Shakespearean Tragedy

Lectures on *Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth*

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Preface

These lectures are based on a selection from materials used in teaching at Liverpool, Glasgow, and Oxford; and I have for the most part preserved the lecture form. The point of view taken in them is explained in the Introduction. I should, of course, wish them to be read in their order, and a knowledge of the first two is assumed in the remainder; but readers who may prefer to enter at once on the discussion of the several plays can do so by beginning at page 64.

Any one who writes on Shakespeare must owe much to his predecessors. Where I was conscious of a particular obligation, I have acknowledged it; but most of my reading of Shakespearean criticism was done many years ago, and I can only hope that I have not often reproduced as my own what belongs to another.

Many of the Notes will be of interest only to scholars, who may find, I hope, something new in them.

I have quoted, as a rule, from the Globe edition, and have referred always to its numeration of acts, scenes, and lines.

November, 1904

Note to Second and Subsequent Impressions

In these impressions I have confined myself to making some formal improvements, correcting indubitable mistakes, and indicating here and there my desire to modify or develop at some future time statements which seem to me doubtful or open to misunderstanding. The changes, where it seemed desirable, are shown by the inclusion of sentences in square brackets.

Introduction to the Fourth Edition

by Robert Shaughnessy

I

It is just over a hundred years since Andrew Cecil Bradley, newly incumbent in the Chair of Poetry at Oxford University, composed the series of lectures that would form the basis of the work with which he rapidly became (and remains) synonymous: *Shakespearean Tragedy*, which was first published in 1904. He could hardly have anticipated that his book would still be in print a century later, still less would he have imagined the extent to which it would be circulated, appropriated, argued over and argued with, nor the various and sometimes surprising ways in which his own name would be identified with a critical method, and an approach to Shakespeare's tragic drama, that would be, by stages, admired, imitated, hotly contested, ignored, and rehabilitated. Describing the overall project of the book as an attempt to 'consider the four principal tragedies of Shakespeare from a single point of view', Bradley declared that his aim was to enhance 'dramatic appreciation', that is, 'to increase our understanding and enjoyment of these works as dramas; to learn to apprehend the action and some of the personages of each with a somewhat greater truth and intensity, so that they may assume in our imaginations a shape a little less unlike the shape they wore in the imagination of their creator'. Although later generations of critics would take particular exception to the emphasis on character, to the suggestion that reading and criticism should set themselves in pursuit of the artist's own conception of the work, and to the implication that the play will ideally live in the reader's imagination rather than on the stage, Bradley's determination to treat the plays of Shakespeare as drama (though not necessarily or straightforwardly as *theatre*) has remained a core principle of modern criticism. Bradley's Shakespeare is 'dramatic to the tips of his fingers'; throughout *Shakespearean Tragedy*, Bradley is concerned with the designs the plays have on their readers and audiences, with their

mechanisms of construction, and with the intensity of the experiences they offer, with the clues they offer to actors as well as readers, and with the dynamics of audience response. The 'right way' to read Shakespeare is that of those who engage with the plays 'as if they were actors who had to study all the parts', hoping to 'realize fully and exactly the inner movements which produced these words and no other, these deeds and no other, at each particular moment'. But he would also discover in Shakespeare's tragic vision something akin to a humane, questioning and non-dogmatic philosophy of life that was more in tune with twentieth-century sentiment than the pious moralizing and strident nationalism of many of his critical contemporaries.

In its own time, *Shakespearean Tragedy* established itself firmly and quickly as a landmark work of criticism because it was a careful synthesis of conservatism and innovation, a summation of Victorian Shakespearean scholarship and a blueprint for the twentieth-century criticism that followed in its wake. Published at the moment when English Literature was gaining momentum as a university subject, Bradley's work appealed to an expanding constituency of lay readers as well as professional specialists; here was a book which set out to explicate, plainly, logically and systematically, how Shakespeare's plays work. Behind Bradley's criticism lay an immense body of nineteenth-century scholarship, both amateur and professional, including the industry of the American scholar Horace Howard Furness, who in 1871 initiated the New Variorum Shakespeare, an edition which assembled textual variants alongside excerpts of important critical commentary, and the work of the New Shakspere (*sic*) Society, founded in London two years later. The quasi-scientific labour of collation, collection and cataloguing was motivated by an underlying concern with the 'growth' of Shakespeare's 'mind and art',[1] a project which demanded a synthesis that would transcend antiquarianism; in 1875 this was provided by the Society's vice-president, and Professor of English at Trinity College, Dublin, Edward Dowden. The widely read *Shakspere: A Critical Study of His Mind and Art*, which was an important prototype for *Shakespearean Tragedy*, combined an appeal to the nineteenth-century interest in evolutionary development with an idealized biographical view of the national poet which connected 'the study of Shakspere's works with an enquiry after the personality of the writer', and proposed that 'the growth of his intellect and character from youth to full maturity, distinguishes the work from the greater

