willing to be judged, for good and all, by his attitude in such a moment? If to hear the voice of Apollyon is tantamount to compliance, what is the chance of saintship for anybody? (Then, too, are victims of diabolism ever *tempted*? But let us have done with that.) Does Macbeth's thought rank below the pragmatic morality of present times, or of human history, when the lure of power or pelf entices?

But let us look at the text again. We find that Macbeth is merely saying, 'If the assassination and all its consequences could be consolidated in one physical act, we might let the future take care of itself. *But,—but,—but,—*crime used as a means defeats the end.' So the present forces in this man are not moving in the line of Lady Macbeth's terrible resolve. And how has Shakespeare made us feel, dramatically, about these counter forces that are having the right of way? Had we control at this moment of Macbeth's will, would we intensify or slacken the motivation that controls it?

It thus seems clear that the tragedy in hand is not founded upon any such 'error' as Quiller-Couch suggests. Macbeth has not

⁸ Do we realize how exactly Shakespeare has made his hero, in this prophecy, forecast the effect of the murder upon the sensibilities of the nation? Does he mean to intimate that moral or other prevision can reverse the motivation of a mind, a soul that the powers of evil have overmastered?

⁹ This reasoning concerns the first part of the situation,—Lady Macbeth's insistence that Duncan shall be got rid of immediately, this very night. We note that then Macbeth goes on to the vital question, whether Duncan shall be meddled with at all, and rules as master of his house against it.

lost the use of his moral faculties, he has not forfeited even his common sense. No such hallucination obsesses him as could prompt him to accept as a confession of faith, 'Fair is foul, and foul is fair.' It is the witches who have said that, and perhaps feel that. Yet is he not, as our author has said, practically if not utterly a self-seeker, and a murderer?

Shakespeare's answer would be, 'No. No. I have taken pains to show Macbeth as just a man, like you and me. I have made him loyal when most of my audience would have had him disloyal. I have made him shrink from lifting hand against Duncan, while most of my readers have been crying out, in the dramatic spirit, "Away with him." When he has for his part determined to thwart the purpose of his wife, I bring her away from Duncan (I. 28) to control him. Macbeth, with decision in his voice, anticipates her censure:

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.

"He has at least lately shown a disposition to reward me. I have won the respect and confidence of every rank in Scotland, and I am in no mood to cast all that away." This means that he rules against the project, not only for to-night, but for good and all. He has dallied with the idea, or rather he has set Lady Macbeth at dallying with the idea, of being rid of Duncan. But at no moment since the opening of the play has he been in thought consentingly an assassin. At the words of the Third Witch, he started and showed signs of fear, not of kingship, but—since Duncan is securely enthroned again—of implied measures, on his part, essentially foreign to his nature and his will. Again, when at return he finds Lady Macbeth ablaze with determination to destroy King Duncan almost at sight, he shows (I. v. 63, 64) such signs of fright as make his wife ask and expect only (II. 72, 74) that he clear them from his face. Were he a murderer indeed, requiring merely less dangerous conditions, she would have set him a task far easier, and less absurd. No. I have really intended that Macbeth shall be the man that Lady Macbeth (I. v. 17-23) declares:

Yet do I fear thy nature.
It is too full o' th' milk of human kindness
To catch the nearest way. Thou wouldst be great,
/ rt not without ambition, but without
The illness should attend it. What thou wouldst highly,
That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false,
And yet wouldst wrongly win.

Macbeth, in other words, is a *scrupulous* self-seeker. He is not so scrupulous as to eschew wrong-doing altogether. But he will stop short of crime. He is thus wholly in character when he interdicts further action against the life of Duncan.

'And yet, I make Macbeth, after winning the moral credit of this opposition, recede from his decision. I bring in forces that thrust the motives just now so potent into the background. Woman rules society continuously by her conservatism, but home and husband occasionally by her radical insistences. It is in the nature of compensation that the weaker sex, under certain conditions, should outwill the stronger. So here, in spite of what policy dictates, and loyalty, and pride, and self-respect, and the sense of honor, and of duty to a kinsman and a guest, together with the certain prospect of Scotland's commending the poisoned chalice to his own lips,—against all his better judgment and in full assurance of perdition, Macbeth yields to his wife's frenzied resolution. He jumps the life to come, not because he dreads the scorn and pain and discord that else must follow, but because he loves.

'Of course there must be steps in the procedure. I but let Lady Macbeth use first her woman's logic, by which she would make her darling hero out a coward. He knows it is not her conviction, for he has heard her,—scores of time has heard her, praise his daring. He realizes that she employs her taunts only for present victory, yet he lets them rouse him. He should instead have found them humorous, amusing,—he should have seemed at least imperturbable. But I have made Macbeth too fond of his wife to essay strategy, or make light of even her half-meant gibes. There can be no recourse or evasion now. When a husband takes an issue like this seriously, but two ways lie open,—compliance, or brutal, violent denial. But brutal, violent

denial this man has never exercised, nor indeed can exercise, of his wife's demands.

'So his defeat is sure. Lady Macbeth I make in fairness innocent of the first proposal that Duncan should be sacrificed. It was a reckless thought, bred of the king's unbearable worthlessness and presumption, and one that Macbeth could never have executed of himself. After it was "broken" to his wife, Macbeth must surely have been the victim of cumulative importunity. At some moment, goaded as now by the reproach that he is lily-livered, Macbeth has sworn to her that, at the convenient time, he *will* assert himself. I am not sure, though, that he ever did quite this. Lady Macbeth is capable, in her present mood, of exaggeration. But she needs some further and more telling advantage over her husband, and I create it for her. She has but to affirm to him that, in a case like this, she for her part would have dashed out her baby's brains as earnest of her fierce sincerity. Macbeth knows that she could have done nothing of the kind, being powerless even now to lift hand against Duncan, whom she hates. Yet he will not ridicule, or gainsay. He lets her have her triumph, though it means damnation to both her and him. So I keep the sympathy of my audience with Macbeth, and make the play a tragedy of devotion.'¹⁰

¹⁰ How fine it is that Macbeth does not here taunt his wife for having promised to bring the deed to pass herself (I, v. 68-71),—while now she naïvely presumes to shift the task to him! How fine also it is later, when the apples of Sodom have been tasted, that he permits himself no syllable of reproach to her!

The author has thus of course consummated the enabling act of his tragedy on the domestic rather than the epic plane. The gain has been that he brings it home to the lowest comprehension. Every-day examples bear out the history. The wife who, for social eminence, demands that her husband find means, any sort of means, of doubling his income, is a Lady Macbeth in kind. She is vaguely aware that the course proposed will mar his credit, and his peace of mind. He for his part knows that it will immure him finally in a felon's cell. But he jumps the immediate life to come, and obeys her wish.

As to the imagined truculency of Lady Macbeth's disposition, observation of outside incidents will restore perspectives. Once while trying, rather ineffectually, to explain to a class of students why it was not neces-

So we are in fine confirmed in the belief that Quiller-Couch has erred in making Macbeth the victim of moral error. Rather has Shakespeare built his play on what Aristotle, in our author's summary, would call 'Frailty.' And it is not common human frailty, but frailty that proceeds from love, a 'love that covereth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.' Macbeth's devotion is indeed in this case frailty, mortal frailty, but frailty that may become a man.

We note that, on Macbeth's formal renunciation of his purpose (I. iii. 143, 144) to remain inactive, neutral,—

I am settled, and bend up

Each corporal agent to this terrible feat,—

the First Act ends, almost upon the instant. It is Shakespeare's principle that the resolution of the minor obstruction should thus bring the close of first acts severally, in both tragedy and comedy. His major obstructions are 'resolved,' either positively or negatively, in the second scene of the Second Act. We remember that, technically, the greater or major obstacle to Macbeth's rise to kingship is Malcolm, as named by Duncan the Prince of Cumberland. This obstruction is lifted from the path of the plot, at the point just designated, by the assassination.

II

Passing over Quiller-Couch's observations concerning the knocking on the gate, and the Porter's humor, which are acute and satisfying, we find ourselves moved to review his judgment of minor characters. We quote from pp. 46 and 48:

sary to postulate a Borgia nature as the origin of a deed like this which Lady Macbeth forces upon her husband, I was reminded of a mademoiselle Macbeth who had made history, not long before, almost in our very circle. A girl friend had stolen away by machinations her affianced lover, and she had reacted murderously against the traitor. She was high-bred, refined, religious, and had always lived a sheltered life. But the peculiarly maddening intensity of her wrong stung her to the act of poisoning—as it proved not fatally—her rival. Was this to be accounted less than Lady Macbeth's intended deed, which reached no farther than a purpose, being found by trial impossible to carry through? The students, as I found, adjudged neither of these unfortunates essentially abnormal, except as peculiarly liable by temperament to violent temptation.

Let us now return to Shakespeare's clever—as it seems to me, his immensely clever—flattening of the virtuous characters in this play. I have suggested the word for them—for your Rosses and Lennoxes. They are ordinary, and of purpose ordinary. . . .

Further, this flattening of the virtuous characters gives *Macbeth* (already Greek in its simplicity of plot) just that conviction of Doom, avenging and inexorable, which is often attributed to the Greek tragedians as their last, and lost, secret. I reiterate that nobody can care more than a farthing for Macduff on his own account. He had, to be sure, an unusual start in the world; but he has not quite lived up to it. His escape, which leaves his wife and children at Macbeth's mercy, is (to say the least) unheroic. By effecting Macbeth's discomfiture through such a man of straw, Shakespeare impresses on us the conviction—or, rather, he leaves us no room for anything but the conviction—that Heaven is at the work of avenging, and the process of retribution is made the more imposing as its agents are seen in themselves to be naught.

These remarks are in general happy, but seem wholly inapplicable to Macduff. This man's daring, in the amazing situation developed after the discovery (II. iii) of Duncan's murder, is sublime.

Macbeth, after Macduff reports that he was appointed to wake the King, proposes to bring him to the presence. But he fails to knock, or to usher his guest—as would be expected—across the threshold. He merely points out the door. When presently Macduff dashes out, crying

O horror, horror, horror! Tongue nor heart
Cannot conceive nor name thee,

Macbeth does not rush into the apartment, pretendingly to learn what has happened to the man committed to his tutelage and responsibility, but stands moveless, stolid, impassive. At Macduff's instance, he goes with Lennox, into the chamber. At the summons of the castle bell, Lady Macbeth, somewhat too quickly, but with well-affected surprise and challenge, comes in. Banquo, unsurprised, as we note, appears, and discourses with his hostess and Macduff in a vein quite out of keeping with the excitement of the moment. He cannot have had time to dress, and seems not to have been unprepared for what has happened. Malcolm and Donalbain, with other thanes unnamed and servants,¹¹ come in

¹¹ Lady Macbeth is borne out (I. 132) by unnamed persons. No one of the thanes mentioned here offers to assist.

to fill up the scene,—for what? To furnish audience for things now to be said. Macbeth has returned from the place of death. All eyes are fastened on him. He must now meet the test. His nature is sensitive and sympathetic, and no situation could be more trying. He begins well, though not quite naturally:

Had I but died an hour before this chance,
I had lived a blessed time; for from this instant
There's nothing serious in mortality.
All is but toys. Renown and grace is dead.
The wine of life is drawn, and the mere lees
Is left this vault to brag of.

It is not so hard to talk in sublime generals. But when the question comes, Who did it, the case is changed. Macbeth is silent, and Lennox answers,—

Those of his chamber, as it seem'd, had done it.
Their hands and faces were all badg'd with blood.
So were their daggers, which unwip'd we found
Upon their pillows.

Is there then a pause, each looking to his fellow? Those victims have been struck down, half-awake, with no chance to speak, and Lennox attempts to gloss over the ugly fact. 'They stared,' he says, 'and were distracted. No man's life was to be trusted with them.' Do the company think so? Macbeth, looking into their faces, seems to read dark imaginings. At any rate, he spoils his part by a colossal blunder. Feeling that he must not delay longer an avowal of his act, he tries fatally to explain and at the same time deprecate and excuse,—

I yet do I repent me of my fury,
That I did kill them.

If, taking his cue from Lennox's last remark, he had said, 'I killed them at sight, and would fain have made them die ten thousand deaths,' he would have passed this crisis of his trial perhaps successfully. But he is hopelessly unmanned, and his unaccountable, almost imbecile remark, that he 'repents him' of his 'fury' can have but one effect upon the company. There is one man only among them all whose soul reacts naturally and utterly and worthily. Macduff, as with the voice of doom, turns on him,—

Wherefore did you so?

Our sympathies are with Macbeth even in his failure, but we kindle at this righteous challenge, '*Wherefore?*'¹² "Nobody can care more than a farthing for Macduff on his own account"? Macduff is the man of the play, and from this hour is master of the outcome. At his challenge, Macbeth goes to pieces, tries to justify the 'fury' that he has repented of, and makes a frightful mess of it:

Who can be wise, temperate, and furious,
Loyal and neutral, in a moment? No man.
The expedition of my violent love
Outrun the pauser, Reason. . . . Who could refrain
That had a heart to love, and in that heart
Courage to make's love known?

Now wonder Lady Macbeth swoons, either feigningly or genuinely. She might well swoon from this sudden vision of where, in the eyes of Scotland, she and her husband have brought themselves. (But people who swoon, we remember, do not anticipate the fit and call for help.) Macduff, the new master of the household, does not stir to aid, but bids whoever will—and it is not Macbeth who wills—"look to the lady." Surely there can be no mistaking Shakespeare's meaning or purpose here. This man who is in present revolt is the only thane of Scotland who will refuse to lend himself to the mockery of Macbeth's coronation. He alone will disdain to appear at the feast designed to test the devotion of the lords. He is the only one of all who will make it his business to inaugurate rebellion, and seek help from outside the kingdom. And he is the appointed figure to execute the vengeance of the Almighty and of Scotland at the close.

