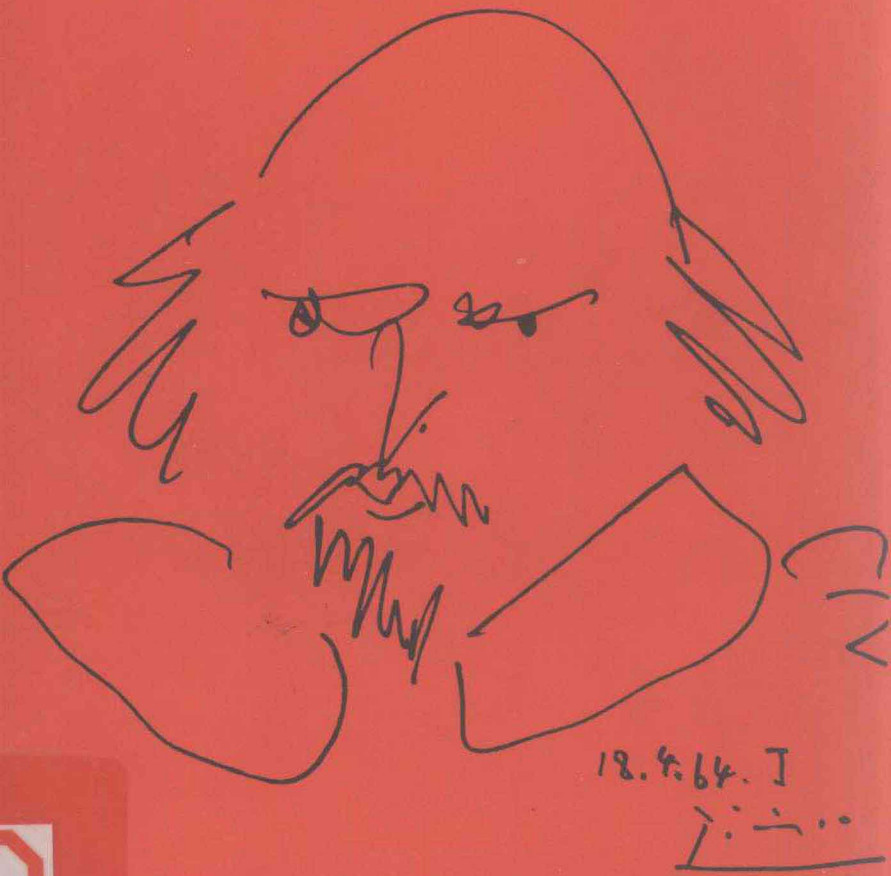
THE NEW SHAKESPEARE

The Tempest



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THE WORKS OF SHAKESPEARE

EDITED FOR THE SYNDICS OF THE
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BY
SIR ARTHUR QUILLER-COUCH
AND JOHN DOVER WILSON

THE TEMPEST

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

I

Editions of Shakespeare multiply; but it is now many years since the last attempt was made at a complete recension of Shakespeare's text, based upon a study and comparison, line by line, of the existing materials. In the interval scholars have made many discoveries, and not a few worthy to be called illuminating; since the new light they shed on these materials exhibits them (as we believe) in truer proportions with truer relative values.

We shall indicate, by and by, the most important of these discoveries, as justifying a belief that since the day, some three hundred years ago, when preparations were begun in the printing-house of William Jaggard and his son Isaac for the issue of the First Folio, no moment has been more favourable for auspicating a text of the plays and poems than that which begets the occasion of this new one. But no time must be lost in assuring the reader that we enter upon our task diffidently, with a sense of high adventure tempered by a consciousness of grave responsibility; and that at the outset we have chosen for phylactery these wise words by one of Shakespeare's wisest editors, William Aldis Wright—'After a considerable experience I feel justified in saying that in most cases ignorance and conceit are the fruitful parents of conjectural emendation.' To have done with excuses, we desire lastly that the reader will not take offence at this or that which seems at first sight an innovation upon the 'Shakespeares' to which he is accustomed: that he will refrain at any rate from condemning us before making sure that we are not cutting Shakespeare free from the accretions of a long line of editors.