number of preceding criticisms of Shakspere'. Dowden's 'Shakspere' is a manly, patriotic and inspirational figure, who, while 'prudent, industrious, and economical', was also given to 'brood . . . with a passionate intensity over that which cannot be known', and whose life and art both encompassed 'the infinite of meditation, the infinite of passion'. Dowden's Bard is both Hamlet and Henry V, achieving in his composition of the former 'a thorough comprehension of Hamlet's malady' that enabled him to create the latter, who 'through his union with the vital strength of the world . . . becomes one of the world's most glorious and beneficent forces'. And if Shakspeare's growth to maturity as a man and an artist provides a role model for all Victorian gentlemen, his work similarly offers spiritual sustenance: 'courage, and energy, and strength, to dedicate himself and his work to that – whatever it may be – which life has revealed to him as best, and highest, and most real'.[2]

Bradley generously acknowledged Dowden's work as a formative influence, recommended *Shakspere* as essential reading, and displayed little visible ambition to challenge or displace his renowned predecessor. Bradley shared Dowden's concern for '*a rich feeling for positive, concrete fact*', and for 'human character in its living play', and engaged with what has been called the 'Victorian problematic of faith and doubt'[3] that operates in Dowden's work. But the mood of optimism, qualified yet ultimately secure religious faith, and imperial self-confidence that informs *Shakspere* is replaced, in *Shakespearean Tragedy*, by a more anxious spirit of self-questioning, in a work which is tentative and provisional rather than definitive and dogmatic. Whereas Dowden read the entire canon through the lens of Shakspeare's imagined life history, Bradley largely excluded the author from the remit of his investigations, and narrowed the focus to the four 'great' tragedies.[4] This was not simply reflective of the intellectual preferences, temperament and tastes of the author; in its style and method, *Shakespearean Tragedy* was also a forerunner of a new kind of professionalism in literary criticism (despite Bradley's disingenuous claim that 'many an unscholarly lover of Shakespeare' was 'a far better critic than many a Shakespeare scholar'). It defined an approach and a method which became institutionalized, but it was, like many subsequent innovations in the field, the product of interdisciplinary dialogue.

A. C. Bradley began his academic career in 1874 in philosophy, as a Fellow, then a Lecturer, at Balliol College, Oxford. He identified with Idealism, a school of thought led by the charismatic Liberal don

T. H. Green, which rejected the conservative evangelism then dominant at Oxford, and which, as Bradley put it at the time, was informed by an 'earnest effort to bring speculation into relation with modern life . . . and to deal with branches of science, physical, social, political, metaphysical, theological, aesthetic, as parts of a whole'.[5] Though theologically inflected, the idealism of Green and his disciples rejected scriptural literalism and the conventional rituals of religious observance; pluralist and internationalist in outlook, it advocated self-sacrifice and social and cultural philanthropy (Bradley was a supporter of the Workers' Educational Association and the Association for Promoting the Education of Women, and at one time associated with Fabianism); it was also closely allied with Liberal politics. Bradley's first publications were in the field of Classics, and, although never prolific, he continued to write and lecture on philosophical and political topics throughout his career.[6] Green's movement came into conflict with the University authorities, and in 1882, under circumstances which remain obscure, Bradley left, or was compelled to leave, Oxford for the new post of Chair of Modern Literature and History at the University College of Liverpool. From there he went in 1889 to the Chair of English Literature at the University of Glasgow, and it was here that he began to build a reputation as a literary academic, although he still published little. In 1900 he moved to London with the intention of retiring from professional academic life, but found himself (rather against his initial inclinations) proposed for the Chair of Poetry at Oxford, to which, at the age of fifty, he was duly elected in 1901. During his tenure at Liverpool and Glasgow (which he regarded as a period of forced exile), Bradley had been uncertain about his own role as a scholar and intellectual, but the appointment instilled in him a new sense of his disciplinary mission. In effect, it offered him the opportunity to formulate a new rationale for literary study itself, to correct the popular misconception that this was a frivolous or feminine subject, composed, as he put it, of 'mere chatter about Shelley', or worse, 'mere idle voluptuousness'.[7] Informed by his classical and philosophical training, literary criticism would in Bradley's hands assume a properly ethical function, in that it offered a way of thinking about poetry and philosophy as reciprocal activities, as reflected in his conviction 'that what imagination loved as poetry reason might love as philosophy, and that in the end these are two ways of saying the same thing'.[8]