Shakespeare's plays are distinguished from other dramas generally in that they are provided thus with a Finalizing Factor.

¹² One cannot but fancy that Quiller-Couch himself, under the same conditions, would have said that word, and become the protagonist of the play. It required more manhood certainly to defy the power thus of Macbeth, alone, than to oppose and then succumb (I. vii) to the evil genius of King Duncan. Who of us would have cared to be the hero of the play, at this moment, if we could have confronted that hero with such sublime, uncalculating loyalty to Scotland? Who of us could have joined himself, after that *Wherefore*, with the craven followers of Macbeth?

This Factor is a member of the cast who appears early in the action, and supplies the means or forces necessary for winding up the plot. Macduff furnishes this element in *Macbeth*. Shakespeare does not permit the personage fulfilling this part to come into competition with the title character. Neither does he bring in such factor as an alien element, or withhold him as a *deus ex machina* until the play must end. In other plays as in this one, we care more than a farthing's worth for his function. This finalizing factor in *Hamlet* is Laertes. In *Othello* it is Iago. We find him in Aufidius as we analyze the play of *Coriolanus*, we see him in Kent as we read *King Lear*. Bellarius supplies the part in *Cymbeline*, and Paulina in *The Winter's Tale*. We find the same feature in the greater comedies, as Puck in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Sebastian in *Twelfth Night*, and Duke Frederick in *As You Like It*. In no one of the thirty-seven plays credited to Shakespeare in this expedient of his more exploited or exalted than in *Macbeth*.¹³

It seems hardly worth while to quote the opinions of our author on the character and rôle of Banquo. We may more speedily finish with the topic by reviewing the evidence in the text. We have called attention, a few paragraphs back, to the fact that Banquo shows no surprise, on joining the company in the great hall, after servants, at Macduff's order, have rung the great bell of the castle. We might ponder a little at the quickness with which he enters, just after Lady Macbeth, who has been waiting for a cue. Malcolm and Donalbain, having taken time to dress, have evidently been awaked from sleep. Was Banquo awake already? Had he slept at all? We may infer from his aside (II. 7-9),—

Merciful powers,
Restrain in me the cursed thoughts that nature
Gives way to in repose,—

that he was in fear, at retiring, lest he should mutter of 'cursed thoughts' and so compromise himself to some hearing ear. Has he not then divined, from the constrained manner of Macbeth,

¹³ It is interesting to compare Victor Hugo's parallel or perhaps imitated expedient, in *Hernani*, of the horn.

and from the suppressed excitement of Lady Macbeth,—and indeed since from the veiled overtures (II. i. 21–24, 25, 26) of Macbeth himself, what the night holds for Scotland and her king? What should we, in Banquo's place, have thought? He is as loyal in his answer (II. 26–29),—

So I lose none [*i.e.* honor]
In seeking to augment it, but still keep
My bosom enfranchis'd and allegiance clear,
I shall be counsell'd,—

as he has seemed before. But is he as loyal in his heart? If he has sensed nothing disloyal, why does he qualify his language? After giving over his sword (i. 4) to Fleance, why, on seeing a torch and hearing steps does he ask for it again? Is he not in a friendly castle, shut in from all confederates of Macdonwald? Does he think Duncan safer than himself? Why does he seem or wish to bespeak something for the King through mention of 'unusual pleasure' and 'measureless content'?¹⁴ May not the lord of the realm be trusted to make his own acknowledgments? Does it not occur to Banquo that Duncan should have guard, some thane like himself, with grooms or soldiers, at the door of his chamber? When he declares to the company, after the discovery,—

In the great hand of God I stand, and thence
Against the undivulg'd pretence I fight
Of treasonous malice,—

does he mean to imply that he is devoid of conviction concerning the authors of the deed? He can affirm truly that he has himself done nothing. Can he say, before God, that he has left nothing undone?

Shakespeare has touched but lightly (I. ii. 33–41) on Banquo's part in the great battles. Duncan forces mention of the latter's partnership with Macbeth into the sergeant's story. Later (iv. 29–32) he makes Banquo's desert and glory equal to Macbeth's.

¹⁴ Why should Shakespeare mock us even here with a fresh instance of his control over our sympathies? How indeed can he so polarize this goodness of Duncan's nature as to hold us resolutely indifferent to his inhuman fate?

His daring and effectiveness have clearly not been equal with Macbeth's. Why has Duncan tried to make them so? Macbeth feels no jealousy, and conceives no fear till after the assassination. But Duncan's praise has put warrant under the witches' prophecy (iii. 65-68) that greatness shall come at least to Banquo's descendants. That makes him Macbeth's rival, if the victory does not.

Macbeth knows that his thanes are not wholehearted in their acceptance of his rule. Macduff has declined to witness his coronation. What is Banquo's state of mind? Macbeth does not need to recall the vision of consequences that filled his soul when Lady Macbeth (I. vii) came out to him from the banquet. He has taught Banquo bloody instructions. Shakespeare needs but to have Banquo betray to us a little of his jealousy, at the opening of Act III,¹⁵ and behave mysteriously. The intimation that he may possibly meddle with Macbeth puts him on the wrong side of our sympathies. We are willing that Macbeth shall make his throne secure.

Professor Quiller-Couch is at variance, it would seem, with the evidence here summarized. He holds that Banquo furnishes the Point of Rest for the whole play, standing beside the hero, like Horatio beside Hamlet, as the Ordinary Man. "To Banquo as to Macbeth the witches' predictions are offered. Macbeth shall be King of Scotland: Banquo shall beget kings. But whereas Macbeth, taking evil for good and under persuasion of his wife as well as of the supernatural, grasps at the immediate means to the end, Banquo, like an ordinary, well-meaning, sensible fellow, *doesn't do it*, and therefore on the fatal night can go like an honest man to his dreams. . . . from the moment Macbeth yields and apparently succeeds, Banquo, who has not yielded, becomes a

¹⁵ Shakespeare's clear dramatic vision admits, as we have seen, but two obstructions 'to involve the plot.' Other playwrights allow a greater number, sometimes as many as four, thus dividing the attention and interest of the audience or reader. The Second Act finishes with the major involvement, and adjusts the plot to the situation thus inaugurated. Shakespeare's third acts introduce new forces and new action. Here these forces are Banquo's ambition and jealousy, and Macbeth's suspicion, which last furnishes the motive for a fresh assassination.

living reproach to him. He is the shadowiest of *dangers*, but a very actual *reproach*: and therefore Macbeth's first instinct is, by removing Banquo, to obliterate the standard of decency, of loyalty—if that loyalty were partial only, why, then, the more credit for obeying it!—which survives to accuse him. So Banquo becomes naturally the first sacrifice to be paid to a guilty conscience, and Banquo is murdered." This is the gist of our author's six pages of discussion.

Shakespeare will use the consequences of this murder to precipitate the plot. But to appreciate fully this turn in the story, which has no warrant in Holinshed, we must consider briefly the use which Shakespeare has made of the supernatural in the play at large.

The part played by the Witches seems to the present writer but imperfectly recognized by Professor Quiller-Couch, as by critics generally. Shakespeare was presumably unacquainted with the Hierarchy of Dionysius and the mediaeval notion of dualism between good and evil angels of the various orders. Baconians might find some color for their theory in the fact that the witch-masters in this play appear to be evil Principalities of that scheme, and concerned with fomenting calamity and woe for the nations of the earth.¹⁶ The Witches here are openly obedient to

¹⁶ Just as in the Sphere of the Moon—which was nearest to the earth—each child at birth came under the influence of a good angel and an evil genius or angel, always in contention for control, so in the Sphere of Venus, each nation was under tutelage of beneficent Principalities, with whom malignant spirits of the same order were incessantly at war, trying to afflict and destroy. Clear, bright days were due to the temporary pre-vailement of the former, storms and foul weather, to recurrent triumphs of the evil Lucifers. Macbeth rehearses (IV. i. 50-60) modes of deviltry that the Witches, through their master, might set in motion. The play opens in 'thunder, lightning and in rain' which, because of the fog and filthy air—not usually attendant upon electric storms—were perhaps intended to suggest diabolism. The commotions in nature on the night (II. iii. 59-66) of the assassination are not doubtfully of this origin. And is Shakespeare's thought that the Third Witch, who has apparently been hovering over the scene of battle while her sisters execute distant commissions, has had to do with the discomfiture of Macdonald, by making him helpless against (I. ii. 16-23) the strangely hazardous lunge and lift of Macbeth's sword? Any tyro should have fended the thrust successfully.

these masters, who intend further mischief for Scotland, in spite of the issue of the battle, in which the good angels seem to have prevailed. Or perhaps we are to infer that the evil angels, having used Macdonwald, connive finally at his defeat and death. They purpose now to draw Macbeth over to their side. They cannot or at least do not bewitch this hero of the hour, nor even Lady Macbeth, but will manage to effect their will by way of both. Even the apparition of the air-drawn dagger, which will lead Macbeth to Duncan's chamber, will only lead the way he is to go by his own resolve.

However we may conclude concerning Shakespeare's use and knowledge of mediaeval dualism, there is indubitably a consistent and governing conception concerning the Witches' function in his thought. Their masters are the cause of the new tribulations that are in store for Scotland. Their animus and power are apparent in each of the first four acts. They foreknow the outcome of the battle, and commission their agents, before the first scene opens, to meet with and greet Macbeth. They pronounce to him, on the road to Forres, a prediction that he shall himself fulfill. In the Second Act, they wait upon his stroke, and hold carnival (II. iii. 59-66) over the consummation of the murder. In the Third Act they provide a climax for the plot. In the Fourth, they lure on their victim by false promises to his doom, which is to involve, not another rebellion like Macdonwald's, but civil war, with intermeddling from an outside power, the most dangerous and determined enemy of the country.

The Witch-masters furnish, in the Third Act, not only a climax for the plot, but the chief sensation of the whole history.¹⁷ Here is the place in the play where the author's art is most pronounced and daring. Ignoring ten prosperous years of Macbeth's rule, he seizes upon Holinshed's mention of a banquet, ordered for compassing Banquo's murder, as the means of precipitating the

¹⁷ The present writer accepts the stage tradition confirmed by Dr. Forman's testimony, that the ghost of Banquo must be shown before the physical eye, not only of Macbeth, but of the audience. He is also of the opinion that the guests, who have not yet had time to digest the circumstances of Banquo's failure to return, infer that it is an apparition of the murdered Duncan that unmans their host.

plot. The Witch-masters trump up an apparition of the mutilated victim, install it in the royal seat, and so horrify Macbeth that he forgets to guard his murderous secret. Lady Macbeth precipitously orders out the guests, supperless, from fear lest Macbeth pronounce before them the very name of the form he sees. These thanes were called together to ensure committal to Macbeth's cause. As each canters forth, with his grooms, in the dead of night, towards his castle, he feels himself absolved from the expected obligation, and not wholly disinclined to a future committal of quite a different sort.¹⁸ Thus has Shakespeare inspired the leaders of the people, against the eventual overthrow of the usurper, with a personal as well as a political animus or motivation.

This imaginative anticipation of the outcome is the constructive center of the play. There is 'descending action' from the moment of the unsuccessful banquet till the end of the history. We are convinced that Macbeth is doomed, and we visualize the defeat and punishment with which his career will end. Because of the vision in which the conviction comes to us, we may call this crowning part of the construction the Subjective Climax. We create for ourselves a conclusion without waiting for enabling or compelling facts. The Objective Climax is reached at the vital moment when the anticipated issue becomes actual. All the

¹⁸ To those who have not regarded the presence of Banquo's ghost as counterfeited, a summary of the suggestions in the text may be of interest. The figures that make up the 'show of eight kings,' in the first scene of the Fourth Act, are incontestably creations of the Witch-masters, or of diabolism. Macbeth recognizes the 'blood-boltered Banquo' as the same apparition that unnerved him at the banquet, the night before, except that it now smiles on him in triumph. Evidently again this is not, in Shakespeare's thought, a veritable disembodied spirit, since such, by the notions of the age, were permitted to visit the earth only, like the ghost of the elder Hamlet, by high authority, and not by petition of evil powers, *and not in the day time*. Macbeth, we remember, proposed to seek the Weird Sisters (III. iv. 132, 133) 'betimes,' 'to-morrow.' This understanding of Macbeth's purpose is confirmed by the author—whoever he was—of Hecate's censure (*cf.* II. 14-17) of the Witches in the next scene. Also messengers follow Macbeth to the Witches' cavern, to report Macduff's flight, as in regular course of the day's activities.

tragedies of Shakespeare are provided, at the middle of the Third Act, with an anticipative climax of this kind. This occurs in *Hamlet* at the point, in the intercalated play, when the king rises. Iago inaugurates it in *Othello* by snatching Desdemona's handkerchief from Emilia. Brutus supplies it for *Julius Caesar* through consenting that Antony address the populace. Other dramatists contrive a constructive climax, but do not force upon audience or reader imaginative inferences concerning respective outcomes. Shakespeare retains in general the same typical feature in the construction of his comedies.

The drama of *Macbeth* ends in a manner opposite to what we had wished and hoped. This however does not make the work a tragedy. That which finally happens is out of keeping with the moral desert of the hero at the moment when we conceive for him his future and crave to see it realized. His failure to make his destiny square with his aims and possibilities is distressing to us, and this reaction in our sympathies is thought of and spoken of as 'tragic' or 'tragic.' The substance and the effect of such a history are alike called Tragedy.

Shakespeare differs from other dramatists in forcing his audiences and readers to conceive and covet a definite consummation, as here in *Macbeth*, as early as the second scene or situation in the *First Act*. In work from other hands, the consummation is often not signified till near the end of the First Act, or is left shadowy altogether. After hearing from Ross and the 'bleeding sergeant,' in the present play, of Macbeth's amazing victory, we find ourselves possessed by the desire that this master may achieve a great career, and that Scotland, through him, may win a worthy place among the nations. We are caught also by the prospect that we ourselves may witness later some of the assured exploits of this Bellona's bridegroom.