II

But we have designed these volumes also for the pocket of the ordinary lover of Shakespeare, because time alters the catholic approach to him, if by insensible degrees, no less thoroughly than it deflects that of the esoteric student. 'What mankind have long possessed they have often examined and compared: and if they persist to value the possession, it is because frequent comparisons have confirmed opinion in its favour.' So wrote Samuel Johnson in the Preface to his edition of the Plays of Shakespeare, published in 1765; adding that these plays have 'passed through variations of taste and changes of manners, and, as they devolved from one generation to another, have received new honours at every transmission....The sand heaped by one flood is scattered by another, but the rock always continues in its place. The stream of Time, which is continually washing the dissoluble fabricks of other poets, passes without injury by the adamant of *Shakespeare*.'

'In the fine arts'—writes a later critic, Professor Barrett Wendell, also of Shakespeare—'a man of genius is he who in perception and in expression alike, in thought and in phrase, instinctively so does his work that his work remains significant after the conditions in which he actually produced it are past. The work of any man of genius, then, is susceptible of endless comment and interpretation, varying as the generations of posterity vary from his and from one another.'

Thus, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, two critics among many have echoed the line which Ben Jonson penned for the First Folio of 1623, prescient and yet (one may assert) not fully awake to his own prescience

He was not of an age, but for all time!

For, obscure and mostly insignificant as are the collected details of Shakespeare's life and career, the vicissitudes

of his reputation have never lacked evidence from the first, and in later times have rather suffered from a cloud of witness. In the beginning, having come up from Stratford-on-Avon to London (about 1586) to try his fortune, this youth managed to open the back door of Burbage's Theatre and gain employment as an actor. Burbage must soon have set him the additional task of furbishing and 'bumbasting out' old plays for revival—with results at which the original authors very naturally took offence: for as early as 1592 Robert Greene utters (from his death-bed) his famous invective upon our young man as 'an upstart Crow beautified with our feathers'; warning his literary fellow-playwrights, 'it is pittee men of such rare wits should be subject to the pleasures of such rude groomes.' Greene's contemptuous language may pass. Its vehement anger pretty plainly proves that, even so early, our dramatic apprentice had learnt to make himself formidable.

We may start from the previous year 1591, and take the ensuing twenty as the period covering Shakespeare's career as a dramatist. Did his fame grow as nowadays in retrospect we can see his poetical power maturing from *Love's Labour's Lost* up to *King Lear* and on to *The Tempest*? The little contemporary evidence is curious, and tells us at once that it did and that it did not. For example in 1598 we have Francis Meres, a learned graduate of Cambridge, asserting that 'among the English he is the most excellent in both kinds [Tragedy and Comedy] for the Stage,' rivalling the fame of Seneca in the one kind and of Plautus in the other. As against this we find, at the same date and in Meres' University, the authors of *The Pilgrimage to Parnassus* attempting more than one laugh at him as belonging to a tribe of playwrights fashionable but unlettered. Vaguely, yet with some certainty, the early Elizabethan dramatists fall for us into two opponent camps; the University wits and 'literary' tribesmen coming to