Shakespearean Tragedy was a book whose time had come. One of its first reviewers declared that 'the Oxford Chair of Poetry has never produced a finer fruit . . . we have no hesitation in putting Professor Bradley's book far above any modern Shakespearean criticism that we know, worthy to rank very near the immortal work of Lamb and Coleridge', and took pains to note its 'freshness of method and distinction of form'; another, that 'One may well doubt whether in the whole field of English Literary Criticism anything has been written in the last twenty years more luminous, more masterly, more penetrating to the very centre of its subject.'[9] Others were more stinting in their praise: while 'popular in aim', Bradley's book was too preoccupied with matters 'which would never occupy the attention of anyone except a professional academic critic'; more damningly, 'every lecture teems with . . . irritating superfluities, aggravated it may be added by the unnecessary diffuseness with which they are discussed'.[10] More seriously, a *Times Literary Supplement* (*TLS*) reviewer took Bradley to task for his answer to the question, 'What is outside the text?': 'He says (by implication) a set of real lives.'[11] This anticipated the more trenchant criticisms of Bradley that would emerge some three decades later; in the meantime, it appeared that the guardedly favourable reaction that greeted *Shakespearean Tragedy* on its first publication accurately reflected the mood of its readership. The first print run of 1500 copies was published in December 1904; even at ten shillings a copy, it sold sufficiently well to warrant an equivalent run of the second edition three months later, and a further run in August of the same year; thereafter it was reprinted at annual or biannual intervals, achieving sales of more than 40,000 by 1937 (reissued after the war, the second edition was reprinted twenty-four times between 1957 and 1992).[12] Significantly, over two-thirds of this total were sold after 1921; it is no coincidence that this was the year in which Sir Henry Newbolt published his report on the findings of the Board of Education on the teaching of English in England, which, amongst other things, recommended the study of English literature, and of Shakespeare in particular, as 'the only basis possible for national education. . . . It is itself the English mind.'[13] Judicious without being judgemental, authoritative but accessible, Bradley's urbane scholarship was ideally positioned to respond to the new priority afforded to national literary education. Indeed, by the mid-1920s, Guy Boas satirically suggested that Bradley had acquired an authority to rival or even eclipse that of Shakespeare himself:

I dreamt last night that Shakespeare's ghost
Sat for a Civil Service post;
The English paper for the year
Had several questions on *King Lear*
Which Shakespeare answered very badly
Because he hadn't read his Bradley![14]

II

What, then, is it about Bradley's method and style of writing that has afforded *Shakespearean Tragedy* an enduring appeal? It is partly due to the book's careful balance of abstraction and particularity, or, to put it another way, of theoretical reflection and practical analysis. Bradley's method is, for the most part, based on pragmatic and sensitive close reading of the text, often in the form of a step-by-step journey through the play; and it is this, rather than his more theoretical pronouncements on tragedy, that accounts for his critical longevity and makes him still worth reading. But *Shakespearean Tragedy* prefaces its discussion of *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Othello* and *Macbeth* with two lectures addressing more general and theoretical concerns, and although Bradley advises readers 'who may prefer to enter at once on the discussion of the several plays' to skip them if they wish, it is worth identifying some of the critical suppositions upon which this detailed work rests. In the opening lecture, Bradley sets out to define 'Shakespeare's tragic conception' in the abstract. His starting point is the relationship between the private and the public spheres in tragic drama; he stipulates that the protagonist, according to the classical and medieval view, should be a man of 'high degree' whose fall 'affects the welfare of a whole nation or empire'. More than this, though, Shakespearean tragic heroes are 'exceptional beings':

> the hero, with Shakespeare, is a person of high degree or of public importance, and . . . his actions or sufferings are of an unusual kind. But this is not all. His nature also is exceptional, and generally raises him in some respect much above the average level of humanity . . . by an intensification of the life which they share with others, they are raised above them. . . . Some, like Hamlet and Cleopatra, have genius. Others . . . are built on the grand scale; and desire, passion, or will attains in them a terrible force.