In other tragedies of Shakespeare, the prefigured consummation is wholly ethical, and fails of fulfillment in a manner not inconsistent with the earlier conditions of the plot. Our minds experience a normal *katharsis* of anxiety and pity. In *Hamlet* we nowhere repent our enthusiasm for the title character. Othello does not deserve his fate, nor does Brutus, nor Antony,

nor Lear, and we feel the same sympathy with them at the end as at the middle or the beginning. But in *Macbeth* we are conscious of having been dealt with unfairly. We find ourselves at the close in the plight of naughty children who have repeated a moral experiment, and learn once more that connivance in wrongdoing must end in regret and shame. *Macbeth* is thus, of all Shakespeare's work, an immoral play. We have been forced, through the author's knowledge of our minds, to commit ourselves to a cause and course that we finally repudiate. One grows hospitable to the notion, after this experience, that Shakespeare wrote the play to order,—perhaps to gratify a Stuart's pride in a prophesied kingship and origin.

III

Quiller-Couch again, in his lecture (pp. 72 ff.) on *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, formulates the purpose of this volume:

I do suggest that we can immensely increase our delight in Shakespeare and strengthen our understanding of him if, as we read him again and again, we keep asking ourselves *how the thing was done*. I am sure that—hopeless as complete success must be—by this method we get far nearer to the *τὸ τί ἦν εἶναι* of a given play than by searching among 'sources' and 'origins,' by debating how much Shakespeare took from Chaucer's *Knights Tale*, or how much he borrowed from Golding's *Ovid*, or how much Latin he learned at Stratford Grammar School, or how far he anticipated modern scientific discoveries, or why he gave the names "Pease-blossom," "Cobweb," "Moth," "Mustard-Seed" to his fairies.

This is a noble and sufficient motive. The common sense of scholars is coming to recognize that the question of where the hair and feathers and spears of grass come from with which the robin weaves her nest, is of minor moment. The nest's the thing,—how it is made fast from the beginning to the double fork of a tree, how rounded into symmetry, and made soft and warm for new-hatched young. If we cannot go back to the art, the instinct that guides the making of the marvel, let us not flatter ourselves into the belief that identifying materials is identifying the processes that use them. 'Workmanship,' let us remember, does not begin until processes begin, and processes involve art. The greatest thing in literature is the art of Shakespeare. It is

perhaps no less an instinct than the gift of constructing a perfectly rounded and artistic nest. But it is an instinct that is not, like the robin's or the wren's, inscrutable. The psychology and the processes of Shakespeare's art can be analyzed and known. It is gratifying to find this truth so plainly postulated.

But this excellent promise of the author falls considerably short of fulfillment in the present lecture. It opens with sensible observations on the development of Shakespeare's notion of what a play should be, and what his chief expedients were. The first is "the trick of a woman disguised in man's apparel." Another works the plot upon a shipwreck, shown or reported. "*The Comedy of Errors* and *Pericles* are pivoted upon shipwreck; by shipwreck Perdita in *The Winter's Tale* is abandoned on the magical seacoast of Bohemia. *Twelfth Night* takes its intrigue from shipwreck, and, for acting purposes, opens with Viola's casting ashore. . . . *The Tempest* opens in the midst of shipwreck. In *The Comedy of Errors* and *Twelfth Night* shipwreck leads on to another trick—that of mistaken identity, as it is called. In *The Comedy of Errors* (again) and *Pericles* it leads on to the trick of a long-lost mother, supposed to have perished in shipwreck, revealed as living yet and loving. . . . One might make a long list of these favorite themes; from Shakespeare's pet one of the jealous husband or lover and the woman foully misjudged (Hero, Desdemona, Hermione), . . . to the trick of the commanded murderer whose heart softens (Hubert, Pisanio),"—only Pisanio never intended to harm Imogen.¹⁹

And then, "All young artists in drama are preoccupied with plot or 'construction.' 'Character' comes later. The plot of *Love's Labour's Lost* turns on 'confusion of identity,' the Princess and her ladies masking themselves to the perplexity of their masked lovers. . . . *The Comedy of Errors* is an experiment on a different model; not Lyly now, but Plautus, and Plautus out-Plautus'd. Again we have confusion of identity for the motive, but here confusion of identity does not merely turn on

¹⁹ If he did so purpose, why should he bring along a page's doublet, hat, and hose to the place of execution? Were they to serve as burial clothes for Imogen?

the plot, as in *Love's Labour's Lost*; it means all the play, and the play means nothing else. Where Plautus had one pair of twin brothers so featured that they could not be told apart, Shakespeare adds another pair, and the fun is drawn out with astonishing dexterity. Let three things, however, be observed: (1) The feat is achieved at a total loss of character—and indeed he who starts out to confuse identity must, consciously or not, set himself the task of obliterating character. (2) Unless a convention of pasteboard be accepted as substitute for flesh and blood, the events are incredible. (3) On the stage of Plautus the convention of two men being like enough in feature to deceive even their wives might pass. It was *actually* a convention of pasteboard, since the players wore masks. Paint two masks alike, and (since masks muffle voices) the trick is done. But (4) Shakespeare, dispensing with the masks, doubled the confusion by tacking a pair of Dromios on to a pair of Antipholuses; and to double one situation so improbable is to multiply its improbability by the hundred.

"It is all done, to be sure, with such amazing resource that, were ingenuity of stagecraft the test of great drama, we might say, 'Here is a man who has little or nothing to learn.' But ingenuity of stagecraft is not the test of great drama; and in fact Shakespeare had more than a vast deal to learn. He had a vast deal to unlearn.

"A dramatic author must start by mastering certain stage-mechanics. Having mastered them, he must—to be great—unlearn reliance on them, learn to cut them away as he grows to perceive that the secret of his art resides in playing human beings against human beings, man against woman, character against character, will against will—not in devising 'situations' or 'curtains' and operating his puppets to produce these. His art touches climax when his 'situations' and curtains so befall that we tell ourselves, 'It is wonderful—yet what else could have happened?' *Othello* is one of the cleverest stage plays ever written. What does it leave us to say but, in an awe of pity, 'This is most terrible, but it must have happened so'? In great art, as in life, character makes the bed it lies on or dies on.

"So in the next play, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, we find Shakespeare learning and, perhaps even more deliberately, un-learning. *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is not a great play: but it is a curious one, and a very wardrobe of 'effects' in which Shakespeare afterwards dressed himself to better advantage.

"In *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* Shakespeare is feeling for character, for real men and women. Tricks no longer satisfy him. Yet the old tricks haunt him. He must have again, as in *The Comedy of Errors*, two gentlemen with a servant apiece—though the opposition is discriminated and more cunningly balanced. For stage effect Proteus (supposed a friend and a gentleman) must suddenly behave with incredible baseness. For stage effect Valentine must surrender his true love to his false friend with a mawkish generosity that deserves nothing so much as a kicking:

All that was mine in Silvia I give thee.

And what about Silvia? Where does Silvia come in? That devastating sentence may help the curtain, but it blows all character to the winds. There are now no gentlemen in Verona."

This is of course edifying and quite what is to be expected of a mind acute in character distinctions. No one can so well be trusted to discuss the growth of an artist's powers as he who has himself experienced that growth. Who else can know of the chasm that lies between vision and expression? "All art is seeing and saying." It is not easy always to observe. Yet it is sometimes easy to see, but impossible to say. Trollope speaks, we remember, almost dolorously of an author's limitations:

It is to be regretted that no mental method of daguerreotype or photography has yet been discovered by which the characters of men can be reduced to writing and put into grammatical language with an unerring precision of truthful description. How often does the novelist feel, ay, and the historian also and the biographer, that he has conceived within his mind and accurately depicted on the tablet of his brain the full character and personage of a man, and that nevertheless, when he flies to pen and ink to perpetuate the portrait, his words forsake, elude, disappoint and play the deuce with him, till at the end of a dozen pages the man described has no more resemblance to the man conceived than the sign-board at the corner of the street has to the Duke of Cambridge.—*Barchester Towers* I. 232.

Evidently, in Trollope's case, the chasm between a vision of character and the portrayal of it was a yawning one. Quiller-Couch implies that Shakespeare did not at first see character well, but had to feel for it, if haply he might sense or catch it in some feature. We fear that our author is grievously wrong in this. It would not be harder to show that Shakespeare from the first saw character whole and drew it whole when needed than that he developed these capabilities play by play. To be sure he did not always exploit personality in the Comedies. But *Romeo and Juliet* is as complete in both aspects as *Othello* or *King Lear*, and might be held more vivid and telling in character distinctions than *Cymbeline*, *The Tempest*, or *The Winter's Tale*, which we remember were his latest plays. Shakespeare of course is Shakespeare for nothing besides so much as for bridging the chasm between seeing and saying as no man else has ever bridged it. He was surely alive to character differences even in the *Errors*, though, as Quiller-Couch has shown, he might not use them. And he had his bridge-making technic with him all the while, as the next drama in the series of Comedies proves. Let us follow Quiller-Couch a little further:

We come to *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*; and, with the three earlier comedies to guide us, shall attempt to conjecture how the young playwright would face this new piece of work.

Ne let the Pouke nor other evill sprights,
 Ne let mischivous witches with theyr charmes,
 Ne let hob-Goblins, names whose sense we see not,
 Fray us with things that be not:
 Let not the shriech Oule nor the Storke be heard,
 Nor the night Raven that still deadly yels,
 Nor damnèd ghosts cald up with mighty spels,
 Nor griesly Vultures, make us once afeard,
 Ne let th'unpleasant Quayre of Frogs still croking
 Make us to wish the'r choking.

Let none of these theyr drery accents sing;
 Ne let the woods them answer, nor theyr eccho ring.

And I compare this with the fairies' last pattering ditty in our play:

Now the wasted brands do glow,
 Whilst the screech-owl, screeching loud,
 Puts the wretch that lies in woe
 In remembrance of a shroud.
 Now it is the time of night
 That the graves, all gaping wide,
 Every one lets forth his sprit,
 In the church-way paths to glide:
 And we fairies, that do run
 By the triple Hecate's team,
 From the presence of the sun,
 Following darkness like a dream,
 Now are frolic; not a mouse
 Shall disturb this hallow'd house;
 I am sent with broom, before,
 To sweep the dust behind the door.

To the best bride-bed will we,
 Which by us shall blessed be. . . .

And each several chamber bless,
 Through this palace, with sweet peace.

Can any one set these two passages together and doubt *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* to be intended for a merry *katharsis*, a pretty purgation, of those same goblin terrors which Spenser would exorcise from the bridal chamber? For my part, I make little doubt that Shakespeare had Spenser's very words in mind as he wrote.

Here, then, we have a young playwright commissioned to write a wedding play—a play to be presented at court. He is naturally anxious to shine; and, moreover, though his fellow-playwrights already pay him the compliment of being a little jealous, he still has his spurs to win. . . .

Indeed! Indeed! What sort of conclusion might one not establish, if one were allowed to make up major and minor premises, after this fashion, as one goes along? Quiller-Couch as good as admits that there is no proof at all, nothing beyond this shadowy suggestion of a 'purgation,' that this is a wedding play, or that Shakespeare was 'commissioned' to write one to be shown at court. To be sure, there is a marriage in prospect, as the piece opens, which same marriage is still to be consummated at the close. That is the only difference distinguishing it as a 'wedding' play from *As You Like It*, or *The Merchant of Venice*, or *Twelfth Night*, in which matrimonial felicity is in prospect only at the end. We cannot thus beg the question, at the very start, if we are to inquire profitably 'how the thing was done.' And, as has been said already, the upshot of the lecture, which the author has based upon these remarkable assumptions, does not fulfill the promise or the purpose of bringing to light Shakespeare's artistic method or procedures. Quiller-Couch gets no farther than a supposed soliloquy of his author, in which he imagines how the strangely incongruous elements,—the twigs and feathers and horsehair, chanced to be discerned as proper materials with which to build. But how they were wreathed into marvellous unity, the $\tau\omicron\ \tau\acute{\iota}\ \eta\nu\ \epsilon\lambda\upsilon\alpha\iota$ of the play as art, is not reached at all.

So we are thrown back upon our old ignorance of the occasion and the inspiration of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*. We can be sure of nothing save that Shakespeare had to make or chose to make, at some uncertain moment, another play to meet the needs of the company with which he was associated. When he at that or some earlier moment ran through the group of possible subjects in his mind, he came upon the idea of utilizing the lore of elves and fairies. If he had liked Lyly's way well enough, or had inclined to what later became Ben Jonson's way, he would have constructed a masque showing Oberon and Titania and Puck meddling importantly in the affairs of mortals. The common folk believed in that sort of meddling as steadfastly as they believed in the doctrines of grace and perdition. The more intellectual sort of theater-goers were not as yet weaned wholly

away from interest in the old racial superstitions. Knowing that nothing would take better than a spectacle revealing the antics of these tricky children of the air, it is not strange at all that Shakespeare should decide to make it the basis of the play proposed.