recognise (or being bullied into recognising) Ben Jonson for their champion, while Shakespeare almost at unawares grows to his stature as chief challenger on behalf of the theatre-men who worked for the stage and its daily bread, with no hankering side-glance after the honours and diuturnity of print. His election to this eminence is nowhere, in so many words, asserted. When the two parties became publicly and violently embroiled in the wordy stage-war—which started between Jonson on the one side and Dekker and Marston on the other, and lasted from 1599 to 1602—he neither lent his name to the battle nor apparently deigned to participate in it. As we interpret the story, he could not help being intellectually head-and-shoulders above all who made his party: but he enjoyed no quarrel, and was, in fact, by nature too generously indolent, and withal too modest, and yet again too busy with his work, to worry himself with contention. Gentle and 'sweet' (his own favourite word), or some equivalent for these, are steady epithets of all who knew him or had heard his contemporaries talk about him. *De forti dulcedo*—'a handsome well-shaped man' Aubrey tells us of report; 'very good company and of a readie and pleasant smooth witt.' There is no evidence at all that he set an exorbitant price on himself: rather, out of silence and contrast, we get a cumulative impression that he claimed a most modest one. There are hints enough that the generation for which he worked recognised him for a man of parts and promise; but again out of silence and contrast we insensibly gather the conviction that it never occurred to his fellows to regard him as a mountainous man, 'out-topping knowledge'; and that he himself, could he have foreseen Matthew Arnold's famous sonnet, would have found in it a modest gratification combined with something like amazement. His death (in middle age) provoked no such general outburst of lamentation as Sidney's did; his life no such running fire of detraction as did

Jonson's. He retired and died, moderately well-to-do, in the country town of his birth. The copyright (as we call it) of his plays belonged to the theatre or Company for which they were written: and he never troubled himself or anybody to collect, correct, and print them. They were first gathered and given to the world by two fellow-actors, John Heminge and Henry Condell, late in 1623, or more than seven-and-a-half years after his death.

Again we must not make too much of this: for one only of the Elizabethan dramatists had hitherto sought what fame might come of printing his plays for a secondary judgment by the reader; and not one in Shakespeare's life-time. The exception of course was Ben Jonson, who in 1616 had brought together and issued nine pieces in a folio volume.

Some may argue that between the date of his death and that of the First Folio of 1623 Shakespeare's fame had vastly grown, quoting Jonson's splendid and expressly written encomium which follows the Folio Preface, with its allusion to Basse's elegy lamenting that our 'rare Tragedian' had not been laid to rest beside Chaucer and Spenser and Beaumont in Westminster Abbey:

> Renownéd Spenser lye a thought more nye
> To learnéd Chaucer, and rare Beaumont lye
> A little neerer Spenser, to make roome
> For Shakespeare in your threefold, fowerfold Tombe.
> To lodge all fowre in one bed make a shift
> Vntill Doomesdaye, for hardly will a fift
> Betwixt y^{s} day and y^{t} by Fate be slayne
> For whom your Curtaines may be drawn againe...

upon which Jonson retorts in apostrophe:

> My Shakespeare, rise; I will not lodge thee by
> Chaucer or Spenser, or bid Beaumont lye
> A little further, to make thee a roome...
> Thou art a Moniment, without a tombe,
> And art alive still, while thy Booke doth live,
> And we have wits to read, and praise to give.

But dedicatory verse in that age had a proper and recognised pitch: and if a reader in 1623 found the praise not extravagant, as we find it not extravagant to-day, his reason for it and ours would be different. It seems safer to turn for Jonson's real opinion to the famous passage in *Timber or Discoveries*, frank as it is and familiarly spoken, with its confession that he 'loved the man' and its characteristic glance at 'the players' (Heminge and Condell) for their praise of Shakespeare's facility:

> His mind and hand went together: And what he thought he uttered with that easiness that wee have scarce received from him a blot on his papers.

Upon this Jonson retorts vivaciously but with some justice:

> I remember, the Players have often mentioned it as an honour to Shakespeare that in his writing (whatsoever he penn'd) hee never blotted out line. My answer hath beene, would he have 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...

III

Milton's

> What needs my Shakespeare for his honour'd Bones

was prefixed anonymously to the Second Folio of 1632; and he, too, while praising the 'unvalu'd Book' for its 'Delphick lines,' dwells on Shakespeare's easiness:

> For whilst to th' shame of slow-endeavouring art
> Thy easie numbers flow...

