

Some Account of the Life of Mr. William Shakespear (1709) eBook

Some Account of the Life of Mr. William Shakespear (1709) by Nicholas Rowe (dramatist)

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INTRODUCTION.

The Rowe-Tonson edition of Shakespeare's plays (1709) is an important event in the history of both Shakespeare studies and English literary criticism. Though based substantially on the Fourth Folio (1685), it is the first, "edited" edition: Rowe modernized spelling and punctuation and quietly made a number of sensible emendations. It is the first edition to include *dramatis personae*, the first to attempt a systematic division of all the plays into acts and scenes, and the first to give to scenes their distinct locations. It is the first of many illustrated editions. It is the first to abandon the clumsy folio format and to attempt to bring the plays within reach of the

understanding and the pocketbooks of the average reader. Finally, it is the first to include an extended life and critique of the author.

Shakespeare scholars from Pope to the present have not been kind to Rowe either as editor or as critic; but all eighteenth-century editors accepted many of his emendations, and the biographical material that he and Betterton assembled remained the basis of all accounts of the dramatist until the scepticism and scholarship of Steevens and Malone proved most of it to be merely dubious tradition. Johnson, indeed, spoke generously of the edition. In the *Life of Rowe* he said that as an editor Howe “has done more than he promised; and that, without the pomp of notes or the boast of criticism, many passages are happily restored.” The preface, in his opinion, “cannot be said to discover much profundity or penetration.” But he acknowledged Rowe’s influence on Shakespeare’s reputation. In our own century, more justice has been done Rowe, at least as an editor.

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The years 1709-14 were of great importance in the growth of Shakespeare's reputation. As we shall see, the plays as well as the poems, both authentic and spurious, were frequently printed and bought. With the passing of the seventeenth-century folios and the occasional quartos of acting versions of single plays, Shakespeare could find a place in libraries and could be intimately known by hundreds who had hitherto known him only in the theater. Tonson's business acumen made Shakespeare available to the general reader in the reign of Anne; Rowe's editorial, biographical, and critical work helped to make him comprehensible within the framework of contemporary taste.

When Rowe's edition appeared twenty-four years had passed since the publication of the Fourth Folio. As Allardyce Nicoll has shown, Tonson owned certain rights in the publication of the plays, rights derived ultimately from the printers of the First Folio. Precisely when he decided to publish a revised octavo edition is not known, nor do we know when Rowe accepted the commission and began his work. McKerrow has plausibly suggested that Tonson may have been anxious to call attention to his rights in Shakespeare on the eve of the passage of the copyright law which went into effect in April, 1710.[2] Certainly Tonson must have felt that he was adding to the prestige which his publishing house had gained by the publication of Milton and Dryden's *Virgil*.

In March 1708/9 Tonson was advertising for materials "serviceable to [the] Design" of publishing an edition of Shakespeare's works in six volumes octavo, which would be ready "in a Month." There was a delay, however, and it was on 2 June that Tonson finally announced: "There is this day Publish'd ... the Works of Mr. William Shakespear, in six Vols. 8vo. adorn'd with Cuts, Revis'd and carefully Corrected: With an Account of the Life and Writings of the Author, by N. Rowe, Esq; Price 30s." Subscription copies on large paper, some few to be bound in nine volumes, were to be had at his shop.[3]

The success of the venture must have been immediately apparent. By 1710 a second edition, identical in title page and typography with the first, but differing in many details, had been printed,[4] followed in 1714 by a third in duodecimo. This so-called second edition exists in three issues, the first made up of eight volumes, the third of nine. In all three editions the spurious plays were collected in the last volume, except in the third issue of 1714, in which the ninth volume contains the poems.

That other publishers sensed the profits in Shakespeare is evident from the activities of Edmund Curll and Bernard Lintot. Curll acted with imagination and promptness: within three weeks of the publication of Tonson's edition, he advertised as Volume VII of the works of Shakespeare his forthcoming volume of the poems. This volume, misdated 1710 on the title page, seems to have been published in September

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1709. A reprint with corrections and some emendations of the Cotes-Benson Poems *Written By Wil. Shake-speare. Gent.*, 1640, it contains Charles Gildon's "Essay on the Art, Rise, and Progress of the Stage in *Greece, Rome, and England*," his "Remarks" on the separate plays, his "References to Classic Authors," and his glossary. With great shrewdness Curll produced a volume uniform in size and format with Rowe's edition and equipped with an essay which opens with an attack on Tonson for printing doubtful plays and for attempting to disparage the poems through envy of their publisher. This attack was certainly provoked by the curious final paragraph of Rowe's introduction, in which he refused to determine the genuineness of the 1640 poems. Obviously Tonson was perturbed when he learned that Curll was publishing the poems as an appendix to Rowe's edition.

Once again a Shakespearian publication was successful, and Tonson incorporated the Curll volume into the third issue of the 1714 edition, having apparently come to some agreement with Curll, since the title page of Volume IX states that it was "Printed for J. Tonson, E. Curll, J. Pemberton, and K. Sanger." In this edition Gildon omitted his offensive remarks about Tonson, as well as the "References to Classic Authors," in which he had suggested topics treated by both the ancients and Shakespeare. This volume was revised by George Sewall and appeared in appropriate format as an addition to Pope's Shakespeare, 1723-25.

Meanwhile, in July, 1709, Lintot had begun to advertise his edition of the poems, which was expanded in 1710/11 to include the sonnets in a second volume.[5] Thus within a year of the publication of Rowe's edition, all of Shakespeare, as well as some spurious works, was on the market. With the publication of these volumes, Shakespeare began to pass rapidly into the literary consciousness of the race. And formal criticism of his writings inevitably followed.

Rowe's "Some Account of the Life, &c. of Mr. William Shakespear," reprinted with a very few trifling typographical changes in 1714, survived in all the important eighteenth-century editions, but it was never reprinted in its original form. Pope re-arranged the material, giving it a more orderly structure and omitting passages that were obviously erroneous or that seemed outmoded.[6] It is odd that all later eighteenth-century editors seem to have believed that Pope's revision was actually Rowe's own re-writing of the *Account* for the 1714 edition. Theobald did not reprint the essay, but he used and amplified Rowe's material in his biography of Shakespeare; Warburton, of course, reprinted Pope's version, as did Johnson, Steevens, and Malone. Both Steevens and Malone identified the Pope revision as Rowe's.[7]

Thus it came about that Rowe's preface in its original form was lost from sight during the entire eighteenth century. Even in the twentieth, Pope's revision has been printed with the statement that it is taken "from the second edition (1714), slightly altered from

the first edition of 1709."^[8] Only D. Nichol Smith has republished the original essay in his *Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare*, 1903.



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The biographical part of Rowe's *Account* assembled the few facts and most of the traditions still current about Shakespeare a century after his death. It would be easy for any undergraduate to distinguish fact from legend in Rowe's preface; and scholarship since Steevens and Malone has demonstrated the unreliability of most of the local traditions that Betterton reported from Warwickshire. Antiquarian research has added a vast amount of detail about the world in which Shakespeare lived and has raised and answered questions that never occurred to Rowe; but it has recovered little more of the man himself than Rowe knew.

