The Development of Shakespearean Character Analysis in England from 1665 to 1786

Harry F. Sebastian

Loyola University Chicago

Follow this and additional works at: https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses

Part of the English Language and Literature Commons

Recommended Citation

https://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses/1259

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses and Dissertations at Loyola eCommons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Loyola eCommons. For more information, please contact ecommons@luc.edu.

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 License.

Copyright © 1951 Harry F. Sebastian
THE DEVELOPMENT OF SHAKESPEAREAN

CHARACTER ANALYSIS IN ENGLAND

FROM 1665 TO 1786

by

Harry F. Sebastian

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of
the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

February

1951
Harry F. Sebastian was born in Chicago, Illinois, September 22, 1920.

He was graduated from Steimmetz High School, Chicago, Illinois, in June 1938, and from Loyola University, in March 1943, with the degree of Bachelor of Arts.

From 1946 to 1950 the author taught English at Loyola University. He began his graduate studies in English at Loyola University in February, 1947.
A survey of Shakespearean criticism which limits itself to a study of the characters of the plays must of necessity investigate in passing many issues which influenced the critics' opinions on the plays in general as well as on the characters in particular. A critic who finds a play generally unsatisfactory will not have the same attitude towards the characters as a critic who finds the structure of the play acceptable.

For this reason, this study which traces the rise in the appreciation of Shakespeare's abilities as a delineator of characters traces at the same time the rise of the appreciation of Shakespeare's conscious artistry. Both movements in the history of Shakespearean criticism are intimately connected with the decline in the prestige of neo-classicism. For this reason attention is given to the theory of neo-classicism and to neoclassical estimates of Shakespeare.

This study investigates the achievements of the major character analysts of the eighteenth century, Thomas Whately, Maurice Morgann, Henry MacKenzie and Richard Cumberland, and attempts to show that the achievements of these men came as efforts to make specific the older praise of Shakespeare at the same time that they denied the validity of specific neoclassical rules. These men found that Shakespeare possessed an art which was effective, even though Shakespeare was apparently unaware of the
existence of the rules of art laid down by Aristotle and his commentators.

The investigator of Restoration and eighteenth century Shakespearean criticism must agree with T. S. Eliot when he observes that to pass from the Shakespearean criticism of John Dryden to that of Samuel Johnson is to pass from one oasis to another. In the writing of this thesis it has been necessary to make that journey, and indeed, to go beyond the work of Samuel Johnson. If a survey of this criticism shows the gradual development of the appreciation of Shakespeare's characters, this journey has not been made in vain.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. THE BASIS OF NEO-CLASSICAL DRAMATIC CRITICISM</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The main tenets of Aristotle's Poetics--The examen method--The neo-classical interpretation of the doctrine of probability, particularly in regard to the characters--The contrasting attitudes of John Dryden and Thomas Rymer.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. THE NEO-CLASSICAL VIEW OF SHAKESPEARE'S CHARACTERS</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dryden's praise of Shakespeare's characters--Rymer's condemnations of them based on the idea of the type character with its attendant code of decorum--The censure of Shakespeare's characters based on their violations of the code of character decorum--The neo-classical examen useful in pointing out faults but not to a close examination of a character--The lack of agreement on what constituted decorum--Samuel Johnson's attack on the principle of decorum.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. DEFENSES OF SHAKESPEARE'S ART AND RESULTS OF THE FIRST CHARACTER ANALYSES.</td>
<td>89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johnson's defense of Shakespeare's dramatic practices--Early character analyses: Steele, Hughes, Theobald--The studies of Warton and the defense of close study of the action of the plays--Johnson's character analyses--Thomas Whately's parallel study of Macbeth and Richard III--Individuality of the characters--Richardson's analyses and the subservience of poetry to philosophy.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IV. MAURICE MORGANN'S RECOGNITION OF SHAKESPEARE'S CONSCIOUS ARTISTRY.</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maurice Morgann and the declaration that Shakespeare's characters are historic beings--Morgann and the nature of poetry--Shakespeare an artist who conceals his art--The excellence of Morgann's achievement.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Henry Mackenzie and the Hamlet-problem--Shakespeare's skill in creating characters from the ordinary walks of life--
Richard Cumberland and the recognition of Shakespeare's
skill in creating plots--Shakespeare a model for other poets
--Study of the comic characters of Henry IV similar to Haz-
litt's work in form.

The neo-classical misinterpretation of the doctrine of prob-
ability in relation to plot and characterization--The con-
sequent narrowness of the neo-classical criticism of Shake-
speare--The character analysts demonstration of Shakespeare's
artistry and the growing recognition of the invalidity of the
neo-classical rules--Shakespeare's artistry recognized but
not stated in a decisive way by a recognized critic.
CHAPTER I

THE BASIS OF NEO-CLASSICAL DRAMATIC CRITICISM

This first chapter will attempt to summarize the methods and doctrines which formed the basis of neo-classical dramatic criticism and will attempt to present in some detail the theory of characterization which neo-classical critics espoused. Such a procedure is necessary in order to emphasize the importance of the work of the authors of the first character analyses of Shakespeare's characters; for to state the findings of these first character analysts without placing them against the background of the criticism which was being written at the time by neo-classical critics would occasion little interest in their work inasmuch as the reader would find very little or nothing in their analyses which he did not accept as undeniably true but certainly commonplace.

A second reason which suggests this manner of presenting the subject lies in the origin of these analyses. From the Aristotelian examination of the plays of Shakespeare on the usual basis of plot, character, thoughts, and diction, studies of Shakespeare's characters slowly emerged during the eighteenth century, and in the later part of the century came to claim the almost complete attention of the literary critics of Shakespeare.

For these reasons a consideration of the main tenets of the
Poetics and the elaborations made upon it by the neo-classical theorists is necessary in this study of the achievements of the first analysts of Shakespeare's characters.

In Chapter VI of the Poetics, Aristotle enumerates plot, character, diction, thought, spectacle, and melody as the constituent parts of the drama, and in the remaining chapters of the treatise he explains their proper use in the drama and in epic poetry. The last of these two elements, spectacle and melody, do not figure in his discussion because Aristotle believed the effect of tragedy can be experienced by the reader of the play as well as the spectator at the performance of the play.

According to Aristotle "the first essential, the life and soul, so to speak, of Tragedy is the Plot..." By plot he understands "the combination of the incidents, or things done in the story..." The discussion of the plot takes up the greater portion of the whole treatise, extending from Chapter VII through Chapter XVIII with the exception of Chapters XII and XV, the first of these being a discussion of the organization of the parts of the play and the second being the important chapter on the proper construction of the characters.

---

1 De Poetica translated by Ingram Bywater in W. D. Ross, ed., The Works of Aristotle, Oxford, 1924, XI. Unless otherwise noted all references are to the Poetics and are made to the specific chapter in the Poetics.

2 Chapter VI.

3 Ibid.
The importance of the plot in the mind of the author is indicated by the length of the discussion he devotes to it. His main theory is that the plot is the imitation of an action and hence must have unity and necessity in its incidents. A plot which undertakes to present the adventures of a man's life will not have this unity because one man accomplishes many actions during his life which do not have any necessary relation between them. Here of course some Restoration and eighteenth century critics were to find the history plays of Shakespeare "faulty"; and, if the plot, "the first essential," was incorrect, how could the play have any merit?