Shakespeare, in sum, is still a warbler of 'native Wood-notes wilde,' and yet already a Book, or in process of becoming one. He was a book to Suckling (*ob.* 1641, aged thirty-two) who 'supplemented' a passage from *Lucrece*, and had his own portrait painted by Vandyke with a copy of the First Folio under his hand, open at

the play of *Hamlet*. He was a book, again, to King Charles I, whose copy of the Second Folio (still preserved at Windsor) may be the one that went with him in his last distressful wanderings and was, as Milton tells us in *Eikonoklastes*, 'the Closet Companion of these his solitudes.' By this time, indeed, Shakespeare had become a book perforce—a book or nothing—through the closing of the theatres in 1642, and a book he remains for eighteen years or so.

With the Restoration the theatres re-open and he starts up at once again as a playwright in favour and sufficiently alive to be bandied between fervent admiration and nonchalant acceptance. Samuel Pepys goes to the theatre and notes that *Macbeth* is 'a pretty good play' (but he comes to 'like it mightily,' 'a most excellent play in all respects, but especially in divertisement though it be a deep tragedy; which is a strange perfection in a tragedy, it being most proper here and suitable'). *Romeo and Juliet* is 'a play of itself the worst I ever saw in my life,' *The Midsummer-Night's Dream* 'a most insipid ridiculous play,' and *Twelfth Night* 'but a silly play,' 'one of the weakest plays I ever saw on the stage.'

1660, August 20.—To Deptford by water reading *Othello, Moore of Venice*, which I ever heretofore esteemed a mighty good play, but having so lately read *The Adventures of Five Houres*, it seems a mean thing.

But *Hamlet* conquers him, and he witnesses four performances by Betterton with a rising rapture.

Yet Dryden, although he will play any conceivable trick in 'adapting'—witness *All for Love* and his misdeed, with D'Avenant's aid, upon *The Tempest*—never speaks of Shakespeare but as a classic. In practice Shakespeare is so little sacrosanct to him that to except him from any verdict passed on Cibber and Garrick for their impertinences in a later age would be hypocrisy—the homage paid by cowardice to a great name. But when he talks as a critic, his voice never falters. 'Shakespeare's

sacred name,' 'Shakespeare, who many times has written better than any poet,' 'the poet Æschylus was held in the same veneration by the Athenians of after ages as Shakespeare is by us'—*that* is Dryden's way of talking. Here, in a sentence, is his manly apology:

> Therefore let not Shakespear suffer for our sakes: 'tis our fault, who succeed him in an Age which is more refin'd, if we imitate him so ill that we copy his failings only and make a virtue of that in our Writings which in his was an imperfection,

and here, in another, is his summary:

> *Shakespear* had a Universal mind, which comprehended all Characters and Passions.

IV

With Nicholas Rowe, the first general editor (1709), we open the second period of Shakespeare's progress towards canonisation. We may call it as we list the Eighteenth Century period or the period of criticism and conjectural emendation, in both of which arts, within somewhat strict limits, our Eighteenth Century men excelled. Their criticism walked within a narrow and formal conception of the poetic art—or, we may say, a fixed idea of it to which the loose magnificence of Shakespeare was naturally abhorrent. Pope (1725) finds him (as Matthew Arnold[1] found him in a later age) a sad sinner against art, and we may see the alternate fascination and repulsion which agitated Pope reproduced in long exaggerating shadows across the evidence of Voltaire; who during his sojourn in England (1726–9) read Shakespeare voraciously, to imitate him sedulously; and went home to preach Shakespeare to Europe: until conscience constrained him to denounce the man for a buffoon and his

[1] 'He is the richest, the most powerful, the most delightful of poets: he is not altogether, nor even eminently, an artist'—*Mixed Essays*.

works for a vast and horrible dunghill in which the Gallic cock might perchance happen on some few pearls.