Now Shakespeare had an idea, different considerably from modern literary and dramatic notions, that it is often well to do vital things incidentally rather than openly and directly. We find it hard to imagine him even tempted to make up solid action with an Oberon as hero and a Titania as heroine of a proper plot. We may expect him to keep these elvish figures, with Puck, as the age conceived them, fairly behind the scenes, and apart from human sympathy. We remember that when he wishes to show the helplessness of strong natures, as Benedict and Beatrice, in relation to their own psychology, he does not write a *Much Ado* with these as leading parts. He trumps up a pair of lovers, Claudio and Hero, and starts the play off on the beaten track. Later, when Beatrice has made Benedict vow, with a lover's absurd subjectivity, to kill Claudio, he inscribes upon these natures the lesson of the play. *But*, we must mark, he holds us from the first and throughout, according to his rule of dramatic construction, with the conceived and coveted 'consummation,' that Claudio and Hero wed,—that Jack shall have his Gill. Again, wishing to exploit the story of 'the Jew of Venice,' he fixes up a plot that makes the part in seeming incidental, while subordinating the progress of the drama to it. In other words, *The Merchant of Venice* means fundamentally and vitally Shylock, though the dramatic construction makes of his evil purpose only a 'minor obstruction' to the 'consummation' which we prefigure and desire, and which is of course the union of Bassanio and Portia. So here, in the play which Shakespeare has now in hand, he proceeds similarly, and will unfold certain occult concerns and doings of the fairies on a background of real people and real life.

And who shall be the people? What real life shall be enacted? Shakespeare's audiences, at this stage of his popularity, would answer, 'Why, of course, the highest. Deal for us again with kings, and queens, and great folk, and affairs above our own narrow and insipid range.' We must not forget that it was a

romantic age. The popular fancy craved and expected unexampled things. And, somehow, we cannot imagine Shakespeare taking a low aim here. At any rate, it is clear that he turned to classic myths. Theseus is more than a kingly figure. North's Plutarch has it that the Athenians honored him as a demigod at the end. Thus Shakespeare removes the theater of his fairy operations far from all suggestions of allegoric or local reference. And the story of Hippolyta and her Amazons seems to have appealed to Shakespeare,—even if no author since has bethought him of its dramatic possibilities. And the marriage of these super-mortals can be turned to rich account. Royal weddings always set the world agog.

Then, too, Shakespeare from first to last has an eye to contrasts. He delights to bring prince and grave-digger,thane and gate-warder, into the lists of intellectual combat, and not always to the discomfiture of the humbler wit. The wide-mouthed 'countryman' presumes to jest with Cleopatra over the asps that she has sent for. Dogberry and Verges are fetched from England to save Hero from the plot of Borachio and Don John. To fill up the other end of the social scale, between which and our epic pair the shadowy forms of Puck and Oberon shall ply their trade, Bottom and his fellow mechanicals shall flit back from British to Athenian shops, through twenty-five centuries of Aryan history.

Here, then, are the incongruous materials, the gross and the gossamer, the romantic and the vulgar elements. By what manipulations of art can Shakespeare wreathe them into poetic and dramatic unity? How shall it be possible to relate the unspeakable Bottom, and Quince, and Flute, and Snout, to the redoubtable Theseus and the irresistible Hippolyta? How is either party to be dealt with by the fairy personages? Of course, it will not do to bring the bridal figures, nor indeed—soberly and vitally—the coarse mechanicals, into subservience to the fairy parts. So it will be necessary to supply other characters, not of the highest nor of the lowest order, for Oberon and Puck to disport themselves, incidentally to their own concerns, with and upon. This is the sum of the task, the problem on which Shakespeare has set his thought.

We will watch Shakespeare set the scene. Overhead is the massive and sumptuous palace of Theseus, kinsman of Hercules, who slew the Minotaur. There are shining pillars, and marvellous hangings, and two thrones perhaps of gold. And note the speech of these affianced sovereigns:²⁰

Hippolyta appeals to us especially in this strange alien home. She has been queen of the revolt against a man-ruled world. But she feels a woman's poetic anticipation of joy in the solemnities, the formalities of her bridal, though it must be solemnized far from the scenes, the associations, and the companions of her serious years. We share in this idealization, and 'conceive and covet' that all her expectations may be fully realized. This is the slender but sufficient 'consummation' of the play, promised to prove a comedy, in hand.

Philostrate is commissioned upon the moment to stir up the Athenian youth to merriments, and thus supply the pomp and revelling that shall make up the celebrative part of the solemnities. 'Athenian youth,' mark you, unsupported by any women from the camp or household of the bride, or by any maids or matrons of the court or from the city. But Theseus, 'just like a man,' does not appreciate that a stag-entertainment, under the conditions, might not be accordant with Hippolyta's mood or wishes. We react to the blunder, and fear that the solemnities

²⁰ And note, especially, the run-on lines. According to the verse-diviners, this proportion off 2 to 1 should rank the text with *Cymbeline* and *Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare's latest work. Yet *Midsummer-Night's Dream* can hardly have been written more than two years later than *Love's Labour's Lost*.

Theseus. Now, fair Hippolyta, our nuptial hour
Draws on apace: four happy days bring in
Another moon. But oh, methinks, how slow
This old moon wanes! She lingers my desires,
Like to a step-dame or a dowager
Long withering out a young man's revenue.

Hippolyta. Four days will quickly steep themselves in night;
Four nights will quickly dream away the time;
And then the moon, like to a silver bow
New-bent in heaven, shall behold the night
Of our solemnities.

may not harmonize, even outwardly, with the feelings she has cherished. This purpose or order of Duke Theseus is of course the first or 'minor' obstruction to the 'consummation' which motivates us to watch the play.

The 'major' obstruction or involvement follows hard upon. While Theseus sits upon the throne of state, not alone as ruler, and lawgiver, but also as supreme judge, a group of subjects seeks admission to the presence. Egeus, an Athenian householder, conducts his daughter, Hermia, and her two suitors, one Demetrius, chosen of her father, and Lysander, approved by her, before the judgment seat. And thus Hippolyta, queen of protest against the injustices of man, who lifts baby daughters from the arms of helpless mothers to cast out upon the wilds, and who, when any such are suffered to be nourished and brought up, forces them to wed unloved husbands,—this Hippolyta, protagonist of the rights of woman, first suffragette of the centuries, must even now foretaste the institutional subjection of her sex in all the days before her. The appeal of Egeus, invoking the power of the state to coerce his daughter, is affirmed. There is no hesitancy or pity in the doom:

Hermia. But I beseech your grace that I may know
The worst that may befall me in this case,
If I refuse to wed Demetrius.

Theseus. Either to die the death, or to abjure
For ever the society of men.

We are concerned, and deeply—as deeply as Shakespeare allows to happen in a comedy—both for Hippolyta's peace of mind, and for her nuptials. Hermia, we are sure, will not submit, and four days will bring the issue. If the sentence is carried out, will not this bride revolt? The author has made the case as harsh as possible. Does Theseus think to enhance, by his manner of dealing with it, the merriment and revelling? He has at any rate set up a paramount hindrance, a major obstruction to the outcome that we desire. If this obstruction is not lifted from the plot, the comedy will prove a tragedy. Theseus is blind as well as heartless. But evidently (I.i. 122) he can read a face:

Come, my Hippolyta,—*what cheer*, my love?

'How is it with you? What is the matter?'

Here Shakespeare's wreathing of the parts begins. He makes Lysander and Hermia resolve to flee, and they arrive, for the first stage, no farther than the haunting grounds of the fairies. It is a clever but not an astonishing stroke to let Puck blunder, and pour the idealizing juice on the wrong eyes, which will prove right ones for the relief of Hippolyta's trepidation. Helena is brought into the scene, we suspect, as the appointed match for Demetrius. At any rate, Hermia will not be punished for marrying Demetrius, or for further trying to elope with him. So our major obstruction is dismissed from the plot, and in the second scene of the Second Act, just where it should be by the rule.

We return to the construction of the First Act. The Athenian youth have responded to the call of Philostrate. One club or circle are at work upon *The Battle with the Centaurs*, shaping it into ballad form, to be rendered by a trained singer to the harp. A group of lusty fellows are for reviving an old performance, *The Riot of the Topsy Bacchanals*, who rend a Thracian singer in their frenzy. A more literary or refined company are preparing *The Thrice Three Muses Mourning for the Death of Learning*. Probably other intellectuals are busied similarly, for Athens is no small city, nor is it barren in resources. Then, also, hard-handed working men would do honor to their Duke, and select a cast just like their betters for a play. That Shakespeare makes us look in upon these only, while they in conceit and loutishness discuss their parts, is sufficient intimation that he means to bring out their work. So when we think of Hippolyta and her general dislike of men, even when not redolent of garlic, we are persuaded that Theseus's idea was stupid, and that the 'feast in great solemnity,' after the formal wedding, will not be worthily carried through. Thus the minor obstruction, subjective again as in *Macbeth* but not lifted as in that play from the plot, with its resolute ends the act.²¹

²¹ The construction strikes one as lumbering and heavy for so light a comedy. But Shakespeare seems unable to draft a play except upon this general plan. By it, either or neither of the obstructions may be removed

It is a delightful medley, and almost as intricate in point of plot as *Cymbeline*. The domestic affairs of Titania and Oberon constitute a transcendental comedy, ingeniously developed as a sort of interlude in the Second Act. The finest poetry in the play is centered here, and compliment to Elizabeth is contrived by use of an incident, as told by Oberon, too sublimated to be witnessed by mortals, or even the eyes of Puck. With this, along with the story of Titania's changeling, the occult harrying of farmer folk, and the jealousy of Oberon, the business of the play seems shifted bodily to the plane of the supernatural. Thus the author prepares us for his meddling, through fairy influence, with the destinies of the middle figures—the pairs of Athenian lovers—as also with the preposterous rehearsal of the mechanicals, in the next act.

The Third Act begins, typically, with new action,—here with the stampede of Quince and Snug and Flute and Snout and Starveling, as led on by Puck, 'through bog, through bush, through brake, through brier;' and with the exquisite doting of Titania upon Bottom. Now follows the harrying of the misfit couples,—Helena, big of frame, begging to be shielded from the nails of petite Hermia, and bewildered the while by the insistent wooing of both Demetrius and Lysander, who presently exhaust themselves trying to hunt each other out for mortal combat. The human and the elvish are most veritably brought together, philistine mortals, less and greater, are delivered into the hand of Shakespeare's unseen and unsuspected ministers. And at this point, as the swains pant from following the simulated challenges of Puck, the 'subjective climax' of the play is reached. This prevision of the outcome is effected through Oberon's order (III. ii. 366-369) to restore to Lysander's eyes their wonted admiration of Hermia's charms. The reform of Demetrius's vision, as may happen from magical anointing even outside the boundaries of fairyland, is lasting.

from plots. Both are eliminated in *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Twelfth Night*, *Merchant of Venice*, and other plays. Both obstacles stay and become integral parts of the piece in *Lear*, *Cymbeline*, *As You Like It*, *Much Ado*, and *The Winter's Tale*.

The Fourth Act is properly, and in Shakespeare always, a preparing-time. Titania resigns her changeling, and is restored to sanity, and the fairies break up their game at dawn. Horns sound, and Theseus and Hippolyta, who have somehow kept Egeus for three days with them, come upon and annex the middle party. These two couples, from the wonder of their fortunes, are invited to the temple, where, not much after sunrise, the triple weddings are dispatched. Thus are all preliminaries completed, and the 'solemnities,' on which our consummation is based, and by which Hippolyta sets such store, put in prospect for the concluding act.

The scene is set again, as at opening, in the palace. Theseus and Hippolyta, on their thrones of state, are still discussing the adventures told by their partners of the wedding ceremony, and how Demetrius's 'love to Hermia melted as the snow.' No-where else does Shakespeare exalt a character through endowments of thought and speech as he exalts Theseus now:

Hippolyta. 'T is strange, my Theseus, that these lovers speak of,
Theseus. More strange than true. I never may believe
These antique fables, nor these fairy toys.
Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,
Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend
More than cool reason ever comprehends.
The lunatic, the lover, and the poet
Are of imagination all compact.
One sees more devils than vast hell can hold;
That is the madman. The lover, all as frantic,
Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.
The poet's eye in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name.

This, if not the language of the gods, is couched and phrased in the dialect at least of demigods. These superior beings were perhaps strangers to the promptings of gallantry. This may be the reason why Theseus, as in full character of master and lord he scans the report of Philostrate to select the opening sports,

does not consult Hippolyta. But, as she will later learn, her preferences and opinings are not to weigh greatly in court affairs. The title, *A Tedious Brief Scene of Young Pyramus and His Love Thisbe*, catches the eye of Theseus. Warned as to its characters, he replies,—

I will hear that play!

Hippolyta (ll. 85, 88) demurs, and (ll. 212, 255, 323) is plainly bored throughout. Theseus, not unaccordant with Ruskin's pleasing conception (*Praeterita*, paragraphs 4 and 5 at opening) of a King, consoles, persuades, excuses, and ordains. Thus is the 'consummation' that we conceived for the issue of our play not greatly defeated—as it must not be in a comedy—after all.

Is there need to summarize? The 'crew of patches, rude mechanicals that work for bread,' have been brought into relations with the great, and by a splendid charity, have been credited with success. They have withdrawn in conscious pride as having furnished artistic entertainment to the court. The Athenian lovers, because of their miraculous deliverance from outlawry and despair, are lodged, even as the royal bridegroom and Hippolyta, in great rooms of the palace. And the fairies, who have wrought blessing without bane or mishap, keep sentinel through the night watches in the halls and chambers. So the play, out of jarring and incongruous and seemingly impossible materials, has been made into a consummate unity, with the fairies holding throughout and closingly protagonistic rôles.