Bradley's preoccupation with the 'greatness' of his tragic heroes and (less often) heroines, figured throughout the lectures in terms such as 'sublime' (applied to Macbeth and Lady Macbeth), 'genius' (Hamlet), and 'colossal' (Othello), reflects a more patrician and high-minded view of tragic drama than most of us would now be comfortable with, but it is central to his understanding of the emotional impact of tragedy that the predisposition of the protagonist to 'identify the whole being with one interest, object, passion, or habit of mind' produces a conflict 'which stirs not only sympathy and pity, but admiration, terror, and awe'. By characterizing the tragic conflict in terms of the struggle between contradictory drives or forces, Bradley signals both his debt to Hegel, whose theory of tragedy much influenced Bradley and his Victorian predecessors, and his desire to move beyond it. The tragic action, Hegel stated, derives its content from 'the world of those forces which carry in themselves their own justification, and are realized substantively in the volitional activity of mankind'; by which he means 'the love of husband and wife, or parents, children and kinsfolk . . . the life of communities, the patriotism of citizens, the will of those in supreme power'.[15] Bradley offered his own account of Hegel in a lecture written a few years before, summarizing his view of 'the essential tragic fact' as 'the self-division and intestinal warfare of the ethical substance, not so much the war of good with evil as the war of good with good', a view which, Bradley points out, works well in relation to classical Greek tragedy but seems too schematic to apply either to Shakespeare or to 'modern tragedy' in general, in which 'public or universal interests either do not appear at all, or, if they appear, are scarcely more than a background for the real subject'.[16] The 'real subject' is not the clash of abstract principles but 'personal – these particular characters with their struggle and their fate';[17] in *Shakespearean Tragedy* Hegel's 'vague' formulation is reworked as a straightforward question: 'Who are the combatants in this conflict?'

Bradley's humanist account of Shakespearean tragedy is underpinned by the conviction that the catastrophe that occurs to the hero is not merely circumstantial, the product of fate or accident; the protagonist is, to a greater or lesser extent, responsible (though not solely so) for his own demise, and his agency is both psychologically and ethically significant. The 'human actions' which comprise Shakespeare's plots are 'acts or omissions thoroughly expressive of the

doer', and thus 'the centre of the tragedy' lies, in a key formulation, 'in action issuing from character, or in character issuing in action'. The cornerstone of method, 'character', is taken as a given; later critics would argue that this is a conception foisted anachronistically upon a dramaturgy whose culture understood the term 'character' to refer to a person's handwriting or signature, rather than to their personality or their capacity for moral choice, and which, while engaging periodically with what we would now recognize as an emergent realism, constructed *dramatis personae* from a range of emblematic, stereotypical and allegorical resources and vocabularies. The concentration upon individuals, upon inner conflicts and the complexities of motive, also tends to minimize the political and social dimensions of the plays' action: there is, for example, little sense in Bradley's discussion of either *Macbeth* or *Hamlet* that these plays deal with the historical contradictions of feudalism,[18] or even that they are engaged in a serious reflection upon the merits of deposition and political assassination, or in his account of *King Lear* that it depicts an entire society in upheaval (Bradley's political insouciance is indicated by his remark that the division of the kingdom 'would probably have led quickly to war, but not to the agony which culminated in the storm on the heath', as if the former were a relatively minor concern).