The second constituent of the tragedy according to Aristotle is character or that element in the dramatic personage which reveals his moral purpose in the action of the drama. The third constituent of the drama is the "thought" expressed by the dramatic personage, or what Aristotle called the element by which the dramatist displays his "power of saying whatever can be said, or what is appropriate to the occasion." Thus Aristotle makes a distinction between the moral and intellectual qualities of the personages of the drama. How this distinction was observed by the neo-classical critics will be seen later. Last among the literary elements of the drama mentioned by Aristotle is the diction

4 Chapter IX.

5 Chapter VI.
employed in the speeches of the characters. When literary critics wanted to examine a work in detail it was natural for them to use the "Aristotelian" or examen method of analyzing plot, characters, thoughts, and diction. Corneille had popularized the method by issuing in 1660 a series of examens of his plays in which he attempted to justify his practices in the light of neo-classical theory. This action was almost forced upon him by the appearance in 1657 of François Hedelein, Abbe d'Aubignac's Pratique du Theatre in which Corneille's

6 Ibid.

7 The first English version of the Poetics, Aristotle's Art of Poetry Translated from the Original Greek, according to Mr. Theodore Coulston's Edition, Together with Mr. Dacier's Notes Translated from the French, London, 1705, was not, as its title states, a translation from the Greek. The anonymous translator used Andre Dacier's rather free French version as his text. The French translation by Andre Dacier (1651-1722), La Poetique d'Aristote traduite en Francois avec des remarques, Paris, 1692, summed up in the remarks at the end of each chapter the critical theories of the earlier formalistic critics of the seventeenth century. Even before its translation in 1705 the work had not been without influence in England. In 1693 Thomas Rymer spoke of Dacier and LeBossu as the reformers of modern criticism--cf. Short View of Tragedy, London, 1693, iii, and John Dryden praised it in 1695--cf. Walter F. Ker, ed., Essays of John Dryden, Oxford, 1900, I, 83-89. The English translation was re-issued in 1709 and again in 1714 and remained the only English translation until the anonymous translation from the Greek text appeared in 1775--cf. Marvin T. Herrick, The Poetics of Aristotle in England, New Haven, 1930, 81, and Joel E. Spingarn, ed., Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century, Oxford, 1908, I, lxxiii.


9 In this work which an anonymous translator turned into English in 1684 under the title of The Whole Art of the Stage, d'Aubignac (as he was known in England) presented "An Analysis or Examen of the First Tragedy of Sophocles, entitled Ajax, upon the Rules deliver'd for the practice of the Stage."--cf. IV, 153-166.
plays are usually used as examples of what not to do in writing tragedy.10

The examen was introduced into English criticism in 1668 by
John Dryden who included an "Examen of the Silent Woman" of Ben Johnson
in his Essay of Dramatic Poesy.11 But Dryden's examen is short and general
in its discussion. In 1678 the whole rigor of the neo-classical examen was
presented to English readers in Thomas Rymer's almost line by line examina-
tion of Fletcher's tragedies, RoIlo, Duke of Normandy, A King and No King,
and The Maid's Tragedy, in his book entitled The Tragedies of the Last Age
Considered and Examined by the Practice of the Ancients and the Common
Sense of All Ages. It is to Thomas Rymer rather than to John Dryden that
the credit must be given for the popularization of the examen in England.12
Dryden used the form only once and then loosely; Rymer examined the plays
of Fletcher in detail and used the examen a second time in 1693 when he
published his Short View of Tragedy, a work which will be discussed in some
detail later.

The use of the examen method became increasingly common in Eng-
land after the appearance of the Short View of Tragedy. In 1696 John Dennis
brought out his Remarks on a Book Entitled, Prince Arthur, An Hercick Poem
which follows the examen method with great precision.13 It is called "the

10 Kathleen T. Butler, A History of French Literature, London,
1923, I, 209.

11 Ker, Essays of John Dryden, I, 83-89.

12 Herrick, The Poetics of Aristotle, 60.

13 E. N. Hooker, ed., Critical Works of John Dennis, Baltimore,
1939, I, 46-141.
first real literary review in English" in A. F. B. Clark's study, Boileau and the French Classical Critics in England. 14 Other examen type works of Dennis include his Remarks on Cato, a Tragedy (1713), 15 Remarks on a Play, Call'd The Conscious Lovers, a Comedy, (1723), 16 and Remarks on Mr. Pope's Rape of the Lock (1728). 17 These works form only a small part of Dennis's writing, which extended from 1692 to 1729. In all his writings he follows Aristotelian neo-classical principles. In the works cited above, however, he uses the examen as the basis of organization of his work.

In Jeremy Collier's Short View of the Immorality and Profaneness of the Stage, 18 the learned author used the principles of the Poetics to analyze the plots, characters, and the morals inculcated by the plays. In particular he subjects Sir John Vanbrugh's The Relapse, or Virtue in Danger (1697) to a thorough scrutiny in examen form. George Saintsbury says of it:

There is hardly a sharper and more well-deserved beating up of the quarters of a ragged dramatic regiment anywhere than that (at P. 212 seq.) on the glaring improbabilities of Vanbrugh's plot, the absolute want of connection between the title part of it and the real fable--Tom Fashion's cheating his brother of Hoyden--and the way in which the characters are constantly out of character in order that the author may say clever things. 19

14 Paris, 1925, 245.
15 Hooker, Works of John Dennis, II, 41-81.
16 Ibid., II, 251-274.
17 Ibid., II, 322-352.
18 London, 1698.
19 History of Criticism, II, 403.
The remarkable thing about the controversy is that William Congreve, who answered in his Amendments of Mr. Collier's False and Imperfect Citations (1698), and James Drake in his Antient and Modern Stages Surveyed (1699) both used Aristotle in their rebuttals. Of the whole quarrel M. T. Herrick says:

Apparently no one among the reformers or the supporters of the stage thought of objecting to the 'rules'; each group felt sure that Aristotle and the authorities would support their side. 20

Of greater literary importance than any of the preceding examens was Joseph Addison's study of Paradise Lost during 1712. 21 Of this study M. T. Herrick says:

His papers in the Spectator have made the Aristotelian Fable, Manners Sentiment, and Diction familiar to students of criticism on both sides of the Atlantic. 22

Even Alexander Pope lent his prestige to the use of this form. In the preface to his translation of the Iliad (1715) 23 Pope makes a comparison of the achievements of Homer and Virgil in their respective epics. This he does by using in a systematic fashion the familiar divisions of Fable, Manners, Sentiment, and Diction.

The main concerns of this method are summed up by the querulous

20 Poetics of Aristotle, 78.


22 The Poetics of Aristotle, 105.

Charles Gildon, who said that he put these questions to playgoers who, he thought, liked a play without examining it carefully enough.

Pray gentlemen, what are the beauties of this piece? Is the fable masterly? Are the characters justly distinguished? Are the manners truly marked? Are the sentiments natural? Are the incidents well prepared? And do they justly produce terror and compassion, as well as the catastrophe?24

The answers to these questions, simple as they may seem, depend upon a knowledge of the basic doctrines of neo-classicism as Charles Gildon no doubt would have advised the uncritical admirer of a play who unguardedly answered "yes" to these questions. What were these doctrines?

When the French Academy censured Le Cid in 1638, its principal objection to the play was the play's supposed violations of vraisemblance,25 the major doctrine of neo-classicism. In its various applications vraisemblance, it can almost be said, is neo-classicism; for in the effort to maintain it, all the rules for which neo-classicism is famous were established. In his study of the genesis and development of French neo-classicism Rene Bray says of this doctrine:

Et pourtant c'est la règle essentielle de notre doctrine. Dictée par la raison, fondée sur la fin morale assignée à la poésie, elle contient l'interprétation véritable du naturalisme classique. C'est en son nom que se livre toutes les batailles littéraires, elles sont à la bas de toutes les critiques. C'est dire qu'elle touche à tous les problèmes essentiels de notre étude.26

26 La Formation de la doctrine classique en France, Lausanne, 1931, 192.
Its comprehensiveness can be seen in the fact that the whole literary work was bound by the rules of vraisemblance, or probability as it is called in English. In the first place probability was to be observed in regard to the action itself. The plot was to be selected or rejected on the basis of its probability. With it as his guide the poet was to select certain incidents of the action for presentation on the stage; other incidents were merely to be narrated. In the second place it was to be observed in the depiction of the personages of the dramatis personae. Here probability appears as the theory of les bienséances or the theory of character decorum. Lastly probability was to be observed in the representation of the action on the stage, and here it appears as the rule of the unities. 27

The neo-classical critics found the basis of this doctrine in the Poetics. In three explicit statements and in passing comments throughout the work, Aristotle presents his idea of poetic truth.