The critical portions of Rowe's account look backward and forward: backward to the Restoration, among whose critical controversies the eighteenth-century Shakespeare took shape; and forward to the long succession of critical writings that, by the end of the century, had secured for Shakespeare his position as the greatest of the English poets. Until Dryden and Rymer, criticism of Shakespeare in the seventeenth century had been occasional rather than systematic. Dryden, by his own acknowledgement, derived his enthusiasm for Shakespeare from Davenant, and thus, in a way, spoke for a man who had known the poet. Shakespeare was constantly in his mind, and the critical problems that the plays raised in the literary milieu of the Restoration constantly fascinated him. Rymer's attack served to solidify opinion and to force Shakespeare's admirers to examine the grounds of their faith. By 1700 a conventional manner of regarding Shakespeare and the plays had been achieved.

The growth of Shakespeare's reputation during the century after his death is a familiar episode in English criticism. Bentley has demonstrated the dominant position of Jonson up to the end of the century.^[9] But Jonson's reputation and authority worked for Shakespeare and helped to shape, a critical attitude toward the plays. His official praise in the first Folio had declared Shakespeare at least the equal of the ancients and the very poet of nature. He had raised the issue of Shakespeare's learning, thus helping to emphasize the idea of Shakespeare as a natural genius; and in the *Discoveries* he had blamed his friend for too great facility and for bombast.

In his commendatory sonnet in the Second Folio (1632), Milton took the Jonsonian view of Shakespeare, whose "easy numbers" he contrasted with "slow-endeavouring Art," and readers of the poems of 1645 found in *L'Allegro* an early formulation of what was to become the stock comparison of the two great Jacobean dramatists in the lines about Jonson's "learned sock" and Shakespeare, "Fancy's child." This contrast became a constant theme in Restoration allusions to the two poets.

Two other early critical ideas were to be elaborated in the last four decades of the century. In the first Folio Leonard Digges had spoken of Shakespeare's "fire and fancy," and I.M.S. had written in the Second Folio of his ability to move the passions. Finally, throughout the last half of the century, as Bentley has shown, Shakespeare was admired above all English dramatists for his ability to create characters, of whom Falstaff was the most frequently mentioned.

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All of these opinions were developed in Dryden's frequent critical remarks on his favorite dramatist. No one was more clearly aware than he of the faults of the "divine Shakespeare" as they appeared in the new era of letters that Dryden himself helped to shape. And no man ever praised Shakespeare more generously. For Dryden Shakespeare was the greatest of original geniuses, who, "taught by none," laid the foundations of English drama; he was a poet of bold imagination, especially gifted in "magick" or the supernatural, the poet of nature, who could dispense with "art," the poet of the passions, of varied characters and moods, the poet of large and comprehensive soul. To him, as to most of his contemporaries, the contrast between Jonson and Shakespeare was important: the one showed what poets ought to do; the other what untutored genius can do. When Dryden praised Shakespeare, his tone became warmer than when he judicially appraised Jonson.

Like most of his contemporaries Dryden did not heed Jonson's caveat that, despite his lack of learning, Shakespeare did have art. He was too obsessed with the idea that Shakespeare, ignorant of the health-giving art of the ancients, was infected with the faults of his age, faults that even Jonson did not always escape. Shakespeare was often incorrect in grammar; he frequently sank to flatness or soared into bombast; his wit could be coarse and low and too dependent on puns; his plot structure was at times faulty, and he lacked the sense for order and arrangement that the new taste valued. All this he could and did admit, and he was impressed by the learning and critical standards of Rymer's attack. But like Samuel Johnson he was not often prone to substitute theory for experience, and like most of his contemporaries he felt Shakespeare's power to move and to convince. Perhaps the most trenchant expression of his final stand in regard to Shakespeare and to the whole art of poetry is to be found in his letter to Dennis, dated 3 March, 1693/4. Shakespeare, he said, had genius, which is "alone a greater Virtue ... than all the other Qualifications put together." He admitted that all the faults pointed out by Rymer are real enough, but he added a question that removed the discussion from theory to immediate experience: "Yet who will read Mr. Rym[er] or not read Shakespear?" When Dryden died in 1700, the age of Jonson had passed and the age of Shakespeare was about to begin.

The Shakespeare of Rowe's *Account* is in most essentials the Shakespeare of Restoration criticism, minus the consideration of his faults. As Nichol Smith has observed, Dryden and Rymer were continually in Rowe's mind as he wrote. It is likely that Smith is correct in suspecting in the *Account* echoes of Dryden's conversation as well as of his published writings;^[10] and the respect in which Rymer was then held is evident in Rowe's desire not to enter into controversy with that redoubtable critic and in his inability to refrain from doing so.

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If one reads the *Account* in Pope's neat and tidy revision and then as Rowe published it, one is impressed with its Restoration quality. It seems almost deliberately modelled on Dryden's prefaces, for it is loosely organized, discursive, intimate, and it even has something of Dryden's contagious enthusiasm. Rowe presents to his reader the Restoration Shakespeare: the original genius, the antithesis of Jonson, the exception to the rule and the instance that diminishes the importance of the rules. Shakespeare "lived under a kind of mere light of nature," and knowing nothing of the rules should not be judged by them. Admitting the poor plot structure and the neglect of the unities, except in an occasional play, Rowe concentrates on Shakespeare's virtues: his images, "so lively, that the thing he would represent stands full before you, and you possess every part of it;" his command over the passions, especially terror; his magic; his characters and their "manners."

Bentley has demonstrated statistically that the Restoration had little appreciation of the romantic comedies. And yet Rowe, so thoroughly saturated with Restoration criticism, lists character after character from these plays as instances of Shakespeare's ability to depict the manners. Have we perhaps here a response to Shakespeare read as opposed to Shakespeare seen? Certainly the romantic comedies could not stand the test of the critical canons so well as did the *Merry Wives* or even *Othello*; and they were not much liked on the stage. But it seems probable that a generation which read French romances would not have felt especially hostile to the romantic comedies when read in the closet. Rowe's criticism is so little original, so far from idiosyncratic, that it is unnecessary to assume that his response to the characters in the comedies is unique.

Be that as it may, it was well that at the moment when the reading public began rapidly to expand in England, Tonson should have made Shakespeare available in an attractive and convenient format; and it was a happy choice that brought Rowe to the editorship of these six volumes. As poet, playwright, and man of taste, Rowe was admirably fitted to introduce Shakespeare to a multitude of new readers. Relatively innocent of the technical duties of an editor though he was, he none the less was capable of accomplishing what proved to be his historic mission: the easy re-statement of a view of Shakespeare which Dryden had earlier articulated and the demonstration that the plays could be read and admired despite the objections of formal dramatic criticism. He is more than a chronological predecessor of Pope, Johnson, and Morgann. The line is direct from Shakespeare to Davenant, to Dryden, to Rowe; and he is an organic link between this seventeenth-century tradition and the increasingly rich Shakespeare scholarship and criticism that flowed through the eighteenth century into the romantic era.



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Notes

[Footnote 1: Alfred Jackson, "Rowe's edition of Shakespeare," *Library X* (1930), 455-473; Allardyce Nicoll, "The editors of Shakespeare from first folio to Malone," *Studies in the first Folio*, London (1924), pp. 158-161; Ronald B. McKerrow, "The treatment of Shakespeare's text by his earlier editors, 1709-1768," *Proceedings of the British Academy*, XIX (1933), 89-122; Augustus Ralli, *A history of Shakespearian criticism*, London, 1932; Herbert S. Robinson, *English Shakespearian criticism in the eighteenth century*, New York, 1932.]

[Footnote 2: Nicoll, *op. cit.*, pp. 158-161; McKerrow, *op. cit.*, p. 93.]