For Bradley, character is Shakespeare's 'main interest', and as such it is amenable to systematic analysis and reasoned investigation; it is also the primary focus of his investigation of the relationship between the ethical and the psychological. Since deeds are expressive of the doer, Bradley initially plays down the significance of aspects of the plays which seem to interfere with characters' autonomy: the workings of chance or accident, 'abnormal conditions of mind' such as insanity, somnambulism and hallucinations, and supernatural elements: even where these do figure prominently in the action (as in *Macbeth*), they are 'always placed in the closest relation with character', giving 'confirmation and distinct form to inward movements already present and exerting an influence'. Bradley's Shakespeare (who 'confined his view to the world of non-theological observation and thought') is rational and secular; his tragic universe cannot be comprehended in religious terms, nor can the 'ultimate power' in that universe be 'adequately described as a law or order which we can see to be just and benevolent'. The predominant emotion that we feel at the end of tragic drama is a desolating sense of waste;

human existence, it seems, is nothing more than a relentless and inescapable cycle of futile self-destruction:

> Everywhere, from the crushed rocks beneath our feet to the soul of man, we see power, intelligence, life and glory, which astound us and seem to call for worship. And everywhere we see them perishing, devouring one another and destroying themselves, often with dreadful pain, as though they came into being for no other end.

Men and women 'fight blindly in the dark, and the power that works through them makes them the instrument of a design which is not theirs', a design which annihilates the distinctions between good and bad intent, as 'man's thought, translated into act, is transformed into the opposite of itself . . . whatsoever he dreams of doing, he achieves that which he least dreamed of, his own destruction'. If there is an 'ultimate power' in the world of Shakespearean tragedy, according to Bradley, it has to be characterized not in terms of 'justice and merit', whereby tragic heroes, villains and victims are allocated the rewards and punishments they and their actions deserve, but simply as a conflict between good and evil. These qualities are defined as 'everything . . . in human beings which we take to be excellent or the reverse'; the 'moral power' which confronts evil is 'akin to all that we admire and revere in the characters themselves'. If the plays show us that the good may temporarily – and at huge cost – triumph over evil, they none the less reiterate the fact that the conflict between them is perpetual, 'the inexplicable fact . . . of a world travailing for perfection, but bringing to birth, together with glorious good, an evil which it is able to overcome only by self-torture and self-waste'.

Bradley's thinking is not altogether consistent: although the world of Shakespearean tragedy is avowedly secular, the 'moral order' seems none the less to possess almost metaphysical powers of its own, capable of taking positive action through the human agents that both are, and are not, its instruments. However keenly he wishes to relinquish the idea that the ruling power in the world can be ascribed to a god or gods, his need to affirm that there still is a principle of tragic justice, that there is an 'ultimate power' at work, leads him back to an anthropomorphic view of good and evil. Bradley also, perhaps rather too insistently, reiterates the point that tragedy 'does not leave us crushed, rebellious or desperate', a statement that seems oddly quiescent and politically conservative when considered alongside his more

liberal and progressive tendencies. In the event, Bradley's readings of individual plays are at variance with the secular principles established here. If *King Lear* seems, in the 'bitter contrast between . . . faith and the events we witness', to 'indicate an intention to show things at their worst, and to return the sternest of replies to that question of the ultimate power and . . . appeals for retribution', in *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, by contrast, 'the feeling of a supreme power or destiny is particularly marked' and it 'has also at times a peculiar tone, which may be called, in a sense, religious', conveying 'a reminder that the apparent failure of Hamlet's life is not the ultimate truth concerning him'.

If the first lecture represents Bradley at his most abstract and philosophical, the second shows him primarily concerned with the practicalities of plot construction and narrative exposition, and with the ways in which these shape and manipulate audience sympathies and responses. Bradley's sharp awareness of the medium for which the plays were originally composed, the theatre, is to the fore here: stating that 'the play is meant primarily for the theatre', he admits that the complex, multi-layered attentiveness to all aspects of the tragic conflict that emerges from reading, study, reflection and analysis is not necessarily within the remit of the theatrical event: 'that struggle in the hero's soul which sometimes accompanies the outward struggle is of the highest importance for the total effect of a tragedy', but in performance 'the outward conflict, with its influence on the fortunes of the hero, is the aspect which first catches, if it does not engross, attention'. Throughout *Shakespearean Tragedy*, Bradley sometimes differentiates between, and sometimes conflates, the experiences of reading and theatrical viewing, whilst registering that the relationship between these two ways of experiencing the drama is not easily complementary or necessarily mutually supportive. On the one hand, Bradley seems in little doubt that the sensitive and thoughtful reader is capable of accommodating a wider, subtler and more nuanced range of responses than the theatregoer: thus, 'When we are immersed in a tragedy, we feel towards dispositions, actions, and persons such emotions as attraction and repulsion, pity, wonder, fear, horror, perhaps hatred'; the spectator, conversely, reacts in a more raw and immediate fashion to the 'excitement' of the street-fights, battles and crowd scenes, and may even find the experience almost physically disturbing, particularly in 'certain places where the tension in the minds of the audience becomes extreme', as in the mid-point in