From what we have said it will be seen that the poet's function is to describe, not the thing that has happened, but a kind of thing that might happen, i.e. what is possible as being probable or necessary. . . . The distinction between history and poetry consists really in this, that one describes the kind of thing that has been and the other a kind of thing that might be. Hence poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since its statements are of the nature rather of universals. . . . By a universal statement I mean one as to what such or such a kind of man will probably say or do—which is the aim of poetry. 28

The right thing, however, is in the Characters just as in the

27 Ibid.

28 Chapter IX.
incidents of the play to endeavour alays after the necessary or the probable; so that whenever such-and-such a personage says such-and-such a thing, it shall be the necessary or probable outcome of his character; and whenever this incident follows on that, it shall be the necessary or the probable consequence of it.  

Speaking generally, one has to justify (1) the Impossible by reference to the requirements of poetry, or the better, or to opinion. For the purposes of poetry a convincing impossibility is preferable to an unconvincing probability; and if such men as Zeuxis depicted be impossible, the answer is that it is better they should be like that, as the artist ought to improve on his model.

The critics also noted that Aristotle had praised those poets who created a tragic situation that arouses the human feeling in one, like the clever villain (Sisyphus) deceived, or the brave wrong doer worsted. This is probable, however, only in Agathon's sense, when he speaks of the probability of even improbabilities coming to pass.

This later sort of probability, however, the critics called "extraordinary" in contrast to the ordinary probability which "is possible as being probable or necessary." Extraordinary probability was looked upon with slight favor, and successive critics added restrictions to its employment.

Aristotle's statements concerning probability allowed the critics to distinguish three orders of facts: the real (the historical fact), the scientifically possible (the event which can happen) and the probable (the event which is likely to happen). Aristotle had claimed the last as the subject matter of poetry, and the critics set out to define its province in detail. The English translation of d'Aubignac's Pratique du Theatre

---

29 Chapter XV.

30 Chapter XXV.

31 Chapter XVIII.
presents the critics' opinion:

There is nothing therefore but Probability, that can truly found a Dramatic Poem, as well as adorn and finish it; not that True and Possible things are banish'd off the Stage, but they are received upon it only so far as they are probable; and therefore all Circumstances, that want this Character are to be alter'd so as to attain it; if they hop'd [sic] to appear in publick.32

The difficulty in meeting this demand that the poet seek only the probable in his work lies in a definition of the probable itself. Did Aristotle understand by the probable event or character the average event or character, and did he mean a numerical average so to speak? The French critics and their English followers decided that if an event seemed probable, it was probable. In the words of Rene Rapin, "The Probable is whatever suits with Common Opinion."33 The difficulty lies of course in determining what the common opinion is. Aristotle, as we have seen, praised certain poets whose probability was extraordinary,34 although certainly he did not recommend its constant use. And he had recommended the use of historical names in tragedy as an aid in establishing probability because "that which has happened is manifestly possible, else it would not have come to pass."35 But the justification of an event as probable because it

32 The Whole Art of the Stage, translated anonymously, London, 1684, I, 75.

33 "Reflections on Aristotle's Poesie" translated by Thomas Rymer in The Whole Critical Works of Monsieur Rapin, 1706, II, 157. Rymer's translation originally appeared in 1674, the same year that the work was originally published in French.

34 Chapter XVIII.

35 Chapter IX.
had happened was not sufficient for the critics. Boileau had reminded the poet:

Je.nais au spectateur n'offrez rien d'incroyable
Le vrai peut quelque fois n'être pas vraisemblable.36

Or as John Dryden and Sir William Soames put it:

Write not what cannot be with ease conceived;
Some truths may be too strong to be believed.37

The history of neo-classical criticism seems to be the history of the narrowing of the concept of probability.38 Successive critics found more and more "truths too strong to be believed" and hence the "Common Opinion" was directed against them. Even the latitude which Aristotle had allowed the poet to put improbabilities upon which the whole story rested, as in the example of Oedipus's not knowing how Laius had met his death, outside the dramatized story39 was disallowed by d'Aubignac:

and I cannot consent that the Poet should suppose any incidents against probability in those Adventures which precede the Action represented, because that they being a foundation for things which happen afterwards on the stage, it breaks all the Chain of Events, it being against all order that a thing probable should be built upon an improbable one. . . .40

The "probable" came to be a matter of average everyday experience. For

---

36 L'Art poétique, III, 47-48, as found in Albert S. Cook, The Art of Poetry, Boston, 1892, 187.

37 Ibid. The English translation appeared in 1683.

38 Bray, La Formation, 198-202.

39 Chapter XV.

40 The Whole Art, III, 76.
John Dryden in his *Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy*, the "probable" was "that which succeeds or happens oftener than it misses."\(^1\)

When one accepts this arithmetic attitude toward the probable it is possible to understand the attitude of the neo-classicists in general towards plots and characters which did not meet the standards of ordinary experience. Modern Aristotelian critics reject this attitude towards the probable and point out the narrowness of the neo-classical interpretation of this doctrine. S. H. Butcher sums up the modern criticism of the neo-classical interpretation in this way:

The 'probable' is not determined by a numerical average of instances; it is not a condensed expression for what meets us in the common course of things. The *έικός* of daily life, the empirically usual, is derived from an observed sequence of facts, and denotes what is normal and regular in its occurrence, the rule, not the exception. But the rule of experience cannot be the law that governs art... the persons, who play their parts, are not average men and women... The thoughts and deeds, the will and the emotions of a Prometheus or a Clytemnestra, a Hamlet or an Othello, are not an epitomized rendering of the ways of meaner mortals... But we do not think of measuring the intrinsic probability of meeting their counterpart in the actual world.\(^2\)

Irving Babbitt also condemns this attitude of the neo-classical critics and blames them for having been "not capable of a poetic faith, not willing to suspend his disbelief in passing from the world of ordinary fact to the world of artistic creation."\(^3\)

---

\(^1\) Ker, *Essays of John Dryden*, I, 209.


\(^3\) *Rousseau and Romanticism*, New York, 1919, 22.
Only if we insist on the actual probability of seeing in the world of our own experience the events and characters of the poet's creation can our attitude be that of the critic who censures the plot of Othello in this fashion:

The Character of that State is to employ strangers in their Wars; But shall a Poet thonce fancy that they will set a Negro to be their General; or trust a Moor to defend them against the Turk? With us a Black-amoor might rise to be a Trumpeter; but Shakespear would not have him less than a Lieutenant-General. With us a Moor might marry some little drab, or Smallcoal Wench: Shakespear, would provide him the Daughter and Heir of some great Lord, or Privy-Counsellor: And all the Town should reckon it a very suitable match: Yet the English are not bred up with that hatred and aversion to the Moors as are the Venetians, who suffer by a perpetual Hostility from them, Littora littoribus contraria ———

If the probable means the numerical average, it is difficult to urge anything against the findings of this critic.

Just as the application of a rigidly understood numerical attitude towards the probability of events brought many cautions into existence, so the application of the doctrine of probability to the characters of a dramatic work brought into existence a multitude of rules and observations to insure the poet against a violation of probability in creating the personages which he had selected as members of his dramatis personae. In Chapter XV of the Poetics, Aristotle gives directions for the creation of characters. And in the creation of characters as well as in the construction of the plot, probability is to be maintained.