IV

Professor Quiller-Couch next discusses *The Merchant of Venice*, and not unsatisfyingly. The organization of this play is not so intricate, by Shakespeare's scheme, as *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, though the problem of interlacing its two main threads is by no means simple. It has been observed (p. 35) already that the part of Shylock is principal, but treated, in the construction, as secondary and incidental. Shakespeare, for the first thing, sets about supplying the need of some one to put in Shylock's power, and furnishing a reason and an occasion for the step. He feels that he cannot do better than present two

prospective lovers, whom the lack of ready money, on the part of the intending wooer, keeps asunder.²² We naturally fall into sympathy with Bassanio and Portia as hero and heroine of the story to be told, and are thus provided with the 'consummation' necessary to hold us to the plot. We desire and expect that the lovers shall have their will.²³ Shylock's hesitancy in coming to

²² Many critics, among whom Quiller-Couch seems to enroll himself, fall afoul of Bassanio as a fortune hunter. But manifestly, were Shakespeare to make his hero a man 'of independent means,' he could not bring Shylock into the plot. Nor could he use a 'poor but honest' suitor, from outside Portia's class. So he needs must provide some person whose estate is 'involved,' but not beyond repair. And finally, we must not forget that a bride, in Shakespeare's age, from royalty down was expected to bring to the compact something besides herself, as an earnest of her worth,—namely, a respectable *dot*, which as a matter of course was to be placed in her husband's hands as his or for his use.

²³ If we have not discerned the fact already, we shall perhaps be interested to find that Shakespeare's dramatic scheme holds good typically of the modern novel. At some point, within the early chapters, correspondent to the second scene or situation in a play of Shakespeare, the reader sights and desires a specific consummation as the outcome of the forces and conditions introduced. The vision and desire of this conclusion will spur the reader on through four or five hundred pages of happenings till the end is reached. Generally, in a standard example, as Scott's *Quentin Durward* or Meredith's *Evan Harrington*, the whole number of pages divided by five will designate parts roughly answering to acts in a play of Shakespeare. The consummation, in the second of these novels, is sighted and desired in Chapter IV. The minor and subjective obstruction, which is the refusal of the hero to aspire to Rose, is resolved against our wishes when Evan hurries off, at the end of Chapter IX, to learn tailoring in London. This, we remember, should mark the close of a First Act, and comes here almost exactly at the point where the first fifth of the book concludes. The greater obstacle, which is the presumably final separation of the pair, is resolved according to our wishes when Evan is trapped and brought to Beckley Court. The subjective climax, at which we prefigure the issue, is reached at the close of Chapter XXIII. The Fourth Act of this comedy, by the author's explicit notification, ends with Chapter XXXVII. Meredith seems to have divined Shakespeare's idea of form.

In play or novel, some incentive, some allurements, is needed to arouse and sustain interest in audience or reader. Shakespeare's plan is only a fully developed form of Aristotle's postulate of 'a beginning, a middle, and an end.' Shakespeare's fellow dramatists and some moderns follow close upon this trail. But they often delay the consummation, they multi-

terms with Antonio, Bassanio's bondsman, is the first or subjective hindrance to our desire, but is happily removed from the plot at the end of the First Act. The major obstacle in Shakespeare's dramas, and others generally that are based on the fortunes of a pair of lovers, is some rival of either one. Here it is of course the rivals of Bassanio. These are finished with—there are no divisions of the play into scenes in the Folios nor into acts or scenes in the Quartos—in the Second Act.

To construct a character capable of subscribing to Shylock's terms calls for qualities unusual in degree. The qualities with which the author has endowed Antonio strike us at first as impossible in kind. Some of ourselves would perhaps go round the block to avoid meeting the man who has lightly borrowed, or is thought of as likely to ask again. But this Antonio begs the chance, the case standing 'within the eye of honor,' to save his friend from ruin. This, says the world, is not unselfishness, but imbecility.

Antonio is of a class, increasingly numerous in our age, who persist in commercial ventures, not from the love of money, but from the fascination of the quest. Each of us has probably known men of affairs who would indulge a friend, especially liked, beyond the bounds of business reason. Many Antonios can be prodigally extravagant towards their families. This Antonio can be prodigally, and chooses to be prodigally extravagant towards a friend. There were like generous spirits, even under Shakespeare's eye, in England, and there were doubtless more such spirits in Italy. Tradition has it that Shakespeare had received from Southampton, before the date of this play, not the loan but the gift of a thousand pounds. The author had only to make Antonio a Southampton to this Bassanio, but seems to have conceived him as something more. In spite of his behavior towards Shylock, whose greed is loathsome to him, he is one of ply obstructions, they fail of the visualizing climax in the middle of the play. Ibsen's earlier work, including *The Doll's House*, conforms materially. Victor Hugo imitates consciously, but ramblingly. Schiller keeps to the pattern better. In sum, Shakespeare has rediscovered, amplified, and perfected the Greek model. All dramas since more or less gropingly and variously suggest the type.

the finest characters in Elizabethan or any literature. He is hardly an 'inert,' a 'static' figure, as Quiller-Couch insists. Goodness is not inert, as the world has learned, but a living force.²⁴ How Antonio is led to agree to the conditions—and Shylock did not at first conceive anything so deadly, but was stung into the terms he made—is exquisitely detailed. Nor are the other Venetians 'wasters' or 'rotters' in spite of their past-mastery in small talk, nor do they impress us as more 'cold-hearted' than hangers-on in other 'high-life' circles. Shakespeare needed to set them going, at the opening of the play, to avoid precipitating the proper business of the scene. And, for plausibility, one is to remember that there are always men in plenty who, with moderate incomes and much leisure, manage to club and dine with folk of Antonio's sort.

After finding fault with the play variously for more than a dozen pages, Quiller-Couch makes what he calls a personal confession. This, which seems to the present writer the most valuable part of the whole lecture, is summed up thus:

Some four or five years ago I had to stage-manage *The Merchant of Venice*. This meant that for two good months I lived in it and thought of little else. Having once achieved the difficult but necessary feat of getting the Trial Scene back into focus, I found a sense of the workmanship growing in me, and increasing to something like amazement.

There we have it. The difficulties of dramatic technic must be dealt with *from the stage side*, as well as the author's point of view. When the illusion of actuality is set up, unrealities and absurdities disappear. It is useless to explain away what seem logical inconsistencies by academic argument. The author finishes the discussion with this paragraph:

"This a play," wrote Hazlitt, "that in spite of the change of manners still holds undisputed possession of the stage." It does yet; and yet on the stage, sophisticated by actors, it had always vexed me, until, coming to

²⁴ Quiller-Couch quotes the lines (II. viii. 35-49) which complete the portraiture, but seems not to react fully to their purport. The Christ-nature might conceivably be spoken of as 'static,' since inoperative except by influence. Antonio's refinement and delicacy, as well as nobility of disposition, are undeniable. The play is conditioned upon the transcendent qualities in this man.

live with an acting version, I came to track the marvellous stage-cleverness of it all; when, in revulsion, I grew impatient with all judgments of Shakespeare passed on the mere reading of him. This had happened to me before with *The Taming of the Shrew*—a play noisier in the study than on the stage; strident, setting the teeth on edge; odious till acted; when it straightway becomes not only tolerable, but pleasant, and not only pleasant, but straightforwardly effective. In particular, I had to own of *The Merchant of Venice* that the lines which really told on the stage were lines the reader passes by casually, not pausing to take their impression. It fairly surprised me, for an example, that Lorenzo's famous speech in the last Act—about the music and the moonlight and the stars—though well delivered, carried less weight than four little words of Portia's.

It is pleasing to find our author thus recognizing the significance of the Fifth Act, which supplies the objective and artistic climax of the whole. Certain critics assure us that Shakespeare really finished the play with the Fourth Act, but didn't know it, and so going about to add the conventional fifth part, ended the piece with a moon-lit anticlimax. Shakespeare's rules of construction require that the felicity of Bassanio and Portia, which as the unifying and controlling consummation has been on our minds from the beginning, should be 'featured' at the close either for realization or defeat. Since this is not a tragedy, the issue will be fulfillment and not defeat, and must be as dramatic or spectacular as possible. As the pair are wedded—Portia was not to rescue her lover's surety single—but separated, no fit conclusion can proceed except with or after their home-coming. And evidently they must not arrive before the gates of Belmont Park together.

Excellent is the 'composition,' as the artists say, of the scene before us. First the beauty of the night, then the beauty of the grounds that front the palace. Then the happiness of the proxy-lovers, who hold the home open for those who come. Then the messenger, announcing that the mistress approaches, not hasting, but anxiously and slow. Then the servant who reports that the groom will arrive—ere morning. The night advances, and waiting is beguiled with poetic thoughts and music. And on the background of this beauty of sight and sentiment and sound, Portia and Nerissa approach. Very properly and positively Portia asserts herself as mistress of the whole:

That light we see is burning in my hall.

But this is not to belittle the bridegroom. Presently under the dim light of the stars, for the moon has set, the trumpet of Bassanio and his train will sound out its answering challenge. As Jessica and Lorenzo fall into the background, while the dawn reddens, we discern the relation these have sustained to the chief figures. Portia has just been saying,—

A substitute shines brightly as a king
Until a king be by: and then his state
Empties itself, as doth an inland brook
Into the main of waters.

This is the key to the chief expedient here. Lorenzo and Jessica, surrounded by everything that could enhance their joy, seemed favored enough to be the principals in the piece. But the significance of the satellites is absorbed when the Queen and King assume their station.²⁵ Also, Lorenzo and Jessica are devised to bridge the chasm between the races, before the trial scene, and to soften afterwards the harshness of Shylock's future in our subconscious forecast.

It seems to the present writer that Quiller-Couch, continuing his personal confession, goes wrong in the last section of his report. It became plain to him, he says, that the author did not discover how to draft this 'most delightful act of the play' at first approach:

That Shakespeare tried other ways is made evident by one line. Upon Lorenzo's and Jessica's lovely duet there breaks a footfall. Lorenzo, startled by it, demands—

Who comes so fast in the silence of the night?

Voice. A friend.

Lorenzo. A friend? What friend? Your name, I pray you,
"Friend." (*Stephano enters.*)

Stephano. Stephano is my name; and I bring word
My mistress will before the break of day
Be here at Belmont. She doth stray about
By holy crosses, where she kneels and prays
For happy wedlock hours.

Lorenzo. Who comes with her?

²⁵ Perhaps the writer may refer to his attempt (*Publications of the Mod. Lang. Association*, vol. x, p. 106) to indicate the spiritual *a fortiori* here, by which the marital fortunes of Bassanio and Portia are exalted in our fancy.

Stephano. None but a holy hermit, and her maid. . . .

Nothing loose in literature—in play or in poem—ever caught Dr. Johnson napping. ‘I do not perceive,’ says Johnson, in his unfaltering accent ‘the use of this hermit, of whom nothing is seen or heard afterwards. The Poet had first planned his fable some other way, and inadvertently when he had changed his scheme, retained something of the original design.

By the way, why does our author make Lorenzo and Jessica furnish the ‘duet’ they idealize? The Folio directs (l. 68) *Play musicke*; and Nerissa recognizes (l. 98) the performers,—

It is your music madam, of the house,—

as players (or singers?) belonging to the *menage*. They stop (l. 109) at Portia’s order. And Lorenzo, we remember (l. 53), has bidden Stephano

bring your music out into the air.

Possibly Shakespeare, who never blotted a line, discarded at times whole first drafts of acts and scenes. But the evidence here hardly helps to prove it. And Johnson after all is nothing if not one of the expounders with whom (p. 46) Quiller-Couch has grown impatient.

Well, let us see. The question (l. 32),

Who comes with her,—

is clearly used, after the stage manner, to bring out that Portia and Nerissa are attended. And if, finally, the attendant were not needed, could such a specific intimation have been ‘inadvertently’ allowed to stand? When Portia committed to Lorenzo (IV. iv. 24, 25) the ‘husbandry and manage’ of her home, it was done, she said, that she might take up her abode at a near-by monastery till Bassanio’s return. Presumably, then, she and Nerissa resort there as the first stage on their way to the ‘tranect, the common ferry which trades to Venice.’ It is some distance to this ferry, since Portia shall reach it only a little before Balthasar’s arrival, with notes and garments, from Bellario. It is not likely that Portia and Nerissa set out from the monastery unattended. A hermit may well have been the escort and protector forth to the tranect, back from it to the monastery, and then for much or most (III. iv. 31) of the remaining two miles hither. What could

Portia, one might ask, or Shakespeare have done with a hermit brought all the way to this Belmont company?

Perhaps, then, the hermit was needed, after all, in the last draft of this play. As Shakespeare has partly saved his heroine from unsexment at the trial by making her merely the proxy of Bellario, so will he now fully soften her brash and confident and mannish spirit to the womanly sweetness shown at the beginning, and climaxed to us after Bassanio (III. ii. 150-176) opens the leaden casket. The modiste or milliner appends corrective touches when some shade or stiffness calls for relief. Shakespeare uses not unlike expedients now. If others ask, as others may, Why not a knight, a carrier, or Balthasar, to bring her on the way, we may hold the doubting question to be self-answered. We for our part wonder,—while we watch in fancy that slender figure, perplexed, demure, timorous of her future and of herself, lingering apart from the hermit and Nerissa on her knees at the holy crosses,—whether it be indeed the Portia who, before the Doge in Venice, saved Antonio. We cannot, from reading mere words and lines of text, be sure. We must trust the Master, as Quiller-Couch for all his discoveries does not, to persuade us by the witchcraft of rendition. Also mention of a 'hermit' decarnalizes thought, as suits well with the ending of the piece,—so opposite in contrast with the close of *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*.

And what in fine of Shylock, whom some think Shakespeare set out to hold up to the world for execration? Did this character, as Quiller-Couch suggests, 'take charge of his creator'? Here is something beyond stage magic, could one but know. Brabantio, patrician, upright, noble, loses his daughter, and dies of a broken heart. His fate does not appeal to us. Shylock, sordid, vindictive, bloody, loses his daughter and half his fortune. His plight appeals to us. We cannot explain fully, in either case, Shakespeare's method of control. We may be moved to some attempt at philosophizing when we come to the paradox of Falstaff.