[Footnote 3: London *Gazette*, From Monday March 14 to Thursday March 17, 1708, and From Monday May 30 to Thursday June 2, 1709. For descriptions and collations of this edition, see A. Jackson, *op. cit.*; H.L. Ford, *Shakespeare 1700-1740*, Oxford (1935), pp. 9, 10; *TLS* 16 May, 1929, p. 408; Edward Wagenknecht, "The first editor of Shakespeare," *Colophon* VIII, 1931. According to a writer in *The Gentleman's Magazine* (LVII, 1787, p. 76), Rowe was paid thirty-six pounds, ten shillings by Tonson.]

[Footnote 4: Identified and described by McKerrow, *TLS* 8 March, 1934, p. 168. See also Ford, *op. cit.*, pp. 11, 12.]

[Footnote 5: The best discussion of the Curll and Lintot Poems is that of Hyder Rollins in *A new variorum edition of Shakespeare: the poems*, Philadelphia and London (1938) pp. 380-382, to which I am obviously indebted. See also Raymond M. Alden, "The 1710 and 1714 texts of Shakespeare's poems," *MLN* XXXI (1916), 268-274; and Ford, *op. cit.*, pp. 37-40.]

[Footnote 6: For example, he dropped out Rowe's opinion that Shakespeare had little learning; the reference to Dryden's view as to the date of *Pericles*; the statement that *Venus and Adonis* is the only work that Shakespeare himself published; the identification of Spenser's "pleasant Willy" with Shakespeare; the account of Jonson's grudging attitude toward Shakespeare; the attack on Rymer and the defence of *Othello*; and the discussion of the Davenant-Dryden *Tempest*, together with the quotation from Dryden's prologue to that play.]

[Footnote 7: Edmond Malone, *The plays and poems of William Shakespeare*, London (1790), I, 154. Difficult as it is to believe that so careful a scholar as Malone could have made this error, it is none the less true that he observed the omission of the passage on "pleasant Willy" and stated that Rowe had obviously altered his opinion by 1714.]

[Footnote 8: Beverley Warner, *Famous introductions to Shakespeare's plays*, New York (1906), p. 6.]



[Footnote 9: Gerald E. Bentley, *Shakespeare and Jonson*, Chicago (1945). Vol. I.]

[Footnote 10: D. Nichol Smith, *Eighteenth century essays on Shakespeare*, Glasgow (1903), pp. xiv-xv.]



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The writer wishes to express his appreciation of a Research Grant from the University of Minnesota for the summer of 1948, during which this introduction was written.

—Samuel Holt Monk
University of Minnesota

[Illustration: Picture of Shakespeare surrounded by angels]

THE

WORKS

OF

Mr. William Shakespear;

IN

SIX VOLUMES.

ADORN'D with CUTS.

Revis'd and Corrected, with an Account of the Life and Writings of the Author.

By *N. ROWE*, Esq;

L O N D O N:

Printed for *Jacob Tonson*, within *Grays-Inn Gate*, next *Grays-Inn Lane*. MDCCIX.

[Illustration: Decorative motif]

SOME

ACCOUNT

OF THE

LIFE, &c.



OF

Mr. *William Shakespear*.

It seems to be a kind of Respect due to the Memory of Excellent Men, especially of those whom their Wit and Learning have made Famous, to deliver some Account of themselves, as well as their Works, to Posterity. For this Reason, how fond do we see some People of discovering any little Personal Story of the great Men of Antiquity, their Families, the common Accidents of their Lives, and even their Shape, Make and Features have been the Subject of critical Enquiries. How trifling soever this Curiosity may seem to be, it is certainly very Natural; and we are hardly satisfy'd with an Account of any remarkable Person, 'till we have heard him describ'd even to the very Cloaths he wears. As for what relates to Men of Letters, the knowledge of an Author may sometimes conduce to the better understanding his Book: And tho' the Works of Mr. *Shakespear* may seem to many not to want a Comment, yet I fancy some little Account of the Man himself may not be thought improper to go along with them.

He was the Son of Mr. *John Shakespear*, and was Born at *Stratford* upon *Avon*, in *Warwickshire*, in *April* 1564. His Family, as appears by the Register and Publick Writings relating to that Town, were of good Figure and Fashion there, and are mention'd as Gentlemen. His Father, who was a considerable Dealer in Wool, had so large a Family, ten Children in all, that tho' he was his eldest Son, he could give him no better Education than his own Employment. He had bred him, 'tis true, for some time at a Free-School, where 'tis probable he acquir'd that little *Latin* he was Master of: But the narrowness of his Circumstances, and the want of his assistance at Home, forc'd his Father to withdraw him from thence, and unhappily prevented his further Proficiency



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in that Language. It is without Controversie, that he had no knowledge of the Writings of the Antient Poets, not only from this Reason, but from his Works themselves, where we find no traces of any thing that looks like an Imitation of 'em; the Delicacy of his Taste, and the natural Bent of his own Great *Genius*, equal, if not superior to some of the best of theirs, would certainly have led him to Read and Study 'em with so much Pleasure, that some of their fine Images would naturally have insinuated themselves into, and been mix'd with his own Writings; so that his not copying at least something from them, may be an Argument of his never having read 'em. Whether his Ignorance of the Antients were a disadvantage to him or no, may admit of a Dispute: For tho' the knowledge of 'em might have made him more Correct, yet it is not improbable but that the Regularity and Deference for them, which would have attended that Correctness, might have restrain'd some of that Fire, Impetuosity, and even beautiful Extravagance which we admire in *Shakespeare*: And I believe we are better pleas'd with those Thoughts, altogether New and Uncommon, which his own Imagination supply'd him so abundantly with, than if he had given us the most beautiful Passages out of the *Greek* and *Latin* Poets, and that in the most agreeable manner that it was possible for a Master of the *English* Language to deliver 'em. Some *Latin* without question he did know, and one may see up and down in his Plays how far his Reading that way went: In *Love's Labour lost*, the Pedant comes out with a Verse of *Mantuan*; and in *Titus Andronicus*, one of the *Gothick* Princes, upon reading

*Integer vitae scelerisque purus
Non eget Mauri jaculis nec arcu—*

says, 'Tis a Verse in *Horace*, but he remembers it out of his Grammar: Which, I suppose, was the Author's Case. Whatever *Latin* he had, 'tis certain he understood *French*, as may be observ'd from many Words and Sentences scatter'd up and down his Plays in that Language; and especially from one Scene in *Henry* the Fifth written wholly in it. Upon his leaving School, he seems to have given intirely into that way of Living which his Father propos'd to him; and in order to settle in the World after a Family manner, he thought fit to marry while he was yet very Young. His Wife was the Daughter of one *Hathaway*, said to have been a substantial Yeoman in the Neighbourhood of *Stratford*. In this kind of Settlement he continu'd for some time, 'till an Extravagance that he was guilty of, forc'd him both out of his Country and that way of Living which he had taken up; and tho' it seem'd at first to be a Blemish upon his good Manners, and a Misfortune to him, yet it afterwards happily prov'd the occasion of exerting one of the greatest *Genius*'s that ever was known in Dramatick Poetry. He had, by a Misfortune



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common enough to young Fellows, fallen into ill Company; and amongst them, some that made a frequent practice of Deer-stealing, engag'd him with them more than once in robbing a Park that belong'd to Sir *Thomas Lucy* of *Cherlecot*, near *Stratford*. For this he was prosecuted by that Gentleman, as he thought somewhat too severely; and in order to revenge that ill Usage, he made a Ballad upon him. And tho' this, probably the first Essay of his Poetry, be lost, yet it is said to have been so very bitter, that it redoubled the Prosecution against him to that degree, that he was oblig'd to leave his Business and Family in *Warwickshire*, for some time, and shelter himself in *London*.