The right thing, however, is in the characters just as in the incidents of the play to endeavor always after the necessary or probable; so that whenever such-and-such a person says or does such-and-such a thing, it shall be the necessary or probable outcome of his character; and whenever this incident follows on that, it shall be either the necessary or probable consequence of it.45

The poet will achieve this probability if he observes four cautions in creating the characters. In the first place the characters should be "good," that is, the inclination of the personage should be revealed in the actions and discourses of the character in the play. Secondly the character ascribed by the poet to the personage must be appropriate to him. Ironically Aristotle explains this requirement with a negative example by saying that it is not appropriate to ascribe manliness or cleverness to a woman. The neo-classical critics were to remedy this lack with extensive exegesis. Thirdly the character must be like the original. That is, if the poet portrays Achilles in his play, he must give him the same qualities of character that other poets have given him in the past. He cannot, for instance, show his Achilles to be stupid, because common sense knows the character as the wily Achilles. Obviously this require-

45 Chapter XV. At least one theorist, Charles Gildon, complained that the characters in a history play cannot be as effectively portrayed as those in a tragedy or comedy. "But here is the Misfortune of all the Characters of Plays of this Nature, that they are directed to no End, and therefore are of little Use, for the Harmers cannot be necessary, and by Consequence must lose more, than half their Beauty." He continues by pointing out that the violence, rage, grief, and motherly love of Constance (in Shakespeare's King John) are not productive of one incident and are of no use. If there had been a just design of the plot the manners of the characters would have produced the results. Cf. "Remarks on the Plays of Shakespear," in C. Gildon, The Works of Mr. William Shakespear, London, 1710, VII, 339.
ment exists only for those characters drawn from history or myth. Lastly the poet must make his characters act consistently throughout the play. Aristotle censures Euripides because in Ephigenia at Aulis the character of "Ephigenia the suppliant is utterly unlike the later Ephigenia."  

The two questions put by Gildon concerning the characters' being "justly distinguished" and the "Manners truly marked" have their basis in Aristotle's first and second character requirements. If the actions and inclinations of the character were vividly defined, the critic approved of it. If the character acted as a character so conceived should act, the critic again approved. But since this was a very difficult subject the critic stood ready to tell the playwright how the actions and inclinations of the character should be conceived in order to receive the critic's accolade for "manners truly marked." As a result of the critical work done on this subject, the idea of the type character and the doctrine of character deorum developed and in time assumed an unchallenged position in neo-classicism.

The critics set about explaining Aristotle's four requirements for the creation of characters by using two other classical texts as commentaries on it. In the first of these, Book II of the Rhetoric, Aristotle presents an enumeration and analysis from the orator's point of view of the various types of human character in relationship to the emotions

46 Chapter XV.

47 Chapter XII-XVII.
and moral qualities of man, dividing the various types of human character according to age and fortune. Under the first division, age, he analyzes the emotions and moral qualities of the youth, the man in the prime of life, and the old man; under the second he analyzes the qualities of the man of good birth, the wealthy man, and finally the powerful man.

The second text which was made to serve as a commentary on the Poetics was the Ars Poetica of Horace. Two sections of the Ars Poetica deal with character. In the first of these, Horace paraphrases Aristotle's four requirements for the construction of a character laid down in Chapter XV of the Poetics, and here he introduces nothing new. However, in a later section of the Ars Poetica, Horace says that only the dramatist who succeeds in character delineation can hope to succeed; and then he presents full-length lists of likely habits for the child, the young man, the man in the prime of life, and the old man.

Aetatis cujusque notandi sunt tibi mores,
mobilibusque decor naturis dandus et annis.
Reddere qui voces jam scit puer et pede certo
signat humum, gestit paribus colludere et iram
colligit ac ponit temere et mutatur in horas.
Imberbus juvenis, tandem custode remoto,
gaudet equis canibus et aprici gramine Campi,
cereus in vitium flecti, monitoribus asper,
utilium tardus provisor, prodigus aeris,
sublimis cupidusque et amata reliquere pernix.
Conversis studiis aetas animusque virilis
quaerit opes et amicitas, inservit honori,
commisisse cavet quod max mutare labore.
Multa senem circumveniunt incommoda, vel quod
quaerit et inventis miser abstinet ac timet uti,
vel quod res omnis timide gelideque ministrat,
The similarity of the two passages leaves little doubt as to Horace's debt to the Rhetoric. The character sketch of the child, however, is not found in the Rhetoric.

The result of Horace's application of Aristotle's analysis of the types of character to the criticism of dramatic characters had a far-reaching effect. Aristotle's division of character in the Rhetoric was

49 Ll. 156-176. The translation by Wentworth Dillon, Earl of Roscommon (1633-1695), is not the most exact or fluent of the attempts to translate the Ars Poetica. It is here reproduced because of its popularity during the period. First printed in 1680, it was reprinted in 1684, 1695, 1709, and 1733. It is found in Alexander Chalmers, ed., The Works of the English Poets, London, 1810, VIII, 273.

Mind how our tempers alter in our years,
And by that rule form all your characters.
One that hath newly learn'd to speak and go,
 Loves childish plays, is soon provok'd and pleas'd,
And changes every hour his wavering mind;
A youth, that first casts off his tutor's yoke,
 Loves horses, hounds, and sports and exercise,
Prone to all vice, impatient of reproof,
Proud, careless, fond, inconstant, profuse.
Gain and ambition rule our riper years,
And makes us slaves to interest and power.
Old men are only walking hospitals,
Where all defects and all diseases crowd
With restless pain and more tormenting fear,
Lazy, morose, full of delays and hopes,
Opress'd with riches which they dare not use;
Ill-natur'd censors of the present age,
And fond of all the follies of the past.
Thus all the treasures of our flowing years,
Our ebb or life for ever takes away.
Boys must not have th' ambitious cares of men,
Nor men the weak anxieties of age.
made for the purpose of rhetorical exposition. That the division was rhetorical and not aesthetic can be seen in the fact that Aristotle did not allude to this section of the Rhetoric when he was discussing character. However, he does allude to the Rhetoric later in the Poetics and when he is discussing the thoughts expressed by the characters in the drama, but there he is discussing the modes of persuasion. Of the consequences of regarding the divisions of the characters made in the Rhetoric as aesthetic qualities, J. A. Spingarn says:

The result of the attempt to transpose them to the domain of poetry led to a hardening and crystallization of character in the neo-classical drama. But the aesthetic misconception implied by such an attempt is only too obvious. In such a system poetry is held accountable, not to the ideal truth of human life, but to certain arbitrary, or at best empirical formulae of rhetorical theory.

Here again the law of probability is put into operation. Aristotle has defined the qualities which one usually finds in young men, old men, rich men, poor men: Horace adopted the divisions and the qualities; the neo-classical critics stood prepared to enforce probability in character creation by using them as examples of human conduct which the dramatist could not neglect without being in extreme danger of violating probability. The result is that when the young man is presented he is presented as being passionate, changeable, violent, hot-tempered, loving,

50 Chapter XIX.

51 Rhetoric, Book II, Chapter II.

52 A History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance, New York, 1899, 86.
honor and victory, careless concerning money, trusting, sanguine, filled
with expectations, easily cheated, courageous, shy, having exalted notions,
and the like. The old man is presented as hesitating, cynical, neither
loving nor hating warmly, small-minded, not generous, cowardly, shameless,
lacking confidence, loquacious, angry in a feeble way, a slave to gain,
and so on. The general truth of these observations cannot be denied.
These are typical human traits, and using them as the norms of imitation
gives the playwright type characters.

Striving always for probability and putting aside all singular
qualities, neo-classical critics insisted on the complete generality of
the character. Charles Gildon writing in 1710 presents the accepted
view 53 when he says:

Thus Homer in the action of Achilles intends not the Description of
that one Individual Man, but to show what Violence and Anger wou'd
make all Men of that Character say or do; as therefore Achilles is
a general and Allegorical Person do ought all Heroes of Tragedy to
be, where they should speak and act necessarily or probably as all
men so qualify'd and in those Circumstances wou'd do, differing
from History in this that the Drama consults not the truth of what
any particular person did say or do, but only in the general Nature
of such Qualities to produce such words and Actions 54.

The result of following this theory in character construction
is at once evident. The poet begins his development of the character of
the dramatic personage with an undetermined character before him and then

53 André Dacier makes the same comment on Achilles in La Poétique
d'Aristote, 133.

54 "An Essay on the Art, Rise, and Progress of the Stage," in
adds traits to it in accordance with the demands of the plot. When the
demands of the plot have been met, the character is finished, and no doubt
functions effectively in the world created by the poet. Its trueness to
the world outside the creation is another question. During the eighteenth
century the critics who analyzed Shakespeare's characters claimed for
them—and proved Shakespeare's genius in doing it—a trueness to the actual
world.