V

The next lecture in this volume takes up *As You Like It* for discussion. The author speaks of sources, and of plot, then in a third division contributes something substantial concerning this most unsubstantial play:

Some years ago, in hope to get a better understanding of Shakespeare, a friend and I tracked the Warwickshire Avon together, from its source on Naseby battlefield down to Tewkesbury, where, by a yet more ancient battlefield, it is gathered to the greater Severn. From Naseby, where we found its source among the "good cabbage" of an inn-garden, we followed it afoot through "wide-skirted meads," past "poor pelting villages, sheep-cotes and farms," to Rugby, . . . At Rugby we took ship: that is to say, we launched a canoe. . . .

On the second day, after much pulling through reed beds and following for many miles Avon's always leisurely meanders, we ported over Bubbenthall weir, fetched northeast, then southeast, and came to the upper bridge of Stoneleigh Deer Park.

A line of swinging deer-fences hung from the arches of the bridge, the river trailing through their bars. We, having permission, pushed cautiously under these—which in a canoe is not easy. Beyond the barrier we looked to right and left, amazed. We had passed from a sluggish brook, twisting among water-plants and willows, to a pleasant river, expanding down between wide lawns, by slopes of bracken, by the roots of gigantic trees—oaks, Spanish oaks, wych-elms, stately firs, sweet chestnuts, backed by filmy larch coppices.

This was Arden, the forest of Arden, nominally to-day 'Stoneleigh-in-Arden,' and, of old, Shakespeare's very Arden.

As we rested on our paddles, down to a shallow ahead—their accustomed ford, no doubt—a herd of deer came daintily and charged across, splashing; first the bucks, in single file, then the does in a body. The very bed of Avon changes just here: the river now brawling by a shallow, now sliding over slabs of sandstone. . . .

Now, in Stoneleigh Deer Park in Arden I saw the whole thing, as though Corin's crook moved above the ferns and Orlando's ballads fluttered on the boles. There was the very oak beneath which Jaques moralized on the deer—a monster oak, thirty-nine feet around (for I measured it)—not far above the ford across which the herd had splashed, its "antique roots" writhing over the red sandstone rock down to the water's brim. And I saw the whole thing for what the four important Acts of it really are—not as a drama, but as a dream, or rather a dreamy delicious fantasy, and especially a fantasy in colour.

This, with Grant White's running comments on *As You Like It*, in *Studies in Shakespeare*, seems to the writer the most edifying part of all the literature—so far as known to him—that has grown up about the play. Quiller-Couch does not much concern himself in this lecture with *how the thing was done*. That inquiry might well be postponed until some of the more serious dramas have been considered. The dramatic scheme in this one is as bald as might be expected in a children's novel. The author returns, in his last division (p. 111), to the matter of Shakespeare's borrowings, and the extent to which he has improved upon his originals:

The play is—as you like it—a woodland play treated courtly-wise, or a courtly play treated woodland-wise. It plainly derives, through *Love's Labour's Lost*, from John Lyly; whose polite comedies, highly artificial, but in one way or another a wonderful artistic advance, held the ear of Court and of City at the moment when Shakespeare set up as a playwright. . . . if we would understand Shakespeare's workmanship in the early comedies, and trace how *Love's Labour's Lost* grew into *As You Like It*, we must study Lyly's *Campaspe*, his *Endymion*, and his *Galatea*. The main point to grasp is that *As You Like It*, however much improved by genius, belongs to the Lyly line of descent and to the order of the court-pastoral.

The "pastoral" being granted, we may recognize excellent workmanship in the Silvius and Phebe episode. To have garbed Rosalind as a boy without making a girl fall in love with him would have been to miss a plain opportunity—as plain a one as the sight of the bloody cloth at which Rosalind faints. It doubles the intrigue, and it provides with due irony one of the most charming quarters in all Comedy:

Phebe. Good shepherd, tell this youth what 't is to love.
Silvius. It is to be all made of sighs and tears:
 And so am I for Phebe.
Phebe. And I for Ganymede.
Orlando. And I for Rosalind.
Rosalind. And I for no woman.

and so on, and so on. The *genre* and the convention of it granted, nothing could be prettier than the inter-chime and the counter-chime. It is Lyly carried to the *n*th power.

Quiller-Couch ends his chapter on *As You Like It* with this paragraph:

Having said this in praise of a piece of good workmanship, I must in fairness mention a piece of sheer botchwork. I mean the introduction of Hymen in the last Act. To explain away this botch as an imposition upon Shakespeare by another hand—to conjecture it as some hasty alternative to satisfy the public censor, who objected to Church rites of marriage on the stage—would be as easy as it were accordant with the nice distinctions of critical hypocrisy, were it not that Shakespeare, almost if not quite to the end of his days, was capable of similar ineptitudes, such as the vision of Posthumus, and the scroll dropped into his lap. You can explain away one such lapse by an accident; but two scarcely, and three or four not at all. That kind of artistic improbability runs almost in harmonical progression. Hymen in *As You Like It* is worse than Hecate in *Macbeth*.

No, no, not worse. Hecate in *Macbeth* mars sublimity. Hymen in *As You Like It* does nothing worse than offend good taste. Yet one wonders how far one may revise sixteenth century values by twentieth century standards. In Renaissance times, Renaissance ideas and accessories were not yet staled. There is reason for belief that Shakespeare's audiences liked to see mythologic figures staged, just as readers of that day and later liked classical quotations. Also, the vogue of personification, as developed in the *Moralities*, was not yet denatured in the general mind. Moreover, our mentor seems not to realize that Shakespeare might convict him of inconsistency in his present strictures. In another lecture, he holds *The Tempest* as the greatest work of the Master, or even of literary genius for all time. Yet in this play of *The Tempest*, which stands forever without 'botch' or blot, we see Iris and Ceres and Juno 'enter' upon the stage, and hear Ceres and Juno sing²⁶ antiphonal blessings upon Ferdinand and Miranda, and are barely saved from

²⁶ Had Shakespeare perhaps read Virgil's lines,—

Ast ego qui divom incedo regina Jovisque

Et soror et conjunx,—

in the Grammar School of Stratford? There were certainly men in the audiences of 1611 and later who remembered them, and were sensible of the humor or enormity of setting these deities at the business of 'favoring' Globe Theater patrons with specimens of their celestial skill. Did Juno, we wonder, sing in alto or soprano falsetto? In Ben Jonson's elaborate masque of *Chloridia*, rendered at Shrovetide, in 1630, Juno and Iris sing being shown, among clouds and 'airy spirits,' in the opened heavens. But all these parts were taken by ladies of the court.

another visit of the misprized and distressing Hymen. One could, we think, sit through the phantasmagoria of Posthumus's vision, in *Cymbeline*, after that. And, for banality, one suspects that Shakespeare would himself admit that this Epilogue, spoken by the stately Prospero, his superman, had no 'fellow' in all his works besides.

V

It is far from pleasant to be reminded continually, as one reads, of the name an author has given to his work. But we have come to a vital chapter, 'The Story of Falstaff,' in Quiller-Couch's volume, and it gives us pause at the very opening. From the promise of the title-page, and the example of fulfillment with *Macbeth*, we have warrant to expect a study of the workmanship in the handling of the character now reached, the most extraordinary of all Shakespeare's creations.

But the manner of this lecture, as in fact of the three lectures which precede this one, differs radically from the method followed in *Macbeth*. There the purpose was to discover 'How it could lie within the compass even of Shakespeare, master-workman though he was and lord of all noble persuasive language, to make a tragic hero of this Macbeth—traitor to his king, murderer of his sleeping guest, breaker of most sacred trust, ingrate, self-seeker, false kinsman, perjured soldier.' And the purpose was consistently and fairly carried out. If in this lecture the intent were similarly formulated, it would run, How could it lie in the compass even of Shakespeare to present a 'rotter,' a coward, a debauchee, a criminal in such a light as to make us condone, have sympathy with, and in an indeterminate degree, approve and like?

Shakespeare's discomfiture of our prejudices and capture of our favor in the two 'Parts' of *Henry IV* that deal with Falstaff make up the crowning psychological feat of his career. A Falstaff in real life would not perhaps have seemed an altogether repulsive figure to sixteenth century folk. Life was harsh and coarse and cruel. But that this same 'tun of man' should have been so conceived and presented three hundred years ago as not to offend the best refinement and delicacy of modern days is the

top of marvel. We can in the main understand how Shakespeare made Cleopatra, one of the notorious women of history, come out from the company of Semiramis, Thais, Catherine II, and become acceptable among reputable literary subjects. 'Sovereignty of nature,' quantum of personality, explains many riddles, both in books and in real life. But Falstaff can lay claim to no such exemption. Shakespeare would have had to be at pains, under modern distinctions, to keep him from being entered in the class of degenerates or defectives. He is as revolting to the physical as to the spiritual eye, he cumbers the ground even of sensuality. He robs on the king's highway, is in everything but fact a murderer, is insensible to every sort of obligation. As if all this were not enough, Shakespeare assails our sense of decency and shows him to us with his harlot upon his knee.

Quiller-Couch naïvely evades and even begs the question at the beginning of his seventh section:

In this short study I shall not indulge in any panegyric upon Falstaff: and I ask the reader to credit this to a Roman fortitude, since they say that all who write about Falstaff, loving him, write well. The performance I like best is Dr. Johnson's singular outburst beginning, "But Falstaff—unimitated, inimitable Falstaff—how shall I describe thee?"—because it breaks from the heart of a moralist who, being human, could not help himself.

Exactly. But why could not this stern moralist, intolerant even to common human frailties, 'help himself'? Talk of Shakespeare's workmanship on this play that does not first or finally answer that, seems to the writer beside the mark. Our author discourses suggestively on the necessity of inventing 'protagonist' characters, such as this one, for plays or novels dealing with historic figures. Also, he propounds a theory of the Interlude, to which type, he would hold, the 'Second Part' of *Henry IV* belongs. All this of course can count only as means to an end—an end not in sight—namely, how Shakespeare has made Falstaff inimitable, being a nature that one does not at all wish imitated or for one's own part to imitate. Society—that association of men and women that has for its object the standardization of human values—is at work trying to be rid of Falstaffs, and to prevent so far as possible more Falstaffs from being born.

But this, it may be urged, is taking comedy matters too seriously. It is an observation altogether warranted, to say that, although it proves too much. We insist always on judging comedies as well as tragedies by comparison with real life. If one is to theorize how Shakespeare came to create such a character, one need not go back into the history of the Elizabethan theater. Our suspicion would be that Falstaff was brought into dramatic being, not for his own sake, but to help lift Prince Hal from traditional disesteem. The object of the two halves of *Henry IV* and the play of *Henry V* was in part to enable English playgoers to realize how the madcap Prince, who scandalized his father's court, became not only a glorious chieftain and hero, but also a good king and a good man. Falstaff takes over from the Prince, and Poins, his proper companion, the curse of lawlessness and self-indulgence, and leaves the pair, not accessories or abettors so much as boyish, or as we say now-a-days, 'adolescent' applauders, machinators, putters-on. Shakespeare in fact, after having the Prince draw the line (First Part, I. ii. 153, 162) at thieving, makes him declare, awkwardly enough, to be sure, in (ll. 218, 219) an aside—lest we should miss the point—his real attitude towards Poins and Falstaff and the rest.

And what can be said of means by which Shakespeare controls our feelings concerning Falstaff? For the first thing, we may venture this,—he takes us with him into the consciousness of the man. He snares us by the frankness with which he has endowed the character. There is implanted in each of us the appetency to know people, to find Man out thoroughly, to know the modes of being, high and low. There could never else have been novels, or plays, and Shakespeare could not otherwise have been discovered. 'Whom we know wholly we cannot hate.' The man who opens his personal self to us, 'like a little child,' wins us in our own despite. Rousseau was not a personage that we could wish imitated, or that we should wish to imitate. But he harbored no reserves. He was great enough to trust us with his faults and follies, and we like him. But the man who hides his limitations, and poses—like a *Nation* reviewer of early days till his anonymity was lifted—as a superintellect, a pharisee, we de-

spise. We have perhaps often noted how men in fraternities and lodges condone faults in comrades whom they have learned to know, hating the sin, but loving, like Infinite Charity, the sinner. There are potential qualities, could we but probe to them, in abandoned men, good impulses that urge at times towards better things.²⁷ Falstaff is at point, and especially when his chance (*I Henry IV*. V. iv. 169) seems to have come, to slough his skin, to repudiate his falser, his ironic self.

Again, it seems safe to say that, when Shakespeare has won us with a froward or untoward nature, he keeps us from taking the frowardness or untowardness in that nature seriously. We are clearly rescued, in this case of Falstaff, from the consciousness that we could not have the fellow by us, that by no sufferance could we neighbor with him. Shakespeare's resources in this kind are infinite. When, as in tragedy, he cannot help our taking some character, in itself worthy, seriously, he finds expedients to prevent the effect he does not want.²⁸ We do not take the

²⁷ This seems the essence of the meaning summarized, at the close, from *The Ring and the Book*. If we could send Osbornes into jails, to companion with alleged criminals, we should find out the truth without confessions or the third degree. We should both 'see and say,' to inquiring justice, and bring art to the help of blundering and ineffectual tribunals.

²⁸ We are not permitted, for instance, to discern Brabantio in his essential character. Here is a refined true man, doubtless a son of the Renaissance, whose elegant palace abounds in classic curios, Greek manuscripts, and choice products of the Aldine press. He is a member of the Signory, but admits men of parts, without reference to birth or race, to his circle of associates and friends. But Shakespeare, for dramatic reasons, must mask all his accomplishments and worth from us. He is made to appear before us, directly from his bed, unclad, and receive rebuke, in which we are fain to join. In the recoil of pride, he ventures the slander of the drugs, of whose quality and action he admits he has no knowledge. He indicts Othello, whose integrity and greatness of soul we have been made to feel, and finds his case, with us as with his peers, thrown out of court. He asserts a father's advantage over Desdemona, and is vanquished gracefully, with our applause. He resigns her ignobly to Othello, with a warning which we resent. These and other dynamic measures put the man forever out of the reach of sympathy.