For their conjectural emendation these men of the Eighteenth Century had not only the nice aptitude of a close literary set nurtured upon the Greek and Latin Classics: but, to play with, a text admittedly corrupt and calling aloud for improvement—considered as belonging to a semi-barbarous age, and so as material upon which any polite taste had free licence to improve: a text, moreover, upon which the tradition of scholarship as yet enjoined no meticulous research. Roughly speaking, any scholar of the Eighteenth Century was acquitted if he familiarised himself with one or another of the Folio versions and restored any doubtful passage 'out of his own head.' The marvels they accomplished by this simple process remain an enormous credit to them and no less a wonder to us: and, in particular, no editor should pass Lewis Theobald without a salute—'*splendide-mendax*.' Upon Theobald follow Hanmer (1743–4)—a polite country gentleman, retired from the Speakership of the House of Commons and enjoying his leisure, Bishop Warburton (1747), Doctor Johnson (whose eight volumes, after long gestation, came to birth in 1765), Capell (1768), Steevens (1766 and 1773), the indefatigable Malone (1790), Isaac Reed, editor of the First Variorum, published in twenty-one volumes in 1803. Thus, starting from Rowe, we cover a fair hundred years in the course of which we may fairly say, conjectural criticism did all it could upon its knowledge—with the qualification, perhaps, that our author never tempted Bentley to delight mankind by improving his poetry.

But when a poet is acknowledged to be pre-eminent by such a succession of the first class as Dryden, Pope and Samuel Johnson, his throne as a classic is secure, and doubly secure because Dryden, Pope and Johnson, all differently and all in turn, belonged to an age which had

to acknowledge his greatness against all prejudice of more or less rigid rule.

V

So we pass to a third stage when, with all this curious guesswork heaped upon Shakespeare's text and all this tribute superimposed by the greatest critics of a reluctant age, the Romantics lay hold on him and exalt him for a demigod. Coleridge, Schlegel, Hazlitt, Lamb take their turn (Swinburne belatedly continuing the tradition up to yesterday), and all—but Coleridge most of all—have wonderful interpretations to give us. The mischief is not only that Shakespeare becomes a sort of national idol against whom a man can offer no criticism save timidly (as one standing between a lion and a unicorn), but that every second-rate or third-rate 'Elizabethan' with a grip on Shakespeare's skirt is lifted to a place beside him; with the result that Shakespeare loses his right eminence above his contemporaries, while his age enjoys above the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries an exaltation which the sober mind cannot accept as just. Moreover in the intervals of over-estimating, we make these contemporaries Shakespeare's whipping-boys. We cannot accept the plain fact that Shakespeare had often to do odd jobs, was often careless, and sometimes wrote extremely ill. As W. E. Henley put it:

> Our worship must have for its object something flawless, something utterly without spot or blemish. We can be satisfied with nothing less than an entire and perfect chrysolite, and we cannot taste our Shakespeare at his worst without a longing to father his faults upon somebody else—Marlowe, for instance, or Greene or Fletcher—and a fury of proving, that our divinity was incapable of them.

Through the nineteenth century, and even to this day, the volume of laudation swells and rises, ever with a German guttural increasing in self-assertion at the back

of the uproar; until many an honest fellow, conscious of loving letters in a plain way, must surely long for the steadying accent of someone who can keep his head in the tumult; not, perhaps, for another Johnson, but at least for an outspoken utterance on the lines of Johnson's famous Preface, which Adam Smith styled 'the most manly piece of criticism that was ever published in any country.' Surely, as Ben Jonson laughed at Shakespeare for saying it of Caesar, it is high time we laughed at those who keep saying of Shakespeare that he 'did never wrong but with just cause.' Few, in Plato's phrase, are the initiate, many the thyrsus-bearers; and the effect of the Shakespearian thyrsus upon a crowd of its carriers would seem to be quite peculiarly intoxicant. It has been computed that of the lunatics at present under ward or at large in the British Isles, a good third suffer from religious mania, a fifth from a delusion that they belong to the Royal Family, while another fifth believe either that they *are* Shakespeare, or that they are the friends or relatives or champions of somebody else, whose clothes and reputation 'that Stratford clown' managed to steal; or, anyhow, that Shakespeare did anything imaginable but unlikely, from touching up the Authorised Version to practising as a veterinary surgeon.