In their search for generality the critics discovered other
sources of human character unmentioned by Aristotle. Jules de la Mesnardiére, the publication of whose Poétique in 1639 closed the struggle for
regularity in the drama in French and fixed classical doctrine, listed
six sources of character traits: age, passion, present fortune, condition
of life, nationality, and sex. It was his treatment of character which
established the notions of character decorum for which the French drama
became famous, and which served as a model for later French and English
critics.

The doctrine of character decorum comes as a corollary to the
doctrine of the type character. As we have seen, the first requirement
of Aristotle was that the character be "good" or well distinguished in
his traits. The critic asked only that the traits which were given to the

55 Rene Bray, La Formation, 103.

56 Helen Reese Reese, La Mesnardière's Poétique (1639): Sources

57 Ibid., 221.
characters, received high praise for their "goodness." Hence it can be seen that the critics who praised Shakespeare's characters for this reason did not necessarily realize that they were more true to life than the "good" characters of other dramatists who drew their characters according to a standard type.

In elucidating the second requirement, that the traits attributed to the personages be agreeable, the critics looked to the Rhetoric and to the passages in the Ars Poetica which Horace had borrowed from Aristotle for examples of what traits were agreeable to men of various ages and fortunes. And what Aristotle and Horace lacked, Mesnardière and his followers stood ready to supply. The first requirement, that the characters be "good," was thus completely fulfilled by observing the second requirement, that the character have the proper traits. If the traits which the poet selected did not agree with the traits of the type character as it was accepted in the "Common Opinion" of critics, the poet was guilty of a breach of decorum. Of this very important requirement Mesnardière said:

Par la propriété des moeurs, le poète doit considérer qu'il ne faut jamais introduire sans nécessité absolue, ni une fille vaillante, ni une femme savante, ni un valet judicieux. . . . Mettre au théâtre ces trois espèces de personnes avec ces nobles conditions, c'est choquer directement la vraisemblance ordinaire.

Of the six sources of character traits, the condition of life of the personage, or in other words, the rank and position in society

58 Works of John Dennis, II, 425.

59 La Poétique, as quoted in Bray, La Formation, 221. Page references to La Poétique do not appear frequently in Bray's book.
which each character possessed, was very important in determining the probable character traits which should be assigned to him. 60 Also of importance was his treatment of nationality. 61 Here too the poet was to

60 A king should be so brave as to fear no danger and find nothing impossible to the strength of the lawful use of his arms, so cautious as never to find reason either to retract his judgments or to condemn their outcome, so liberal as to show his subjects that he is the dispenser and not the public thief of the wealth of his state, so good as to live with his citizens just as he would live with his king if their positions were reversed. Finally a king in tragedy should possess the perfections which are ordinarily found in several princes because the poems must imitate the actions of eminent persons and even of the most perfect.

As for the tyrant, if he is brave, he must be cruel; if prudent, deceitful; if mild, treacherous; if liberal with one person, avaricious with several. He should distrust everyone, banish from his court men of high virtue inasmuch as a single encounter with them seems to reproach him for his crimes, hate honest literary men because he should consider them the just censors of his wicked actions and the executioners of his fame, and flee the sight of all men, being the object of their enmity and aversion. If he possess any virtue it must be tainted with vice. He should possess nothing which can reasonably make him worthy of the throne from which he dispenses the miseries which afflict so many people.

Queens should be chaste, modest, peaceful, and noble.

Governors of empires should possess these qualities: extreme vigilance, stability, boldness, skill, moderation, extraordinary prudence, exact fidelity, perfect knowledge of political science, in short, a useful blending of probity and intelligence.

The chancellor will be learned, serious, gentle, judicious, accessible, steady, affable, but incorruptible; the pontiff, erudite, eloquent, ceremonious, reserved, modest, religious, patient, and venerable; the courtesan, civil, shrewd, careful, agreeable, correct, officious, wheedling; the captain, brave, bold, watchful, ambitious, enamored of his profession, frank, prudent, and hard working. Cf. Reese, Le Mesnardièr, 108-109.

61 The nations are characterized as follows: The French, bold, courteous, indiscreet, generous, shrewd, inconsiderate, impetuous, inconstant, prodigal, little laborious, polite, fickle in love, impatient and foolhardy; the Spanish, presumptuous, uncivil to strangers, learned in politics, tyrannical, avaricious, constant, fit of every fatigue, indifferent to every climate, ambitious, contemptuous, excessively serious, blindly impassioned for their nation's glory, ridiculous in love, and
strive after the probable—actually after the average—in presenting personages of various nationalities in his dramas. So Mesnardière presents the traits he considers proper to the various nationalities. He does concede that if it is absolutely necessary for the story a character need not display national traits. Thus, although as a rule Spaniards are proud, the poet can introduce a Spaniard of "une parfaite modestie," for, as he continues, "malgré les habitudes qui règnent en chaque pays, il se trouve des Espagnols parfaitement honnêtes gens, curtois, civils, et modérés...." But aside from this concession, the poet must of necessity
donne ces inclinations à ceux à qui elles sont dues, et qu'il ne fasse jamais un guerrier d'un Asiatique, un fidèle d'un Africain, un impie d'un Persien, un véritable d'un Grec, un généreux d'un Thracien, un subtil d'un Allemand, un modeste d'un Espagnol, ni un incivil d'un Français.  

One hears echoes of this initial work of this "grandmaitre des bienseances" for more than a hundred years. Thomas Rymer knew his

furious in hatred; the English, unfaithful, lazy, valiant, cruel, amateurs of cleanliness, enemies of strangers, haughty; the Italians, idle, impious, seditious, suspicious, deceitful, homo-loving, subtle, courteous, vindictive, amateurs of politeness, and impasioned for gain; the Germans, sincere, unpolished, faithful, modest, banqueters, affable, brave, enamored of liberty; the Persians, religious, ambitious, rich, clever, gentle, warlike, and defiant; the Greeks, vain, false, proud, shrewd, erudite, and reasonable; the Egyptians, lazy, timid, voluptuous, and devoted to magic; the Moors, foolish, desperate, little thoughtful of life, stubborn, and faithless; the Thracians, cruel, wretched, barbarous, and vagrant. Cf. Reese, La Mesnardière, 110.

62 La Poétique as quoted in Bray, La Formation, 222.
63 Ibid., 220.
work at first hand, and the works of the later French formalist critics who rephrased his theories were well known in England. John Dryden repeats the doctrine of the six sources of character traits in "The Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy," and in his Reflections, Rene Bray sums up Aristotle, Horace, and Mesnardiere on the subject of character decorum:

Finally the manners must be proportioned to the Age, to the Sex, to the Quality, to the Employment, and to the Fortune of the Persons: and it is particularly in the second book of Aristotle's Rhetoric, and in Horace's book of Poetry, that this Secret may be learned; whatever agrees not with his principles is false; Nothing tolerable can be performed in Poetry without this knowledge, and with it all becomes admirable. 

In this passage the rigidity and artificiality of the system of neo-classical character decorum appear in their most doctrinaire and unyielding form.

Other perils remained after the poet had successfully created characters which were sharply distinguished. A crisis arose whenever there was a conflict between Aristotle's second and third requirements, agreeableness and likeness. Suppose the character which the poet chose to portray had possessed in life a trait which ill befitted his station. This "nice" problem intrigued Le Bossu, Dacier, Dryden, Rymer.

66 Ker, Essays of John Dryden, I, 214.
69 La Poétique d'Aristote, 238.
71 This was one of Rymer's consuming passions. Both The
Mauritius, the Greek emperor, was a prince far surpassing Valentinian, for he was endued with many kingly virtues; he was religious, merciful, and valiant, but withal he was noted of extreme covetousness, a vice which is contrary to the character of a hero or a prince, therefore...that emperor was no fit person to be represented in a tragedy, unless his good qualities were only to be shown and his covetousness (which sullied them all) were slurred over by the artifice of the poet.