It is at this Time, and upon this Accident, that he is said to have made his first Acquaintance in the Play-house. He was receiv'd into the Company then in being, at first in a very mean Rank; But his admirable Wit, and the natural Turn of it to the Stage, soon distinguish'd him, if not as an extraordinary Actor, yet as an excellent Writer. His Name is Printed, as the Custom was in those Times, amongst those of the other Players, before some old Plays, but without any particular Account of what sort of Parts he us'd to play; and tho' I have inquir'd, I could never meet with any further Account of him this way, than that the top of his Performance was the Ghost in his own *Hamlet*. I should have been much more pleas'd, to have learn'd from some certain Authority, which was the first Play he wrote; it would be without doubt a pleasure to any Man, curious in Things of this Kind, to see and know what was the first Essay of a Fancy like *Shakespear's*. Perhaps we are not to look for his Beginnings, like those of other Authors, among their least perfect Writings; Art had so little, and Nature so large a Share in what he did, that, for ought I know, the Performances of his Youth, as they were the most vigorous, and had the most fire and strength of Imagination in 'em, were the best. I would not be thought by this to mean, that his Fancy was so loose and extravagant, as to be Independent on the Rule and Government of Judgment; but that what he thought, was commonly so Great, so justly and rightly Conceived in it self, that it wanted little or no Correction, and was immediately approv'd by an impartial Judgment at the first sight. Mr. *Dryden* seems to think that *Pericles* is one of his first Plays; but there is no judgment to be form'd on that, since there is good Reason to believe that the greatest part of that Play was not written by him; tho' it is own'd, some part of it certainly was, particularly the last Act. But tho' the order of Time in which the several Pieces were written be generally uncertain, yet there are Passages in some few of them which seem to fix their Dates. So the *Chorus* in the beginning of the fifth Act of *Henry V.* by a Compliment very handsomly turn'd to the Earl of *Essex*, shews the Play to have been written



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when that Lord was General for the Queen in *Ireland*: And his Elogy upon Q. *Elizabeth*, and her Successor K. *James*, in the latter end of his *Henry VII*, is a Proof of that Play's being written after the Accession of the latter of those two Princes to the Crown of *England*. Whatever the particular Times of his Writing were, the People of his Age, who began to grow wonderfully fond of Diversions of this kind, could not but be highly pleas'd to see a *Genius* arise amongst 'em of so pleasurable, so rich a Vein, and so plentifully capable of furnishing their favourite Entertainments. Besides the advantages of his Wit, he was in himself a good-natur'd Man, of great sweetness in his Manners, and a most agreeable Companion; so that it is no wonder if with so many good Qualities he made himself acquainted with the best Conversations of those Times. Queen *Elizabeth* had several of his Plays Acted before her, and without doubt gave him many gracious Marks of her Favour: It is that Maiden Princess plainly, whom he intends by

—A fair Vestal, Throned by the West.—

Midsummer Night's Dream, Vol. 2. p. 480.

And that whole Passage is a Compliment very properly brought in, and very handsomly apply'd to her. She was so well pleas'd with that admirable Character of *Falstaff*, in the two Parts of *Henry the Fourth*, that she commanded him to continue it for one Play more, and to shew him in Love. This is said to be the Occasion of his Writing *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. How well she was obey'd, the Play it self is an admirable Proof. Upon this Occasion it may not be improper to observe, that this Part of *Falstaff* is said to have been written originally under the Name of *Oldcastle*; some of that Family being then remaining, the Queen was pleas'd to command him to alter it; upon which he made use of *Falstaff*. The present Offence was indeed avoided; but I don't know whether the Author may not have been somewhat to blame in his second Choice, since it is certain that Sir *John Falstaff*, who was a Knight of the Garter, and a Lieutenant-General, was a Name of distinguish'd Merit in the Wars in *France* in *Henry the Fifth's* and *Henry the Sixth's* Times. What Grace soever the Queen confer'd upon him, it was not to her only he ow'd the Fortune which the Reputation of his Wit made. He had the Honour to meet with many great and uncommon Marks of Favour and Friendship from the Earl of *Southampton*, famous in the Histories of that Time for his Friendship to the unfortunate Earl of *Essex*. It was to that Noble Lord that he Dedicated his *Venus and Adonis*, the only Piece of his Poetry which he ever publish'd himself, tho' many of his Plays were surrepticiously and lamely Printed in his Lifetime. There is one Instance so singular in the Magnificence of this Patron of *Shakespear's*, that if I had not been assur'd that the Story

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was handed down by Sir *William D'Avenant*, who was probably very well acquainted with his Affairs, I should not have ventur'd to have inserted, that my Lord *Southampton*, at one time, gave him a thousand Pounds, to enable him to go through with a Purchase which he heard he had a mind to. A Bounty very great, and very rare at any time, and almost equal to that profuse Generosity the present Age has shewn to *French Dancers* and *Italian Eunuchs*.

What particular Habitude or Friendships he contracted with private Men, I have not been able to learn, more than that every one who had a true Taste of Merit, and could distinguish Men, had generally a just Value and Esteem for him. His exceeding Candor and good Nature must certainly have inclin'd all the gentler Part of the World to love him, as the power of his Wit oblig'd the Men of the most delicate Knowledge and polite Learning to admire him. Amongst these was the incomparable Mr. *Edmond Spencer*, who speaks of him in his *Tears of the Muses*, not only with the Praises due to a good Poet, but even lamenting his Absence with the tenderness of a Friend. The Passage is in *Thalia's Complaint* for the Decay of Dramatick Poetry, and the Contempt the Stage then lay under, amongst his Miscellaneous Works, p. 147.

*And he the Man, whom Nature's self had made
To mock her self, and Truth to imitate
With kindly Counter under mimick Shade,
Our pleasant Willy_, ah! is dead of late:
With whom all Joy and jolly Merriment
Is also deaded, and in Dolour drent._*

*Instead thereof, scoffing Scurrility
And scorning Folly with Contempt is crept,
Rolling in Rhimes of shameless Ribaudry,
Without Regard or due Decorum_ kept;
Each idle Wit at will presumes to make,
And doth the Learned's Task upon him take._*

*But that same gentle Spirit, from whose Pen
Large Streams of Honey and sweet Nectar_ flow,
Scorning the Boldness such base-born Men,
Which dare their Follies forth so rashly throw;
Doth rather choose to sit in idle Cell,
Than so himself to Mockery to sell._*

I know some People have been of Opinion, that *Shakespear* is not meant by *Willy* in the first *Stanza* of these Verses, because *Spencer's* Death happen'd twenty Years before *Shakespear's*. But, besides that the Character is not applicable to any Man of that time



but himself, it is plain by the last *Stanza* that Mr. *Spencer* does not mean that he was then really Dead, but only that he had with-drawn himself from the Publick, or at least with-held his Hand from Writing, out of a disgust he had taken at the then ill taste of the Town, and the mean Condition of the Stage. Mr. *Dryden* was always of Opinion these Verses were meant of *Shakespear*; and 'tis highly probable they were so, since