Yet these extravagances deserve pity rather than laughter: for what they reveal is but the unbalanced side of a very human and not ignoble craving. We cannot help wanting to know more of the *man* who has befriended our lives so constantly, so sunnily; to whom we have owed so many spirited incentives of our childhood—'enrichers of the fancy'—in Charles Lamb's phrase:

> Strengtheners of virtue, a withdrawing from all selfish and mercenary thoughts, a lesson of all sweet and honourable thoughts and actions, to teach you courtesy, benignity, generosity, humanity...

with whose sword at hip we have walked lovers' path;

to whom we have resorted so confidently in dark or in solitary hours.

Doubtless it were a counsel of perfection to accept his works gratefully and let the man go. Doubtless that word should be enough for us in which Homer said farewell to the Delian maidens—'Good-bye, my dears: and hereafter, should any traveller happen along and ask you "Who was the sweetest singer ever landed on your beach?" make answer to him civilly—"Sir, he was just a blind man, and his home (he said) in steep Chios."'

Doubtless, we say, it were a counsel of perfection to accept the writings of Shakespeare even so simply, so gratefully, and to let the man go. But he has meant so much to us! We resent the idea of him as 'out-topping knowledge' derisive of our 'foiled searchings.' We demand, as Jacob, after wrestling all night with the angel, demanded:

> Tell me, I pray thee, thy name. And the man answered, Wherefore is it that thou askest my name? And he blessed him and departed.

But out of the cumulative labour of nineteenth century students innumerable to tell—all devoted, all persistent, the most of them with scarcely a critical gift beyond patience and arithmetic (but we must except Collier, Gervinus, Delius, Furnivall, and the Cambridge editors)—arose among them, as an atoll grows out of Ocean, by infinite verse-countings and other tests, that century's great discovery—of the chronological order in which Shakespeare wrote his plays.

VI

Now the one priceless and irrefragable boon of this discovery is the steady light it throws upon Shakespeare's development as an artist: with its pauses, breaks, trybacks, hesitations, advances, explain them how we may. But also, and less legitimately, it flatters the curiosity of those who want to know about the man and his private

life by persuading them that from the Plays and the Sonnets—but especially the Sonnets—thus set out in right chronological order, can be expressed a continuous and even a detailed biography.

There seems no good reason why scholars and men of letters should decry one another's work just because the ways of it differ. All our roads may lead to Shakespeare in the end. Yet we may protest, or at least enter a warning, that personal gossip based on nothing more secure than internal evidence interpreted through a critic's own proclivities of belief, may easily stray through excess into impertinence. When, for example, we are told that 'every one who has read Shakespeare's works with any care must admit that Shakespeare was a snob of the purest English water,' and find that, apart from the ascertained fact of his father's having applied more than once, and at length with success, to Herald's College for a coat of arms, the evidence consists in little more than assertions that 'aristocratic tastes were natural to him: inherent indeed in the delicate sensitiveness of his beauty-loving temperament' and that 'in all his writings he praises lords and gentlemen and runs down the common people,' we cannot help telling ourselves that it may be so indeed, or again it may not, but we require more assurance than this before constructing or taking away any man's character, be he living or dead. Nor is the argument reinforced by bidding us count and note the proportion of kings, lords and men of title in Shakespeare's *dramatis personae*: since in the first place almost all the Elizabethan playwrights have a similar preference for grandees, and this (apart from the actors' liking to be seen and the public's liking to see them, in fine raiment) for the simple economic reason that the theatrical wardrobes of that time held a limited stock of expensive costumes: and secondly because (in writing their tragedies at any rate) these playwrights know by instinct what Aristotle had long ago pointed out from induction—that your