But Shakespeare could have reversed all this, had the case demanded. Expedients of the opposite effect lay beneath his hand in Brabantio's nature. Antony is one conception in *Julius Caesar*, and quite another in

worser part of Falstaff's nature seriously, because his author keeps him from taking himself in any aspect seriously. His wit is vagrant, his impudence is shift, his insight—the real substance in the man—is shadowy. When he does his best, he seems hardly to have assayed at all. When he thinks to compel recognition from the Prince, as he comes with his train from the coronation, he must needs capitalize his expectation:

Stand here by me, Master Robert Shallow. I will make the king do you grace. I will leer upon him as a' comes by; and do you but mark the countenance he will give me.

But the king bids the Lord Chief-Justice, who once 'committed' him, reprimand the challenger. This is not according to the code of the 'gang,' and Quiller-Couch scores King 'Hal' for it. We have a notion that Quiller-Couch would have done the same thing in King Hal's place. But should not Falstaff have known better than to suppose Hal would not vindicate the honor of his office? Would not a month or two of 'managing' the play make the part approvable?

Then there is an obsession on us that Falstaff is in a sense the rehabilitation of a one-time potentiality in ourselves. We have some awareness of what the plight of self-neglect is like, when one has ceased to feel that it pays to take pains with one's self. In this consciousness there is an element of sympathy, of pity towards the man. Yet, when the needle turns to the pole, when the moral orientation, as it at some point must in Shakespeare, reveals itself, this phase of sympathy merges in another. When 'tear-sheet' Doll, stroking Falstaff's beard, deprecates in his behalf the issue of it all,—

Antony and Cleopatra. Yet there is nothing inconsistent in either with the other. Shylock is handled, fundamentally, with the same strategy as Antony in the latter play, and as Falstaff. We are taken into the inmost consciousness of each. Is not frankness the basis of all manifestations of Shylock's mind?

I had forgot. You told me so.

Sovereignty, again, commandingness of nature. Shylock is the only great personality in the cast, big even in his hate, which he makes us justify. There is a rareness in him, Jew or no Jew, which stifles prejudice and exacts regard.

when wilt thou leave fighting o' days, and foining o' nights, and begin to patch up thine old body for heaven,

we are with Falstaff for the moment, rather than with this voice of the eternal witness. Is it original depravity, or is it only the backward glance of the racial self, after it has learned

By the means of Evil that Good is best,

over years when the Tree of Knowledge was yet untasted? Whatever the fellow element in us, Shakespeare plays upon it, and we are helpless in his hands.

And still the story of Falstaff remains half told. The paradox of his personality is still unriddled. We face again the fact that folk sensitive to every sort of sin and coarseness fail to react to the fragrances of his life and nature. Hazlitt, who is far from tender of human frailties, and whom Quiller-Couch quotes approvingly, pronounces him 'always a better man than Henry.' This is neither moral anaesthesia nor hypnotism. It is only art, and art consists in finding means to stir the senses and forces in the soul. Shakespeare so knew the secret of these senses and proclivities that he could make his audiences desire anything he wished, and repudiate everything which, for dramatic or other reasons, needed to be repudiated. This is the technical side of his control. On the side of expedients and means, all human qualities seem to have lain within his grasp and ken. He has made Shylock and Falstaff surpassingly human, because, like in kind Another, he knew what was in man. There was good in Judas of which we have no knowledge, and which ensured to him his chance. There was good in Falstaff which we cannot analyze, and which did not ensure to him his chance. We can only say, like the sailor preacher, There, but for the grace of God, go we. No man else ever knew so well as Shakespeare that there are graceless souls.

V

Of the remaining chapters in Quiller-Couch's volume, those dealing with 'Shakespeare's Later Workmanship,' '*Pericles* and *Henry VIII*,' '*Cymbeline*,' and '*The Winter's Tale*,' will be passed over. The present writer once worked fatiguingly, at the

request of publishers, on a popular handbook, *What Is Shakespeare*, based on the last two dramas. He once gave considerable study also to *The Tempest*, but, having changed his judgment, is not now minded to review Quiller-Couch's praises. We shall consider further only the three lectures of this author on the play of *Hamlet*.

Very informally and pointedly, not at all like a professor's deliverances, the series opens. The refreshing thing in Quiller-Couch's criticism is the absence of *ex cathedra* confidence, of the academic consciousness. Nowhere in the volume does this author address himself to his work with more singleness of vision and common-sense directness of attack:

So much has been written upon *Hamlet*, that one can hardly descry the play through the rolling cloud of witness. The critical guns detonate with such uproar, and, exploding, diffuse such quantities of gas, as to impose on us that moral stupor which I understand to be one of the calculated effects of heavy artillery warfare. . . . This loud authority confuses us all. It *starts* us thinking of *Hamlet* not as an acted play but as a mystery, a psychological study, an effort of genius so grandiose, vast, amorphous, nebulous, that men of admitted genius—even such men as Coleridge and Goethe,—tracking it, have lost their way in the profound obscure.

Now, with all the courage of humility, I say that this is, nine-tenths of it, rubbish.

I insist that we take Shakespeare first, and before any of these imposing fellows. At all events he wrote the play, and they did not.

Moreover, he wrote it as a play—to be acted on a stage before an audience.

Moreover, he wrote it, not for an audience of Goethes and Coleridges, but for an audience of ordinary men and women.

And yet further, if pressed, I am ready to maintain that *any* work of art which is shapeless, nebulous; any work of art which misses its artistic purpose to be the prey of pedants and philosophers, is to that extent a bad piece of art. And I hope to demonstrate that *Hamlet* is no such thing, but a masterpiece.

The chief points in the author's demonstration that this is no closet play, written for private dissection, come from the stage side:

To this day a travelling company of actors, thrown upon their beam-ends for lack of money, having acted this or that to empty houses, always as a last resort advertise *Hamlet*. It can be counted on, above any other

play, to fill the treasury. Again, when an actor takes a benefit, what is the piece most commonly chosen?—*Hamlet*. Why? 'Because,' it may be answered, 'Hamlet himself is notoriously a "star" part, with plenty of soliloquies, with plenty of what I believe is called "fat" in the Profession; and moreover because the part has become consecrated somehow, invested by tradition with a certain aura of greatness and crowned as with a halo.' . . . We all know that to play Hamlet, and play him successfully, is the crown of every young actor's ambition. But here comes in another mystery—which yet is not mystery at all, unless the critics have fogged us. *When he comes to it, he always plays it successfully.* . . .

It is the fashion, and was the fashion before we were born, so that we may call it the custom—it is the custom to talk of So-and-so's Hamlet: of Garrick's Hamlet, Kemble's Hamlet, Kean's Hamlet; Macready's, Salvini's, Booth's, Phelps's, Irving's Hamlets; Tree's Hamlet, Forbes-Robertson's Hamlet. This custom of speech, if it mean anything, would seem to imply that each of these gifted interpreters has given to the world a different interpretation of that mystery; and that each has made an individual success of it: which, when we come to think of it, approaches the miraculous, if not the absurd. By various paths they all arrive at the core of the great secret: and yet there would seem to be some mystery about a mystery which turns out to be a different one every time it is explained.

Now I suggest that all these fine fellows in their turn have made a success in *Hamlet* simply because it was *there all the time*: ready-made by a man who had been beforehand with them, and, having a capital interest in the play, had unconsciously taken care that their self-conscious displays should never attain to spoiling it. I suggest that all those critics, too (Coleridge, Goethe, Klein, Werder, and the rest), have been plucking different hearts out of the mystery and exhibiting them, simply because there was never any mystery in *Hamlet*, and consequently no secret heart to pluck out.

We quote Quiller-Couch, again, upon a point which critics and many readers accept as proof of Hamlet's irresolution:

The commentators want to know why Hamlet, having discovered his uncle's guilt, did not make an end of him at once. It appears that this is what they would have done. . . . So, you see, one never knows. One meets them going to the University Sermon or shuffling along upon some other blameless errand, and—can we believe it?—any one of these Harry Hotspurs will have killed his some six or seven dozen Scots at a breakfast, washed his hands, and said to his wife, 'Fie upon this quiet life! I want work.' Oh yes; and that is the sort of men they indeed *are*, if only you believe what they write just now to the newspapers!

That's delicious. The world has waited half-a-dozen generations to hear that said in just that way. Nothing is harder than to distinguish imagined conditions of heroism, normalized to us by way of *Robinson Crusoe* and stories of Indian wars, from what one faces in the predicaments and restrictions of real life. This paragraph, taken to heart, should alter the whole course of *Hamlet* criticism.

Following now the running analysis of the play, which Quiller-Couch presently begins, we are stopped by an observation of his on the second scene. Quoting ll. 3-14, in which Claudius attempts to shed an atmosphere of commonplace over his accession, and his hurried marriage with the widowed queen, the author comments thus:

[What he does not explain, by the way—and what the commentators conspire with him and with Shakespeare to overlook—is the small difficulty that, Hamlet's father deceased, Hamlet should *ipso facto* have inherited the throne. From the commentators, discreetly silent over this hitch in the workmanship, I turn to Charles Lamb, who, of course, noted it, but slides it over; telling us in his tale of the play merely that Claudius took the crown 'to the exclusion of young Hamlet, the son of the buried king and lawful successor to the throne.' But this will not quite do. Hamlet is not 'young Hamlet': for in the graveyard scene his age is accurately made out to be thirty. Unless some strange law of succession be hinted at in the line describing Hamlet's mother as

The imperial jointress of this warlike state,

there is a flaw of construction here.]

But, Shakespeare overlooking this trifle, Hamlet does not seem to mind or indeed to think about it first or last. . . .

Of course, if the throne of Denmark had been actually usurped, Hamlet young or not would have thought very much about it, and Shakespeare's Tudor-Stuart audiences would have expected him not only to think, but to take measures of some sort concerning it. In fact, if Hamlet had been veritably robbed of the crown, the play must perforce have taken an altered shape, and a different or at least another motive, besides revenge, have been woven into the plot.

It might be enough to say, concerning the 'flaw of construction,' that Shakespeare is merely following here the *Hystorie of*

Hamlet, in which Fengon slays prince Horvendile his brother, Hamlet's father, and succeeds him. But Shakespeare did not write in ignorance of Danish matters, regal, geographical, or other. In ancient Scandinavia, according to the sagas, kings were chosen by thanes and warriors in open Thing, and the practice continued in later times. The rule indeed was followed in a case connected with our own Anglo-Saxon history:

When the Danish king Svend, or Sweyn, died at Gainsborough in the year 1014, he left another son, Harald, who was younger than Knud Canute, and was chosen to be king by the Danes as soon as they heard of Svend's death. Knud wanted his brother to give him some share in the government of the kingdom of Denmark; but Harald refused, telling him if he wished to be a king he must go back and gain England for himself, in which case, he should have a few ships and men to help him. . . . Harald died in 1018, and then the Danes chose Knud for their king, which proved of great importance to Denmark.—E. C. Otté: *Scandinavian History*, p. 51.²⁹

But we are not through with this business of the succession. It leads us deeply and directly into the 'workmanship' of the play. The first question which the prepared student of *Hamlet* is likely to ask himself concerns the place of action. Why, if the scene is to be laid at Elsinore, is it not set at the Marienlyst palace, instead of Kronberg castle? The time is summer,³⁰ when

²⁹ Other examples occur in later chapters of this work. As is well established, the Lombards in Italy, following the tribal custom, were permitted to choose their kings. At the coronation of Justin, in the Eastern Empire, after the death of Justinian, 'four robust youths (Gibbon, II. xlv) exalted him on a shield,' after the Northern manner. Also, in the last words of Hamlet himself, in (V. ii. 366, 367) the present play, he speaks of the election that is to be had to determine who shall rule.

³⁰ Quiller-Couch says (p. 145) of the opening situation, 'It is night—midnight—and freezing hard.' But, two months earlier, the late king was murdered while sleeping in his orchard. Two months later, Ophelia brings in pansies and rosemary to the Queen, and speaks of violets as 'withered'—out of season. If we suspect the flowers she proffers are only imaginary, we know from the circumstances (IV. vii. 167-170) of her death that it is still summer. The time of the opening scene, two months after the murder, could not have been much earlier than mid-June. The temperature at that season, in northern Denmark, might fall as low as 40° Fahrenheit.

the court would naturally be away from the capital, but hardly imprisoned in a fortress. Kronberg would be safer against an uprising than the Rosenberg palace in Copenhagen. But this, on the other hand, would be more removed and secure from foreign attack, as by Fortinbras from Norway. There would seem to be some further reason why the court has removed to Elsinore, and locks itself up o' nights behind parapets and cannon.³¹

What then, more fully, was Shakespeare's thought? He will use, from the *Hystorie*, under altered names, the ghost of Horvendile, the murdered governor—made over into an elder Hamlet and late king of Denmark—against Fengon, now Claudius, his brother. Claudius, by manipulation of the older nobility, gets himself elected to the throne. Hamlet, the late king's son, conveniently away from Denmark, is naturally preferred by many. Hamlet's mother, seduced by Claudius as a part of his scheme before the assassination, is thus withdrawn from support of Hamlet's claims, and is advertised, for effect, as imperial jointress—partner in the government or empire. The new king, partly perhaps from prescience of future hostilities with Norway but mainly for safety from disaffection, moves the court, after the funeral of Hamlet's father, to the new fortress of Kronberg, the chief stronghold of the kingdom.