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he was three and thirty Years old at *Spencer's* Death; and his Reputation in Poetry must have been great enough before that Time to have deserv'd what is here said of him. His Acquaintance with *Ben Johnson* began with a remarkable piece of Humanity and good Nature; Mr. *Johnson*, who was at that Time altogether unknown to the World, had offer'd one of his Plays to the Players, in order to have it Acted; and the Persons into whose Hands it was put, after having turn'd it carelessly and superciliously over, were just upon returning it to him with an ill-natur'd Answer, that it would be of no service to their Company, when *Shakespear* luckily cast his Eye upon it, and found something so well in it as to engage him first to read it through, and afterwards to recommend Mr. *Johnson* and his Writings to the Publick. After this they were profess'd Friends; tho' I don't know whether the other ever made him an equal return of Gentleness and Sincerity. *Ben* was naturally Proud and Insolent, and in the Days of his Reputation did so far take upon him the Supremacy in Wit, that he could not but look with an evil Eye upon any one that seem'd to stand in Competition with him. And if at times he has affected to commend him, it has always been with some Reserve, insinuating his Uncorrectness, a careless manner of Writing, and want of Judgment; the Praise of seldom altering or blotting out what he writ, which was given him by the Players who were the first Publishers of his Works after his Death, was what *Johnson* could not bear; he thought it impossible, perhaps, for another Man to strike out the greatest Thoughts in the finest Expression, and to reach those Excellencies of Poetry with the Ease of a first Imagination, which himself with infinite Labour and Study could but hardly attain to. *Johnson* was certainly a very good Scholar, and in that had the advantage of *Shakespear*; tho' at the same time I believe it must be allow'd, that what Nature gave the latter, was more than a Ballance for what Books had given the former; and the Judgment of a great Man upon this occasion was, I think, very just and proper. In a Conversation between Sir *John Suckling*, Sir *William D'Avenant*, *Endymion Porter*, Mr. *Hales* of *Eaton*, and *Ben Johnson*; Sir *John Suckling*, who was a profess'd Admirer of *Shakespear*, had undertaken his Defence against *Ben Johnson* with some warmth; Mr. *Hales*, who had sat still for some time, hearing *Ben* frequently reproaching him with the want of Learning, and Ignorance of the Antients, told him at last, *That if Mr. Shakespear* had not read the Antients, he had likewise not stollen any thing from 'em; (a Fault the other made no Confidence of) *and that if he would produce any one Topick finely treated by any of them, he would undertake to shew something upon the same Subject at least as well written by Shakespear. Johnson*



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did indeed take a large liberty, even to the transcribing and translating of whole Scenes together; and sometimes, with all Deference to so great a Name as his, not altogether for the advantage of the Authors of whom he borrow'd. And if *Augustus* and *Virgil* were really what he has made 'em in a Scene of his *Poetaster*, they are as odd an Emperor and a Poet as ever met. *Shakespear*, on the other Hand, was beholding to no body farther than the Foundation of the Tale, the Incidents were often his own, and the Writing intirely so. There is one Play of his, indeed, *The Comedy of Errors*, in a great measure taken from the *Menoechmi* of *Plautus*. How that happen'd, I cannot easily Divine, since, as I hinted before, I do not take him to have been Master of *Latin* enough to read it in the Original, and I know of no Translation of *Plautus* so Old as his Time.

As I have not propos'd to my self to enter into a Large and Compleat Criticism upon Mr. *Shakespear's* Works, so I suppose it will neither be expected that I should take notice of the severe Remarks that have been formerly made upon him by Mr. *Rhymer*. I must confess, I can't very well see what could be the Reason of his animadverting with so much Sharpness, upon the Faults of a Man Excellent on most Occasions, and whom all the World ever was and will be inclin'd to have an Esteem and Veneration for. If it was to shew his own Knowledge in the Art of Poetry, besides that there is a Vanity in making that only his Design, I question if there be not many Imperfections as well in those Schemes and Precepts he has given for the Direction of others, as well as in that Sample of Tragedy which he has written to shew the Excellency of his own *Genius*. If he had a Pique against the Man, and wrote on purpose to ruin a Reputation so well establish'd, he has had the Mortification to fail altogether in his Attempt, and to see the World at least as fond of *Shakespear* as of his Critique. But I won't believe a Gentleman, and a good-natur'd Man, capable of the last Intention. Whatever may have been his Meaning, finding fault is certainly the easiest Task of Knowledge, and commonly those Men of good Judgment, who are likewise of good and gentle Dispositions, abandon this ungrateful Province to the Tyranny of Pedants. If one would enter into the Beauties of *Shakespear*, there is a much larger, as well as a more delightful Field; but as I won't prescribe to the Tastes of other People, so I will only take the liberty, with all due Submission to the Judgment of others, to observe some of those Things I have been pleas'd with in looking him over.



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His Plays are properly to be distinguish'd only into Comedies and Tragedies. Those which are called Histories, and even some of his Comedies, are really Tragedies, with a run or mixture of Comedy amongst 'em. That way of Trage-Comedy was the common Mistake of that Age, and is indeed become so agreeable to the *English* Tast, that tho' the severer Critiques among us cannot bear it, yet the generality of our Audiences seem to be better pleas'd with it than with an exact Tragedy. *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *The Comedy of Errors*, and *The Taming of the Shrew*, are all pure Comedy; the rest, however they are call'd, have something of both Kinds. 'Tis not very easie to determine which way of Writing he was most Excellent in. There is certainly a great deal of Entertainment in his Comical Humours; and tho' they did not then strike at all Ranks of People, as the Satyr of the present Age has taken the Liberty to do, yet there is a pleasing and a well-distinguish'd Variety in those Characters which he thought fit to meddle with. *Falstaff* is allow'd by every body to be a Master-piece; the Character is always well-sustain'd, tho' drawn out into the length of three Plays; and even the Account of his Death, given by his Old Landlady Mrs. *Quickly*, in the first Act of *Henry V.* tho' it be extremely Natural, is yet as diverting as any Part of his Life. If there be any Fault in the Draught he has made of this lewd old Fellow, it is, that tho' he has made him a Thief, Lying, Cowardly, Vain-glorious, and in short every way Vicious, yet he has given him so much Wit as to make him almost too agreeable; and I don't know whether some People have not, in remembrance of the Diversion he had formerly afforded 'em, been sorry to see his Friend *Hal* use him so scurvily, when he comes to the Crown in the End of the Second Part of *Henry* the Fourth. Amongst other Extravagances, in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, he has made him a Dear-stealer, that he might at the same time remember his *Warwickshire* Prosecutor, under the Name of Justice *Shallow*; he has given him very near the same Coat of Arms which *Dugdale*, in his Antiquities of that County, describes for a Family there, and makes the *Welsh* Parson descant very pleasantly upon 'em. That whole Play is admirable; the Humours are various and well oppos'd; the main Design, which is to cure *Ford* his unreasonable Jealousie, is extremely well conducted. *Falstaff's Billet-doux*, and Master *Slender's*

Ah! Sweet Ann Page!