This was Dryden's solution to the problem which was fully in accord with the orthodox view.

The traits which supposedly spring from the condition of life of the character undoubtedly are the traits which concern the critics most frequently. Dacier had the traits which spring from the condition of life in mind when he found fault with the title character of Ephigenia at Aulis. Not only is she "unequal" as Aristotle had pointed out in Chapter XV of the Poetics, but the basis of this inequality lies in her initial lack of traits agreeable to her position. He complains that

elle pousse ses prières jusqu'à la bassesse & à la lacheté, & fait paraitre pour la vie un amour indigne d'une princesse bien née...
Under a theory of this kind the personage of the drama acts according to his official capacity, and his actions must follow the prescribed traits of the critics. The king must at all times act in a regal manner, the soldier in a military manner, and so on. D'aubignac said of the proper method of presenting a king:

> When a King speaks upon the Stage, he must speak like a King, and that is the Circumstance of his Dignity, against which nothing ought to be done with Decency; except there be some reason to dispense with this last, as that he were in disguise. 77

And Thomas Rymer complained that in Fletcher's *A King and No King* Arbaces did not act like a king but like a lover. In Rymer's mind this is a deplorable situation because such a characterization does not take into consideration the heroic nature of a king.

> We are to presume the greatest vertues, where we find the highest of rewards; and though it is not necessary that all Heroes, should be Kings, yet undoubtedly all crown'd heads by Poetical Right are Heroes. This character is a flower, a preprogative so certain, so inseparably annex'd to the Crown, as by no Poet, no Parliament of Poets, ever to be invaded. 78

This conclusion is not surprising. Rymer continues in the same vein as his French master, Mesnardiere, who had been driven to the conclusion that in order to not shock decorum a dramatist should be acquainted with court etiquette. 79 Rymer manifests the same care for propriety when he examines the question "Who and who may kill one another with decency" in

77 The Whole Art of the Stage, II, 76.
78 The Tragedies of the Last Age, 61.
79 Dutton, "French Aristotelian Formalists and Thomas Rymer," PMLA, XXIV, 162.
It should not be thought that only the rigorists among the critics held this view of type characters and character decorum. John Dryden on occasion could propound the same doctrine. He found that the king in the Maid's Tragedy should not be shown in so vicious a character. Sophocles has been more judicious in his Antigone, for, though he represents in Creon a bloody prince, but a usurper, and Antigone herself is the heroine of the tragedy. . . . 81

The danger of this system of character presentation is obvious. Crude and mechanical portraits can easily be achieved by following the rules. It appears easy to construct characters and put them into action when the critics provide all the answers. Rapin's directions to the poet contain this note of dangerous simplicity.

The Painter draws Faces by their Features; but the Poet represents the Minds of Men by their Manners; and the most general Rule for Painting the Manners is to exhibit every Person in his proper Character: A Slave, with base Thoughts and servile Inclinations; A Prince, with a liberal Heart, and Air of Majesty: A Soldier, Fierce, Insolent, Surly, Inconstant: An Old Man, Covetous, Wary, Jealous. 82

The particular is avoided by the poet; the general trait is sought. Thus Joseph Addison preaches Homer because his princes differ, as he says, among themselves as much by their manners as by their dominions. But Addison is not saying that the poet is seeking individual traits in

80 The Tragedies of the Last Age, 117-120.
81 Ker, Essays of John Dryden, I, 217.
82 Works of Monsieur Rapin, II, 159.
creating his characters rather than general traits. This becomes clear when he praises the differences in the various personages and then goes on to say that even those personages whose characters seem to be based on courage alone differ from each other as to the particular variety of courage each one possesses. But at the bottom of each character lies the general type. 83

If the character acts contrarily to one of his probably traits, decorum is violated because the poet has shocked the reader. In the last analysis, any violation of the probable is a shock to the reader, and hence a violation of decorum. In this sense decorum "is the most Universal of all the Rules." 84 Rene Bray in his study of neo-classical doctrine finds that in this sense all critics of the period have this all embracing sense of decorum in regard to the action itself, the creation of the characters, the sentiments expressed in the drama, and the reaction of the whole work on the audience. 85

In summing up the requirements of characterization which were made by these neo-classical critics, we have seen that all the rules were made with one thought in mind. The poet must follow the probable in his characterization, just as he had to follow the probable in the selection of his action. The flaw in this theory of character was the same flaw

83 Spectator, No. 273, January 12, 1711.
84 Works of Monsieur Rapin, II, 179.
85 Bray, La Formation, 216.
which we have seen in their theory of the action: they conceived the probable as the average, as the everyday event and character.

Having considered probability in regard to the demands which the critics made in order to preserve it in the selection of the action and in the creation of characters, this study now takes up the demands which the critics made in order to preserve probability in regard to the representation of the action on the stage. Here we come to a discussion of the unities of time, place, and action which occupied the efforts of many critics during the neo-classical period. Its importance in a study devoted to character criticism is not great in itself; however, in the minds of many eighteenth century critics the unities had an important place. Shakespeare's plays, according to these men, were "faulty" in this particular. The studies of the Shakespeare's characters however directed the attention of the readers to "beauties" which they had been unaware of, and these beauties made the "faults" of violations of the unities seem to be negligible.

The unity of action is actually the only one of the three unities which Aristotle spoke of in the Poetics. To him it was undoubtedly one of the most important requirements in the dramatic form. It is explicit in his definition of tragedy.

A tragedy is an action that is serious and also, as having magnitude complete in itself. . . . 86

86 Chapter VI.
Aristotle insists upon this necessity for the unity of the action throughout the *Poetics* and devotes Chapter VIII in particular to explaining what he means by one action.

In establishing the unity of time as a necessity in the drama, critics noted Aristotle's observation that no time limit was observable in the epic but "Tragedy endeavours to keep as far as possible within a single circuit of the sun, or something near that." The Italian critics of the Renaissance and their French neo-classical followers took this observation as a law and proclaimed its binding force.

The critics devoted much attention to the unities of action and time. In a discussion of the first of these, tragi-comedy was condemned; for in it the author joined a comic sub-plot to the tragic main plot and presented two stories instead of one. And plays on historical events came in for a similar condemnation on the grounds that they violated the unity of action. Thomas Rymer scolded Ben Johnson for selecting Catiline as a subject. "Must not the *Acts of the Apostles*, or a Life in Plutarch, be as well *Acted*, and as properly called a Tragedy, as any History of a Conspiracy?" was his question. And Charles Gildon said that when the unities of time and action were violated

I see no Reason why they may not as well, and with as good Reason stretch the Time to 5000 years, and the Actions to all the Nation's

87 Chapter V.
89 *A Short View of Tragedy*, 160.
and People of the Universe and as there has been a Puppet Show of the Creation of the World, so there may be a Play call'd the History of the World. 90

The unity of place is nowhere mentioned in the Poetics. The impetus which was behind its formulation 91 and behind the demand for the unity of time lies in the insistence on maintaining probability as it was understood in seventeenth century France. As Irving Babbitt points out, the neo-classical critic demanded in the drama strict logic or even literal deception instead of the illusion of a higher reality. 92

The hardheadedness of this position can be seen in D'aubignac's presentation of it. His "ordinary Principle" is that the stage is but a representation of things, and that we are "to imagine that the things themselves are there of which the Images are before us." Having grasped this "ordinary Principle," we must admit the necessity of preserving the unity of place during the entire representation. If the place is changed, the logic of the whole representation is destroyed.

This Truth, well understood, makes us to know that the place cannot change in the rest of the Play, since it cannot change in the representation, for one and the same Image remaining in the same state, cannot represent two different things; now it is highly improbable, that the same space, and the same floor, which receive no change at all, should represent two different places; as for Example France

90 C. Gildon, Shakespear, VII, 357.

91 According to Bray, the unity of place unrolled itself slowly from the unity of time by the effect of the principle of probability. Thus in 1550 Scaliger had set the limit of place to the distance one could travel by the most rapid means of transportation during the time of the representation. Cf. Bray, La Formation, 228.