The ghost of the dead king seeks, after the manner of foster brotherhood in the North, vengeance for the murder. Who shall execute it? The king's son Hamlet. How shall the ghost be

³¹ Editors generally seem not be clear upon this point. For example, following Rowe (1709), they assign the first scene of Act II to 'an apartment (or a 'room') in Polonius's House.' But could Polonius have had a 'house' in Elsinore, which, as should be realized, was somewhat distant from the fortifications embracing Kronberg? The condition in which Hamlet, hatless, with doublet unbraced, ungartered, and down-gyved to his ankles, appears before Ophelia, does not argue a 'trip' over to Elsinore from the castle. For Hamlet was unquestionably quartered within the walls. Moreover, Polonius, as, taking Ophelia by the arm, he starts forth to seek the king, does not appear to have stopped to get *his* hat.

Of course, these matters are far from vital. And Shakespeare is sometimes inconsistent, especially in the comedies. But in the great tragedies he thinks things out with surprising definiteness and detail. It pays always to reconstruct, so far as possible, what was in his mind.

brought to Hamlet? In the most spectacular and effective way. He should appear on the platform before the castle, against the background of the sea. Whom shall the ghost accost? Warders, now first placed on guard, because of 'the threatened invasion, fronting the approach from Norway. What warders, how disposed towards the new king, in relation to the late king whom he has displaced?

This is the intimate and vital matter. It would be natural for the sentinels to mention and discuss, with anybody and everybody, the visit of the dead king's ghost. News of it would spread quickly throughout the castle and the town. But the king must not know, no one belonging to the party of the king is to be told. What party then may know? The party of course of Hamlet, who is to avenge. But how shall the sentries be plausibly of Hamlet's 'party,' and not of the king's? Because the proper guardsmen of the castle are to be, not Danes, but Switzers. How are the ghost and Hamlet to be brought together? Through Horatio, school friend of Hamlet's, of whose arrival Hamlet does not yet know. Why does Hamlet not yet know? Because he is mewed up with his grief. Where are the ghost and Hamlet to hold their secret conference? In the vacant space, among the rocks, in the rear of the castle.³²

The construction of the play is now clearly indicated. Going over from the stage side to the audience, we can forecast the plan. In the second scene of the First Act, we are to discern the tremendous personality of the hero, and to conceive and desire that he come to his own and his best, and that Denmark have the future that his princely daring promises. This 'consummation' grapples us to the story with hoops of steel.

The minor involvement of the plot is managed more brilliantly than in any other of Shakespeare's plays. It is progressive. At the very opening we are made to feel that some wish or will from the unseen world is in exercise towards some inmate of Kronberg castle. At the end of the First Act, this vague feeling

³² Shakespeare's knowledge of Kronberg, as of Elsinore, seems personal, and somewhat bears out the supposition that he was of a company of actors that stopped to play in Denmark on their way to Germany.

merges in the conviction that the person endeavored against is the title character of the play. Then that wish or will reveals itself, in the fifth scene, as Hamlet's father's ghost's demand for vengeance. That must work havoc, we fear, with Hamlet's fortunes. The resolution of this obstruction is 'tragic,' and is reached when, at the close of the First Act, Hamlet accepts the fate that he foresees. The major involvement is personal, being no less than the king himself. We look on him as Hamlet's probable destroyer, because of Hamlet's undisguised insolence and contempt. The resolution of it comes in the second scene of the Second Act, where we are relieved to find that the king will not proceed at once against the life of Hamlet, or not perhaps at all unless persuaded, through Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, that Hamlet is actuated from knowledge of his secret. The imaginative climax occurs at the point where, at the middle of the play, the king 'rises' self-convicted and self-condemned.

These appear to be the chief points, not considered by our author, in the workmanship of *Hamlet*, most popular of all stage plays. Why it has appealed so equally to the popular and the pundit mind is a question that can in part be answered. It is great literature not less than superb acting drama. The hero is a princely nature, and is transfigured at the beginning with sublime dignity of thought and utterance.³³ His problem has been made so unjust and absolute as to engage us with him much as if it were also ours. We are agog over Hamlet's strategy, and thrill with him as he opens the crime of the king to the public of all Denmark. We thrill again when he sets right finally, in triumph,

³³ The Folios show no division into acts and scenes after the opening of the second scene of the Second Act. This seems most consonant with the notion that the first form of the play, like some other tragedies of Shakespeare, may have been undivided, and that revision was begun, but was suspended after some three hundred lines of the scene just named. There is a palpable falling off in the quality of the diction, especially Hamlet's, and there are certain crudities, all of which tend to impress us that the residue of the text has not shared in the vitalization effected in the first six scenes. One notes also the inconsistency between conceptions of the title figure. The Hamlet of the First Act carries no suggestion of a thirty-years' maturity, nor do we anywhere envisage the student from Wittenberg as either fat or scant of breath.

the time that was out of joint. Moreover, above all and under all is the subconsciousness that we have been called in to witness the operations of genius at the topmost level of human insight and expression.

The acme of literary achievement is attained when an author has made his scenes and experiences undistinguishable, in the mind of his reader, from remembered actuals of his own existence. When we reread the play of *Hamlet*, we seem to be re-viewing matters in which we have in some way figured. The people of the cast take rank with folk once or now belonging to our circle. A page of text, like a page of Hawthorne, seems taken from the journal, the memory, of former days.

One dissents here and there from observations of our author on minor points of workmanship. He holds to the not uncommon view that the soliloquy,

To be or not to be,—

is evidence that Hamlet contemplated suicide as an escape from the execution of his promise. But does Quiller-Couch imagine Hamlet thought to face his father in the underworld with the racial blood-vengeance unsatisfied? Is not this soliloquy in effect a key to the psychology of the whole interval of waiting? The ghost has pointedly and precisely charged him,

Howsoever thou pursu'st this act,
Taint not thy mind.

So, were the vengeance to serve as means of putting Hamlet on the throne of his father, not only would his name be wounded, but also his conscience and his honor. Was not that what he felt was under the horizon when he accepted the terrible commission?

The time is out of joint. O cursed spite
That ever I was born to set it right.

Otherwise he must have welcomed the ordered vengeance as his opportunity. By no other means can he now expect to acquire his rights. But *noblesse oblige* blocks the path that way. Not from the act of assassinating their king, even as the murderer of Hamlet's father, may he expect the thanes of Denmark to vote

him worthy to sit in his father's seat. So we are led to conclude that Hamlet will resort to suicide, if he resort to suicide, not before, or instead of, the deed of retribution, but after. Even when he has destroyed the king in an unmasked attack upon himself, he dies (V. ii. 355, 356) in dismay lest the court and nation misconceive his motive.³⁴

The notion of Hamlet's moral inertia, and lack of decision, dissolves as we see him awe the court, and the king's guardsmen, in the last scene. He faces here a king, crowned and in state, flanked by the surviving Polonius-group of 'tedious old fools,' thanes of the realm, with Osric and his fellow unbred parvenus, whom the king has made, presumably since his coronation, lords. And the Switzers, with their halberds, stand by the throne. Is not the king, in his double plot, secure? Yes. The victim, lone, suspicious but submissive, only watches, waiting. But when the queen, falling forward from her throne, reaches her arms out to him, as her only hope, the Hamlet of the First Act comes back:

O villainy! Ho! *Let the doors be lock'd!*
Treachery! Seek it out!

Hamlet is not alone. The doors are locked, but by men who are not followers of the king, and who, at point to act further, pause as Laertes makes all search unneeded. Then Hamlet, realizing that at last his hands are free, administers his father's thrust.

³⁴ This was of course suggested to Shakespeare, for altered treatment, by the mention, in Chapter VI of the *Hystorie*,

How Hamlet, having slaine his uncle, and burnt his palace, made an Oration to the Danes to shew them what he done;

and by this statement, in the last paragraph of the chapter, of the outcome:

This oration of the young prince so mooved the harts of the Danes, and wan the affections of the nobility, that some wept for joy, to see the wisdom, and gallant spirit of Hamlet; and having made an end of their sorrow, al with one consent proclaimed him king of Jutie and Chersonnese, at this present the proper country of Denmarke.

In the fact that the brother whom Fengon slew was not king of Denmark, but only co-governor of a province, we get hint of a reason why Shakespeare had proceeded gingerly in the manner of Claudius's taking off, making him doubly forfeit his right to live. The business of assassinating an anointed sovereign, even if usurper, 'in jest,' upon the stage, was less innocuous in Tudor days than now.

The king calls out for help, but Hamlet, no one stirring, gags him with the last dregs of the cup. No audience could have endured the sight of vengeance exacted—as when the king was praying—under less permissive conditions. The commentators to a man, and many actors, seem not to recognize the tremendous moral force, and terrible power of will that here palsy all protest and opposition.

No. Hamlet is not alone, and has not been alone, in his inactivity. It was not in Shakespeare's mind that he should assay a 'bluff.' He did not shout to the king's servants to lock the doors or seek out treachery. Shakespeare's thought is, rather, When a king comes to a throne in Claudius's way, there is always a Macduff or Hamlet that will be the protagonist of waiting. Is there not an undertow of implication throughout the play that the rule of Claudius is an experiment, that the strength of the kingdom rests in unseen hands? Horatio talks of duty (I. i. 173; ii. 222), prompting report of the ghost to Hamlet, and the officers with him convince us that the same sentiment governs them. These men are evidently not solitary figures in the army and at court. Real 'duty' should have led them, with their story, to the king, who is naturally the first personage in all Denmark to be told of any disturbing facts or forces.³⁵

³⁵ Is it worth the time to follow the line of suggestion farther? When Hamlet proposes to rid the court of his insolent and defiant presence, the king insists on keeping him (I. ii. 116) 'in the cheer and comfort of his eye'; signifying to us almost pointedly that Claudius does not dare have him out of sight. When it is determined that Hamlet shall be sent to England, he learns of the order, of the sealed letters, and of the companions chosen, from within the royal circle. He will dig one yard, he says, below their mines—he will meet their secret plotting with secret plotting. But how? Of course by proxy. The summary action of the king—fearing perhaps that the daring exposure of his crime was the prelude to some *coup*—in 'shipping' Hamlet forth at dawn, is baldly suggestive. It at least delays the counter explosion. As to the matter of the pirate rescue, Shakespeare needs but to get Hamlet back to Kronberg, and avoids confusing his audience with details. But again, there is little question what was in his mind. Pirates do not turn outlaws to get prisoners—they do not take any—but treasure. They cut throats, to obtain it, and scuttle ships, and avoid appearing with their loot at open moorings. But these 'sailors,' these 'good fellows,' land at Elsinore, and indeed come

One word of Ophelia, misjudged and misprized Ophelia. Quiller-Couch says (p. 151) that she was not present in the room of state when Hamlet threw down the gauntlet of scorn (I. ii) to the new sovereign and his court. Shakespeare, we might have been sure, would not have had Ophelia miss that. It is only the modern editors who have considered her unworthy. The Folios allow her to enter the scene with her father and Laertes. 'She is colorless, insipid, characterless.' Well, could Portia have answered Laertes (I. iii. 45-51) with such consummate and feminine finality? That she should disally herself with Hamlet at her father's order—Hamlet having made himself the king's enemy in the last scene—argues no lack of will or personality. She is typically the high-born maid of the Northland, she is the Ingeborg of the sagas, who refuses to break from loyalty to her home and family. Tegnér has faithfully expanded her devotion thus:

Frithiof. Art thou not free if thou but will? Thy father
No longer liveth.

Ingeborg. Helge is my father,
Now stands in place of father, and my hand
Waits his award. King Bele's daughter never
Will steal her joy, however near it lie.
What, pray, were woman, should she free herself
From bonds wherewith Allfather has made fast
Unto the strong her being's helplessness!
The snow-white water lily is like her.
It rises with the waves, with waves it sinks,

over to Kronberg to get into communication with the king. Why are they not hanged on sight? Quite evidently the king is chary of measures against those who thwart his will.

One would be glad to see, in a volume like this one, a corrective paragraph on stage abuses in the rendition of important parts. Nothing could sooner make Shakespeare's ghost haunt the greenroom, than a manager's causing or allowing Gertrude, for cheap effect, to leave the stage at the end of Act III sobbing, and be heard in hysterics along the corridors of the castle. No part of the drama is more touching than the perfect sympathy and understanding with which Hamlet and his mother, after he has entrusted her with his secret, are prepared for their last meeting. Once more, to cause or allow the actor taking the part of Hamlet to creep in the very article of death to the foot of the throne and with his last energy writhe himself into it—as if *this* were the sum total of all his mortal aspirations—is the acme of outrage to his nature and to Shakespeare's thought.

And skippers' keels shall go straight over it.
 And never mark that they have cut its stalk.
 It is that lily's destiny. But still,
 As long as in the sand its root holds fast,
 The plant shall have its worth, and borrow hue
 From sister-stars which glitter pale above,—
 A star itself upon the blue expanse.
 But if it struggle free, it only drifts
 A wither'd leaf around the desert waters.³⁶

Can one omit mention, on taking leave of Quiller-Couch's fervent tribute, that this was the work which won recognition of Shakespeare's genius from the dons and scholars of the day? Is it not affirmed of *Hamlet*, on the title page of the First, and apparently pirated Quarto, text,—

As it hath been diuerse times acted by his Highnesse
 seruants in the Cittie of London; as also in the two
 Vniuersities of Cambridge and Oxford, and else-where?

'And elsewhere.' Where 'elsewhere,' we wonder. At Bristol, at Norwich, possibly. At Elsinore palace, at Kronberg? And how did Shakespeare's fame reach the Isis and the Cam? Did Shakespeare himself, at some first rendition of *Hamlet*, manage the cast? Was he his own ghost eitherwhere? The archives, perhaps, in one or the other university will show. Might not the Edward-Seventh Professor of English Literature at Cambridge institute, like our Professor Wallace at the Public Record Office, an inquiry?

³⁶ Esaias Tegnér: *Frithiof's Saga*, Canto VIII, ll. 267-284.