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are very good Expressions of Love in their Way. In *Twelfth-Night* there is something singularly Ridiculous and Pleasant in the fantastical Steward *Malvolio*. The Parasite and the Vain-glorious in *Parolles*, in *All's Well that ends Well* is as good as any thing of that Kind in *Plautus* or *Terence*. *Petruchio*, in *The Taming of the Shrew*, is an uncommon Piece of Humour. The Conversation of *Benedick* and *Beatrice* in *Much ado about Nothing*, and of *Rosalind* in *As you like it*, have much Wit and Sprightliness all along. His Clowns, without which Character there was hardly any Play writ in that Time, are all very entertaining: And, I believe, *Thersites* in *Troilus* and *Cressida*, and *Apemantus* in *Timon*, will be allow'd to be Master-Pieces of ill Nature, and satyrical Snarling. To these I might add, that incomparable Character of *Shylock the Jew*, in *The Merchant of Venice*; but tho' we have seen that Play Receiv'd and Acted as a Comedy, and the Part of the *Jew* perform'd by an Excellent Comedian, yet I cannot but think it was design'd Tragically by the Author. There appears in it such a deadly Spirit of Revenge, such a savage Fierceness and Fellness, and such a bloody designation of Cruelty and Mischief, as cannot agree either with the Stile or Characters of Comedy. The Play it self, take it all together, seems to me to be one of the most finish'd of any of *Shakespear's*. The Tale indeed, in that Part relating to the Caskets, and the extravagant and unusual kind of Bond given by *Antonio*, is a little too much remov'd from the Rules of Probability: But taking the Fact for granted, we must allow it to be very beautifully written. There is something in the Friendship of *Antonio* to *Bassanio* very Great, Generous and Tender. The whole fourth Act, supposing, as I said, the Fact to be probable, is extremely Fine. But there are two Passages that deserve a particular Notice. The first is, what *Portia* says in praise of Mercy, pag. 577; and the other on the Power of Musick, pag. 587. The Melancholy of *Jacques*, in *As you like it*, is as singular and odd as it is diverting. And if what *Horace* says

Difficile est proprie communia Dicere,

'Twill be a hard Task for any one to go beyond him in the Description of the several Degrees and Ages of Man's Life, tho' the Thought be old, and common enough.

—All the World's a Stage,
And all the Men and Women meerly Players;
They have their Exits and their Entrances,
And one Man in his time plays many Parts,
His Acts being seven Ages. At first the Infant
Mewling and puking in the Nurse's Arms:
And then, the whining School-boy with his Satchel,
And shining Morning-face, creeping like Snail
Unwillingly to School.



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And then the Lover

Sighing like Furnace, with a woful Ballad
 Made to his Mistress' Eye-brow. Then a Soldier
 Full of strange Oaths, and bearded like the Pard,
 Jealous in Honour, sudden and quick in Quarrel,
 Seeking the bubble Reputation
 Ev'n in the Cannon's Mouth. And then the Justice
 In fair round Belly, with good Capon lin'd,
 With Eyes severe, and Beard of formal Cut,
 Full of wise Saws and modern Instances;
 And so he plays his Part. The sixth Age shifts
 Into the lean and slipper'd Pantaloon,
 With Spectacles on Nose, and Pouch on Side;
 His youthful Hose, well sav'd, a world too wide
 For his shrunk Shank; and his big manly Voice
 Turning again tow'rd childish treble Pipes,
 And Whistles in his Sound. Last Scene of all,
 That ends this strange eventful History,
 Is second Childishness and meer Oblivion,
 Sans Teeth, sans Eyes, sans Tast, sans ev'rything._

p. 625.

His Images are indeed ev'ry where so lively, that the Thing he would represent stands full before you, and you possess ev'ry Part of it. I will venture to point out one more, which is, I think, as strong and as uncommon as any thing I ever saw; 'tis an Image of Patience. Speaking of a Maid in Love, he says,

_—She never told her Love,
 But let Concealment, like a Worm i' th' Bud
 Feed on her Damask Cheek: She pin'd in Thought,
 And sate like *Patience* on a Monument,
 Smiling at_ Grief.

What an Image is here given! and what a Task would it have been for the greatest Masters of *Greece* and *Rome* to have express'd the Passions design'd by this Sketch of Statuary? The Stile of his Comedy is, in general, Natural to the Characters, and easie in it self; and the Wit most commonly sprightly and pleasing, except in those places where he runs into Dogrel Rhymes, as in *The Comedy of Errors*, and a Passage or two in some other Plays. As for his Jingling sometimes, and playing upon Words, it was the common Vice of the Age he liv'd in: And if we find it in the Pulpit, made use of as an



Ornament to the Sermons of some of the Gravest Divines of those Times; perhaps it may not be thought too light for the Stage.

But certainly the greatness of this Author's Genius do's no where so much appear, as where he gives his Imagination an entire Loose, and raises his Fancy to a flight above Mankind and the Limits of the visible World. Such are his Attempts in *The Tempest*, *Midsummer-Night's Dream*, *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*. Of these, *The Tempest*, however it comes to be plac'd the first by the former Publishers of his Works, can never have been the first written by him: It seems to me as perfect in its Kind, as almost any thing we have of his. One may observe, that the Unities are kept here with an Exactness uncommon to the Liberties



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of his Writing: Tho' that was what, I suppose, he valu'd himself least upon, since his Excellencies were all of another Kind. I am very sensible that he do's, in this Play, depart too much from that likeness to Truth which ought to be observ'd in these sort of Writings; yet he do's it so very finely, that one is easily drawn in to have more Faith for his sake, than Reason does well allow of. His Magick has something in it very Solemn and very Poetical: And that extravagant Character of *Caliban* is mighty well sustain'd, shews a wonderful Invention in the Author, who could strike out such a particular wild Image, and is certainly one of the finest and most uncommon Grotesques that was ever seen. The Observation, which I have been inform'd[A] three very great Men concurr'd in making upon this Part, was extremely just. *That Shakespear_* had not only found out a new Character in his *Caliban*, but had also devis'd and adapted a new manner of Language for that Character._ Among the particular Beauties of this Piece, I think one may be allow'd to point out the Tale of *Prospero* in the First Act; his Speech to *Ferdinand* in the Fourth, upon the breaking up the Masque of *Juno* and *Ceres*; and that in the Fifth, where he dissolves his Charms, and resolves to break his Magick Rod. This Play has been alter'd by Sir *William D'Avenant* and Mr. *Dryden*; and tho' I won't Arraign the Judgment of those two great Men, yet I think I may be allow'd to say, that there are some things left out by them, that might, and even ought to have been kept in. Mr. *Dryden* was an Admirer of our Author, and, indeed, he owed him a great deal, as those who have read them both may very easily observe. And, I think, in Justice to 'em both, I should not on this Occasion omit what Mr. *Dryden* has said of him.

*Shakespear, who, taught by none, did first impart
To Fletcher_ Wit, to lab'ring Johnson Art.
He, Monarch-like, gave those his Subjects Law,
And is that Nature which they Paint and Draw.
Fletcher reach'd that which on his heights did grow,
Whilst Johnson crept and gather'd all below:
This did his Love, and this his Mirth digest,
One imitates him most, the other best.
If they have since out-writ all other Men,
'Tis with the Drops which fell from Shakespear's Pen.
The[B]Storm which vanish'd on the neighb'ring Shoar,
Was taught by Shakespear's Tempest to roar.
That Innocence and Beauty which did smile
In Fletcher, grew on this Enchanted Isle.
But Shakespear's Magick could not copied be,
Within that Circle none durst walk but he._
I must confess 'twas bold, nor would you now
That Liberty to vulgar Wits allow,
Which works by Magick supernatural things:
But Shakespear_'s Pow'r is Sacred as A King's._*



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Prologue to *The Tempest*, as it
is alter'd by Mr. Dryden.