Othello, where 'the audience is not what it was at the beginning', having 'been attending for some time', and having 'been through a certain amount of agitation', 'the extreme tension which now arises may therefore easily tire and displease it'. This may seem overly fastidious, and seems to imagine the spectator as a swooning Victorian heroine, in need of a good dose of the smelling salts, but it none the less signals an attitude towards the theatre that is, at the very least, ambivalent. On the other hand, Bradley also appeals on a few occasions to theatregoing experience as a kind of check against untrammelled speculation, referring to 'minutiae which we notice only because we study him, but which nobody ever notices in a stage performance'; and prefacing thirty pages of close discussion of the possible motives for Hamlet's delay by observing that 'the majority of the spectators . . . certainly do not question themselves about his character or the cause of his delay'. Having speculated at length, likewise, on Hamlet's silence about Ophelia (of which more in a moment), Bradley concedes that 'scarcely any spectators or readers of *Hamlet* notice this silence at all', and that since Shakespeare 'wrote primarily for the theatre and not for students' it might be better not to concern oneself with the problem.

Bradley's Shakespeare, though 'dramatic to his fingertips', seems to have shared Bradley's uncertainty over the worth of the medium for which he was writing, in that 'he knew that the immense majority of his audience were incapable of distinguishing between rough and finished work. He often felt the degradation having to live by pleasing them,' and clearly 'did not regard his plays as mere stage-dramas of the moment'. To a large extent, Bradley's view is attributable to what we can assume to be his experience of Shakespearean production in his own time, and his clear sense of how alien it was to Shakespeare's own theatre. Shakespeare, Bradley was well aware, wrote for a theatre in which 'there was no scenery, scene followed scene with scarcely any pause' (accounting for 'peculiarities of construction which would injure a play written for our stage but were perfectly well-fitted for that very different stage'), but his patience as an Edwardian theatregoer would have been sorely tested by productions reliant upon 'a great deal of scenery, which takes a long time to set and change'. During the period in which Bradley gave his lectures, the signature style for Shakespeare was defined on the London stage by the abundantly detailed and magnificently cumbersome productions

mounted by Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree at His Majesty's Theatre, notoriously typified by the live rabbits that inhabited the forests of his 1900 *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Had Bradley travelled forty miles in the other direction, to Stratford-upon-Avon's recently built Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, he might have found work more to his taste in the shape of the work mounted under the direction of Sir Frank Benson during its annual summer festival seasons. Benson, who in the course of thirty years at Stratford staged all but two of Shakespeare's plays, as well as tirelessly touring nationally and internationally, was known for an athletic style of production that had both its admirers and its detractors. Max Beerbohm wrote of his *Henry V* that 'the fielding was excellent, and so was the batting. Speech after speech was sent spinning across the boundary, and one was constantly inclined to shout "Well *played*, sir! Well played *indeed*!" As a branch of university cricket, the whole performance was, indeed, beyond praise.'[19] Bradley, like many a fine English Shakespearean scholar after him, was an avid cricket fan, and it is pleasant, though probably idle, to speculate that a touch of the Bensonian sporting sublime might have held an appeal for the man who, when once invited to a match between current and former Balliol College students, is reported to have asked if he might umpire, 'Because there is nothing in life like the bowler's face at the moment he delivers the ball.'[20]

Away from the pitch, the commitment to reading the plays sequentially forms one of the basic principles of the lectures, which address each of the four 'great' tragedies in turn. As the play which had, even by Bradley's time, attracted more interest in its protagonist than any other, *Hamlet* provides a point of departure, initially framed by Bradley in terms of the discrepancy between what the play appears to be about, and what, on closer inspection, it actually is:

> Suppose you were to describe the plot of *Hamlet* to a person quite ignorant of the play, and suppose you were careful to tell your hearer nothing about Hamlet's character, what impression would your sketch make on him? Would he not exclaim: 'What a sensational story! Why, here are some eight violent deaths, not to speak of adultery, a ghost, a mad woman, and a fight in a grave! If I did not know that the play was Shakespeare's, I should have thought it must have been one of those early tragedies of blood and horror from which he is said to have redeemed the stage'?