92 Rousseau and Romanticism, 22.
The logic of the argument is irrefutable. Granting the premise, one must agree with the conclusion. No challenge to the premise was heard in France, and few challenges were heard in England during the Restoration period. As the eighteenth century passed, however, challenges were heard with increasing frequency; and finally during the last half of the century the claim of the unities was disallowed.

Although the theory of d'Aubignac presented no exceptions to its logic, the application of the theory of the unities was never rigidly enforced in England. The theory was propounded none the less in the translated version of Boileau's L'Art poétique. And Rapin said sternly, "For unless there be the Unity of Place, of Time, and of the Action in great Poems, there can be no Verisimilitude." But even Thomas Rymer did not demand this regularity with the same force that he demanded probability in the plot and decorum in the characters. Of the violation of the unity of place in Othello he said with rather bad grace:

Well absurdities of this kind break no Bones. They may make Fools of us; but do not hurt our Morals.

John Dryden had a better reason for suggesting moderation in enforcing

---

93 The Whole Art of the Theatre, II, 99.
95 Works of Monsieur Rapin, II, 146.
96 Thomas Rymer, A Short View of Tragedy, London, 1693, 106.
these rules. Writing late in his life in the "Dedication of the Aeneis" (1697), he said that he was of Corneille's opinion that a too rigid observance of the unity of time might hamper the poet in that "the time allotted by the Ancients was too short to raise and finish a great action; and better a mechanic rule were stretched, or broken, than a great beauty were omitted."97

The account contained in the foregoing pages has outlined the theory upon which were based the particular rules for preserving probability in selecting the plot, for guaranteeing the observation of character decorum, and for preserving the unities of time, place, and action. Using them the judicial critics made their exams of particular literary works. Appeals to nature rather than to the rules were heard during the Restoration and grew louder during the following century, but during the Restoration and first part of the eighteenth century critics were able to defend the rules as Dryden did by quoting Rapin in their defense.

If the rules be well considered, we shall find them to be made only to reduce Nature into method, to trace her step by step, and not suffer the least mark of her to escape us: 'tis only by these, that probability in fiction is maintained, which is the soul of poetry.98

Charles Gildon voiced the common sentiment of judicial critics when he said that appeals from the rules to nature could not be allowed because

97 Ker, Essays of John Dryden, II, 157-158.
98 Ibid., I, 228.
the meaning of the word is so wide that "it leaves it to the Fancy and Capacity of everyone, to decide what is according to Nature and what is not." 99

This distrust of the uninstructed judgment of the average man made the neo-classical critic ready and anxious to rely on the rules in order to be sure that his judgments were wholly sound. d'Aubignac pointed out that a man relies on the rules of other arts when he judges them and that is equally natural for him to rely on rules when he judges the dramatic art. 100 Gildon is more specific in his distrust of the reason unaided by the rules. He affirms that the rules of art show us what nature is and how to distinguish "its Lineaments from the unruly and preposterous Sallies and Flights of an uninstructed Fancy." 101 With the rules as a guide a critic could be sure of himself. So sure was d'Aubignac of this fact that he could boast to his readers:

I dare boldly say, that whoever shall read this Treatise, shall condemn many things which they formerly thought very Rational. 102

The reader of his treatise cannot, as a matter of fact, deny this statement.

Using the examen method, the judicial critic first examined the work on the basis of plot to see in how far its author had followed the rules

100 The Whole Art, II, 80.
102 The Whole Art, II, 80.
in this regard, next he took up the characters and their actions, then
what they said, or the sentiments as they were called, and finally the
diction of the whole poem. Those parts of the poem which followed the
rules were its "beauties"; those which violated the rules were its "faults"
or "blemishes". The result of the examen is most frequently disappointing
to the modern reader. The critics has made many judgments on the par-
ticulars of the various parts of the drama. But the whole critique lacks
a certain unity. In the process of analyzing the parts in a minute fashion,
the critic frequently lost sight of the impression which the whole work
had made upon him. One gets this sense of the fragmentary nature of the
examen from Thomas Rymer's explanation of the process. In his Essay Con-
cerning Critical and Curious Learning (1698) he says that "when he [the
judicial critic] makes his Judgment of a Book; he takes it in pieces and
considers the whole Structure and Oeconomy of it."103 Unfortunately, few
critics put the pieces back together and finally judged the whole work.

In theory neo-classical critics agreed that there were those
poets who could deviate from the rules,

And snatch a grace beyond the reach of art104

and thus reach the reader's heart, the aim of the poet. But in practice
critics had only their own judgments to follow in deciding whether or not
the poetic license had been justified. The poet had to be very certain

103 As quoted in A. C. Baugh, ed., A Literary History of England,
New York, 1943, 720.

that the critic would see his reason for deviating from the rule because

The Critic else proceeds without remorse,
Seizes your fame, and puts his laws in force. 105

This proceeding without remorse as the critic put his laws in force is certainly one of the most unattractive features of judicial criticism.

The safer method of proceeding was to follow the rules and not to rely on one's own judgment. Gildon's belief in the efficacy of the rules in forming one's judgment led him to promise his readers to lay down such Rules of Art, that the Reader of Shakespeare may be able to distinguish his Errors from his Perfections now too much and too unjustly confounded by the foolish Bigotry of his Blind and Partial Adorers. 106

Even John Hughes, the eighteenth century editor of the Faerie Queene, who was no great protagonist of the rules because he knew that they were not a substitute for genius, did admit,

Notwithstanding this, they are useful to help our observation in distinguishing the Beauties and Blemishes in such works as have already been produced. 107

And still later in the century Hugh Blair admitted in his lecture on literary criticism that some works which contain "gross transgressions of the laws of Criticism" acquire a general and even a lasting admiration. But these works have gained their reputations in spite of such transgressions because

105 Ibid., I, 11. 167-168.
106 C. Gildon, Shakespear, VII, ii-iii.
They possess other beauties which are conformable to just rules; and the force of these beauties has been so great as to overpower all censure and give to the public a degree of satisfaction superior to the disgust arising from their blemishes. 108

Neither Hughes nor Blair was in sympathy with rigid judicial criticism, but both take a position which implies that a rationale underlying all beauties exists which is capable of formulation.

In concluding this survey of neo-classical critical theory, the author will point out the two attitudes towards criticism in general and the rules in particular which, according to Professor Sherburn, 109 represent the main points of view. John Dryden attempted to reconcile the successes of the unrestrained Elizabethan literature with the classical reasonableness of Aristotle and Horace. 110 In the Essay of Dramatic Poesy, Neander (who represents Dryden) argues that an observance of dramatic rules in a reasonable way in reconcilable with the greater freedom of the Elizabethan dramatists whose great genius he recognized. 111 In his "Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy" he presents the question of how far Shakespeare and Fletcher should be imitated, and to answer this question presents a short summary of Aristotle's principles, making


111 Ker, Essays of John Dryden, I, 78-79.
frequent mention of the French neo-classical critics in order to establish the grounds of criticism. He finds the English dramatists faulty in the "mechanic beauties" of the unities but praises them for excelling the French dramatists in character delineation.

In particular judgments Dryden shows a concern for the result rather than the theory. The authority of Aristotle meant little to him. In his copy of Thomas Rymer's Tragedies of the Last Age (1678), he noted an objection to Rymer's appeal to the Poetics.

'Tis not enough that Aristotle has said so, for Aristotle drew his models of tragedy from Sophocles and Euripides, and, if he had seen ours, might have changed his mind.

And in the Dedication to Love Triumphant (1694) he repeated the same idea.

Had it been possible for Aristotle to have seen the Cinna, I am confident that he would have altered his opinion.