It is the same Magick that raises the Fairies in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, the Witches in *Macbeth*, and the Ghost in *Hamlet*, with Thoughts and Language so proper to the Parts they sustain, and so peculiar to the Talent of this Writer. But of the two last of these Plays I shall have occasion to take notice, among the Tragedies of Mr. *Shakespear*. If one undertook to examine the greatest part of these by those Rules which are establish'd by *Aristotle*, and taken from the Model of the *Grecian Stage*, it would be no very hard Task to find a great many Faults: But as *Shakespear* liv'd under a kind of mere Light of Nature, and had never been made acquainted with the Regularity of those written Precepts, so it would be hard to judge him by a Law he knew nothing of. We are to consider him as a Man that liv'd in a State of almost universal License and Ignorance: There was no establish'd Judge, but every one took the liberty to Write according to the Dictates of his own Fancy. When one considers, that there is not one Play before him of a Reputation good enough to entitle it to an Appearance on the present Stage, it cannot but be a Matter of great Wonder that he should advance Dramatick Poetry so far as he did. The Fable is what is generally plac'd the first, among those that are reckon'd the constituent Parts of a Tragick or Heroick Poem; not, perhaps, as it is the most Difficult or Beautiful, but as it is the first properly to be thought of in the Contrivance and Course of the whole; and with the Fable ought to be consider'd, the fit Disposition, Order and Conduct of its several Parts. As it is not in this Province of the *Drama* that the Strength and Mastery of *Shakespear* lay, so I shall not undertake the tedious and ill-natur'd Trouble to point out the several Faults he was guilty of in it. His Tales were seldom invented, but rather taken either from true History, or Novels and Romances: And he commonly made use of 'em in that Order, with those Incidents, and that extent of Time in which he found 'em in the Authors from whence he borrow'd them. So *The Winter's Tale*, which is taken from an old Book, call'd, *The Delectable History of Dorastus and Faunia*, contains the space of sixteen or seventeen Years, and the Scene is sometimes laid in *Bohemia*, and sometimes in *Sicily*, according to the original Order of the Story. Almost all his Historical Plays comprehend a great length of Time, and very different and distinct Places: And in his *Antony* and *Cleopatra*, the Scene travels over the greatest Part of the *Roman Empire*. But in Recompence for his Carelessness in this Point, when he comes to another Part of the *Drama*, *The Manners of his Characters, in Acting or Speaking what is proper for them, and fit to be shown by the Poet*, he may be generally justify'd,



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and in very many places greatly commended. For those Plays which he has taken from the *English* or *Roman* History, let any Man compare 'em, and he will find the Character as exact in the Poet as the Historian. He seems indeed so far from proposing to himself any one Action for a Subject, that the Title very often tells you, 'tis *The Life of King John*, *King Richard*, &c. What can be more agreeable to the Idea our Historians give of *Henry* the Sixth, than the Picture *Shakespear* has drawn of him! His Manners are every where exactly the same with the Story; one finds him still describ'd with Simplicity, passive Sanctity, want of Courage, weakness of Mind, and easie Submission to the Governance of an imperious Wife, or prevailing Faction: Tho' at the same time the Poet do's Justice to his good Qualities, and moves the Pity of his Audience for him, by showing him Pious, Disinterested, a Contemner of the Things of this World, and wholly resign'd to the severest Dispensations of God's Providence. There is a short Scene in the Second Part of *Henry VI. Vol. III. pag. 1504.* which I cannot but think admirable in its Kind. Cardinal *Beaufort*, who had murder'd the Duke of *Gloucester*, is shewn in the last Agonies on his Death-Bed, with the good King praying over him. There is so much Terror in one, so much Tenderness and moving Piety in the other, as must touch any one who is capable either of Fear or Pity. In his *Henry VIII.* that Prince is drawn with that Greatness of Mind, and all those good Qualities which are attributed to him in any Account of his Reign. If his Faults are not shewn in an equal degree, and the Shades in this Picture do not bear a just Proportion to the Lights, it is not that the Artist wanted either Colours or Skill in the Disposition of 'em; but the truth, I believe, might be, that he forbore doing it out of regard to Queen *Elizabeth*, since it could have been no very great Respect to the Memory of his Mistress, to have expos'd some certain Parts of her Father's Life upon the Stage. He has dealt much more freely with the Minister of that Great King, and certainly nothing was ever more justly written, than the Character of Cardinal *Wolsey*. He has shewn him Tyrannical, Cruel, and Insolent in his Prosperity; and yet, by a wonderful Address, he makes his Fall and Ruin the Subject of general Compassion. The whole Man, with his Vices and Virtues, is finely and exactly describ'd in the second Scene of the fourth Act. The Distresses likewise of Queen *Katherine*, in this Play, are very movingly touch'd: and tho' the Art of the Poet has skreen'd King *Henry* from any gross Imputation of Injustice, yet one is inclin'd to wish, the Queen had met with a Fortune more worthy of her Birth and Virtue. Nor are the Manners, proper to the Persons represented, less justly observ'd, in those Characters taken from the *Roman* History; and of this, the Fierceness



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and Impatience of *Coriolanus*, his Courage and Disdain of the common People, the Virtue and Philosophical Temper of *Brutus*, and the irregular Greatness of Mind in *M. Antony*, are beautiful Proofs. For the two last especially, you find 'em exactly as they are describ'd by *Plutarch*, from whom certainly *Shakespear* copy'd 'em. He has indeed follow'd his Original pretty close, and taken in several little Incidents that might have been spar'd in a Play. But, as I hinted before, his Design seems most commonly rather to describe those great Men in the several Fortunes and Accidents of their Lives, than to take any single great Action, and form his Work simply upon that. However, there are some of his Pieces, where the Fable is founded upon one Action only. Such are more especially, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, and *Othello*. The Design in *Romeo and Juliet*, is plainly the Punishment of their two Families, for the unreasonable Feuds and Animosities that had been so long kept up between 'em, and occasion'd the Effusion of so much Blood. In the management of this Story, he has shewn something wonderfully Tender and Passionate in the Love-part, and vary Pitiful in the Distress. *Hamlet* is founded on much the same Tale with the *Electra* of *Sophocles*. In each of 'em a young Prince is engag'd to Revenge the Death of his Father, their Mothers are equally Guilty, are both concern'd in the Murder of their Husbands, and are afterwards married to the Murderers. There is in the first Part of the *Greek* Trajedy, something very moving in the Grief of *Electra*; but as Mr. *D'Acier* has observ'd, there is something very unnatural and shocking in the Manners he has given that Princess and *Orestes* in the latter Part. *Orestes* embrues his Hands in the Blood of his own Mother; and that barbarous Action is perform'd, tho' not immediately upon the Stage, yet so near, that the Audience hear *Clytemnestra* crying out to *AEghystus* for Help, and to her Son for Mercy: While *Electra*, her Daughter, and a Princess, both of them Characters that ought to have appear'd with more Decency, stands upon the Stage and encourages her Brother in the Parricide. What Horror does this not raise! *Clytemnestra* was a wicked Woman, and had deserv'd to Die; nay, in the truth of the Story, she was kill'd by her own Son; but to represent an Action of this Kind on the Stage, is certainly an Offence against those Rules of Manners proper to the Persons that ought to be observ'd there. On the contrary, let us only look a little on the Conduct of *Shakespear*. *Hamlet* is represented with the same Piety towards his Father, and Resolution to Revenge his Death, as *Orestes*; he has the same Abhorrence for his Mother's Guilt, which, to provoke him the more, is heighten'd by Incest: But 'tis with wonderful Art and Justness of Judgment, that the Poet restrains him from doing Violence to his Mother. To prevent any thing of that Kind, he makes his Father's Ghost forbid that part of his Vengeance.



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But howsoever thou pursu'st this Act, Taint not thy Mind; nor let thy Soul contrive Against thy Mother ought; leave her to Heav'n, And to those Thorns that in her Bosom lodge, To prick and sting her. Vol. V. p. 2386.

This is to distinguish rightly between *Horror* and *Terror*. The latter is a proper Passion of Tragedy, but the former ought always to be carefully avoided. And certainly no Dramatick Writer ever succeeded better in raising *Terror* in the Minds of an Audience than *Shakespear* has done. The whole Tragedy of *Macbeth*, but more especially the Scene where the King is murder'd, in the second Act, as well as this Play, is a noble Proof of that manly Spirit with which he writ; and both shew how powerful he was, in giving the strongest Motions to our Souls that they are capable of. I cannot leave *Hamlet*, without taking notice of the Advantage with which we have seen this Master-piece of *Shakespear* distinguish it self upon the Stage, by Mr. *Betterton's* fine Performance of that Part. A Man, who tho' he had no other good Qualities, as he has a great many, must have made his way into the Esteem of all Men of Letters, by this only Excellency. No Man is better acquainted with *Shakespear's* manner of Expression, and indeed he has study'd him so well, and is so much a Master of him, that whatever Part of his he performs he does it as if it had been written on purpose for him, and that the Author had exactly conceiv'd it as he plays it. I must own a particular Obligation to him, for the most considerable part of the Passages relating to his Life, which I have here transmitted to the Publick; his Veneration for the Memory of *Shakespear* having engag'd him to make a Journey into *Warwickshire*, on purpose to gather up what Remains he could of a Name for which he had so great a Value. Since I had at first resolv'd not to enter into any Critical Controversie, I won't pretend to enquire into the Justness of Mr. *Rhymer's* Remarks on *Othello*; he has certainly pointed out some Faults very judiciously; and indeed they are such as most People will agree, with him, to be Faults: But I wish he would likewise have observ'd some of the Beauties too; as I think it became an Exact and Equal Critique to do. It seems strange that he should allow nothing Good in the whole: If the Fable and Incidents are not to his Taste, yet the Thoughts are almost every where very Noble, and the Diction manly and proper. These last, indeed, are Parts of *Shakespear's* Praise, which it would be very hard to Dispute with him. His Sentiments and Images of Things are Great and Natural; and his Expression (tho' perhaps in some Instances a little Irregular) just, and rais'd in Proportion to his Subject and Occasion. It would be even endless to mention the particular Instances that might be given of this Kind: But his Book is in the Possession of the Publick, and 'twill be hard to dip into any Part of it, without finding what I have said of him made good.



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The latter Part of his Life was spent, as all Men of good Sense will wish theirs may be, in Ease, Retirement, and the Conversation of his Friends. He had the good Fortune to gather an Estate equal to his Occasion, and, in that, to his Wish; and is said to have spent some Years before his Death at his native *Stratford*. His pleasurable Wit, and good Nature, engag'd him in the Acquaintance, and entitled him to the Friendship of the Gentlemen of the Neighbourhood. Amongst them, it is a Story almost still remember'd in that Country, that he had a particular Intimacy with Mr. *Combe*, an old Gentleman noted thereabouts for his Wealth and Usury: It happen'd, that in a pleasant Conversation amongst their common Friends, Mr. *Combe* told *Shakespear* in a laughing manner, that he fancy'd, he intended to write his Epitaph, if he happen'd to out-live him; and since he could not know what might be said of him when he was dead, he desir'd it might be done immediately: Upon which *Shakespear* gave him these four Verses.

Ten in the Hundred lies here ingrav'd, 'Tis a Hundred to Ten, his Soul is not sav'd: If any Man ask, Who lies in this Tomb? Oh! ho! quoth the Devil, 'tis my John-a-Combe.

But the Sharpness of the Satyr is said to have stung the Man so severely, that he never forgave it.

He Dy'd in the 53d Year of his Age, and was bury'd on the North side of the Chancel, in the Great Church at *Stratford*, where a Monument, as engrav'd in the Plate, is plac'd in the Wall. On his Grave-Stone underneath is,

Good Friend, for Jesus sake, forbear To dig the Dust inclosed here. Blest be the Man that spares these Stones, And Curst be he that moves my Bones.

He had three Daughters, of which two liv'd to be marry'd; *Judith*, the Elder, to one Mr. *Thomas Quiney*, by whom she had three Sons, who all dy'd without Children; and *Susannah*, who was his Favourite, to Dr. *John Hall*, a Physician of good Reputation in that Country. She left one Child only, a Daughter, who was marry'd first to *Thomas Nash*, Esq; and afterwards to Sir *John Bernard* of *Abbingdon*, but dy'd likewise without Issue.

This is what I could learn of any Note, either relating to himself or Family: The Character of the Man is best seen in his Writings. But since *Ben Johnson* has made a sort of an Essay towards it in his *Discoveries*, tho', as I have before hinted, he was not very Cordial in his Friendship, I will venture to give it in his Words.

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“I remember the Players have often mention'd it as an Honour to *Shakespear*, that in Writing (whatsoever he penn'd) he never blotted out a Line. My Answer hath been, *Would he had blotted a thousand*, which they thought a malevolent Speech. I had not told Posterity this, but for their Ignorance, who chose that Circumstance to commend their Friend by, wherein he most faulted. And to justifie mine own Candor, (for I lov'd the Man, and do honour his Memory, on this side Idolatry, as much as any.) He was, indeed, Honest, and of an open and free Nature, had an Excellent Fancy, brave Notions, and gentle Expressions, wherein he flow'd with that Facility, that sometimes it was necessary he should be stopp'd: *Sufflaminandus erat*, as *Augustus* said of *Haterius*. His Wit was in his own Power, would the Rule of it had been so too. Many times he fell into those things could not escape Laughter; as when he said in the Person of *Caesar*, one speaking to him,

“*Caesar thou dost me Wrong.*”

“He reply'd:

“*Caesar did never Wrong, but with just Cause.*”

and such like, which were ridiculous. But he redeem'd his Vices with his Virtues: There was ever more in him to be Prais'd than to be Pardon'd.”

As for the Passage which he mentions out of *Shakespear*, there is somewhat like it *Julius Caesar*, Vol. V. p. 2260. but without the Absurdity; nor did I ever meet with it in any Edition that I have seen, as quoted by Mr. *Johnson*. Besides his Plays in this Edition, there are two or three ascrib'd to him by Mr. *Langbain*, which I have never seen, and know nothing of. He writ likewise, *Venus and Adonis*, and *Tarquin and Lucrece*, in Stanza's, which have been printed in a late Collection of Poems. As to the Character given of him by *Ben Johnson*, there is a good deal true in it: But I believe it may be as well express'd by what *Horace* says of the first *Romans*, who wrote Tragedy upon the *Greek Models*, (or indeed translated 'em) in his Epistle to *Augustus*.

—Natura sublimis & Acer
Nam spirat Tragicum satis & faeliciter Audet,
Sed turpem putat in Chartis metuitq; Lituram.

There is a Book of Poems, publish'd in 1640, under the Name of Mr. *William Shakespear*, but as I have but very lately seen it, without an Opportunity of making any Judgment upon it, I won't pretend to determine, whether it be his or no.

[Illustration: Decorative motif]



FOOTNOTES:

[Footnote A: *Ld. Falkland, Ld. C.J. Vaughan, and Mr. Selden.*]

[Footnote B: Alluding to the Sea-Voyage of *Fletcher.*]

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