His own practice was at times at variance with the rules. In All for Love (1678) he presented a scene in which Octavia and Cleopatra meet and ex-

---

112 Dryden speaks of his guides in criticism as "Aristotle with his interpreters, and Horace, and Longinus... the authors to whom I owe my lights..." Ibid., I, 207. Who the interpreters are appears in references to "... Bossu, the best of modern critics..." Ibid., I, 211, and "Rapin, a judicious critic..." Ibid., I, 210. Of André Dacier he said, "Bossu has not given more exact rules for the Epick nor Dacier for Tragedy, in his late excellent translation of Aristotle, and his notes upon him, than our Fresnou has made for painting." Ibid., II, 136.

113 Ibid., I, 218.


change words. In his Preface to the printed play Dryden admits that
strict observance of decorum would object to the meeting of the two rivals
and much more to the spirited exchange of words which took place in his
play. Yet he says of the scene:

'tis not unlikely that two exasperated rivals should use such satire
as I have put into their mouths; for, after all, though one were a
Roman, and the other a queen, they were both women. 116

He concluded that the poet has only to observe the bounds of modesty; any
further consideration is "nicety and affectation."

The critical position of Dryden is difficult to summarize be-
cause of the variety of his opinions. But, as Professor George Sherburn
points out, he is usually constant in his appreciation of naturalness,
"refined" wit, structural neatness and those rules which conduce to it,
variety and opposition to whatever hampers it, of "bold" strokes and
"masculine" fancy. 117 Professors Saintsbury 118 and A. W. Ward 119 concur
in their opinion of Dryden's consistent attempt to judge a literary work
on the grounds of the impression it made upon him rather than on its
conformity to a rigidly enforced critical system. The restraint of Dry-
den in applying the rules to literature and his unwillingness to judge
the place a literary work should occupy in the scale of perfection by the

117 A. C. Baugh, A Literary History, 717.
118 A History of Criticism, II, 373, 391.
119 Cambridge History of English Literature, VIII, 24.
number of rules which it observed or violated were not shared by Thomas Rymer, who has been called by Professor Sherburn "the standard bearer of unimaginative neo-classical rationalism." That his influence was not limited to his own life time is testified to by D. Nicol Smith, who is able to trace his influence on to the time of Samuel Johnson.

Rymer shared with d'Aubignac and Gildon that distrust for his own judgment unaided by the rules which has been mentioned previously. His respect for Aristotle and his confidence in the accuracy and completeness of the Poetics also stand in marked contrast to Dryden's more casual acceptance of the rules because they were "made only to reduce Nature into method. . . ." Rymer had a reverence for the rules.

Aristotle was the first that drew these Rules up into Compass, and made Criticism an Art; and the Philosopher took such care to form his Precepts upon the Practice of the best Writers, and to reduce them withal to the severest Test of Nature and Reason, that he scarcely left anything for succeeding Ages to do. . . .

There is no doubt in Rymer's mind that he is being reasonable when he applies the rules to literary works. But as George B. Dutton has pointed out, Rymer holds that the demands of reason are formulated in the rules and he does not exercise his reason independently of them in examining the literary work. He applies the rules and observes the outcome.

120 A. C. Baugh, A Literary History, 719.
121 D. N. Smith, Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare, xiv.
122 As quoted in A. C. Baugh, A Literary History, 720.
123 "French Aristotelian Formalists and Thomas Rymer," PMLA, XXIV, 168.
The idea of probability understood in a numerical way is the main principle in his criticism. The relentlessness of his logic in following the probabilities of plot and character leaves the modern reader amazed. In his Shakespearean criticism, which will be examined in the following chapter, this trait is the one which makes the most lasting impression on the reader who considers his critical method and findings. His sharp insistence on the distinction between what he terms history on one hand and poetry and philosophy on the other led him to object to any singularity which was attributed to the particular story which the poet had selected. This is the grounds of his objection to Fletcher's Rollo, Duke of Normandy:

'Tis possible that a Prince may abandon himself to be rul'd by some busie creature of no consideration. The Annals of Normandy may mention such Dukes. History may have known the like. But Aristotle cries shame. Poetry will allow nothing so unbecoming, nor dares any Poet imagine that God Almighty would trust his Anointed with such a Guardian-Devil.\textsuperscript{124}

His ideas of character decorum are extremely rigid in contrast to Dryden's freer views. In his examen of The Maid's Tragedy he completely disapproves of Fletcher's handling of the characters of Evadne and the King. Evadne is an impossible creature because tragedy cannot represent a woman without modesty as natural and essential to her;\textsuperscript{125} and the King is faulty in that the plot demands that he be accessory to a falsehood. Rymer questions "whether in Poetry a King can be an acces-

\textsuperscript{124} \textit{Tragedies of the Last Age}, 47.

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid., 114.
It is Dutton's conclusion that Rymer's criticism is a sweeping application of the rules laid down by the French formalistic critics. 127

It is beyond the purpose of this thesis to investigate in detail how completely neo-classical criticism made itself predominant during the Restoration and the eighteenth century. Certainly there were men of letters who did not pay a great deal of attention to the rules during this period. 128 In the opinion of Paul Spenser Wood, the characteristic individualism of the English people, the prestige of Elizabethan literature, and the protests against the strict rules of the Aristotelian formalists were factors which prevented the complete triumph of neo-classicism in England. 129 As he points out, however, there was no organized opposition to neo-classicism, and since the bold independence of Elizabethan individualism had broken down, men of letters had to choose between some sort of classical restraint and literary anarchy. 130 It is also worth noting that even those persons who were unsympathetic with the rules were forced to use neo-classical terminology for lack of

---

126 Ibid., 115.
127 "French Aristotelian Formalists and Thomas Rymer," PMLA, XXIX, 163.
130 Ibid., 197.
more satisfying literary terms. It is against such a background that the judicial criticism of Shakespeare must be viewed.
CHAPTER II

THE NEO-CLASSICAL VIEW OF SHAKESPEARE'S CHARACTERS

The tenets of neo-classicism which were examined in the first chapter of this thesis operated from the very beginnings of the Restoration criticism of Shakespeare. John Dryden, the "father of Shakespearean criticism,"¹ began the evaluations of Shakespeare suspiciously, it is true, in his estimate of Shakespeare in the Essay of Dramatic Poesy (1665) when he said of Shakespeare:

He was the man who of all modern, and perhaps ancient poets had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the images of Nature were still present to him, and he draw them not laboriously, but luckily; when he describes any thing you more than see it, you feel it too. . . . No man can say he ever had a fit subject for his wit, and did not raise himself as high above the rest of the poets,

Quantum lenta solent inter viburna cupressi.

Shakespeare was the Homer, or father of our dramatic poets; Johnson was the Virgil, the pattern of elaborate writing; I admire him, but I love Shakespeare.²

This estimate which came from the heart, Samuel Johnson later called "an epitome of excellence" which subsequent critics and editors had merely paraphrased and diffused.³ Fourteen years later, however, when Dryden set

---


² Ker, Essays of John Dryden, I, 82.

³ Smith, Eighteenth Century Essays, xiv.
about making a systematic criticism of Shakespeare in order to discover in how far Shakespeare and Fletcher should be imitated, Aristotle and his commentators were his guides in criticism. 4

Although the modern reader may wish that Dryden had spent less time on an exposition of the doctrine of Aristotle, the fact remains that we owe the first character sketch of a Shakespearean character to Dryden's efforts to explain Aristotle's remarks on the qualities which a well constructed dramatic character should possess. In "The Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy" the reader sees the interesting spectacle of the dramatist-critic using his own works as well as the works of others to demonstrate the accepted neo-classical principles, censuring and approving his own works as well as those of others.

Dryden based his theory of characterization on the idea of the type character. As a practicing dramatist the view which Dryden holds is far from the later Romantic view which sees the dramatic characters of Shakespeare, at least, as individuals with fully rounded personalities

4 It is interesting to note that in An Essay of Dramatic Poesy, Dryden had not emphasized the importance of regularity of the plot. He had taken the position that the men of his generation rightly followed the earlier English dramatists in an endeavor to follow in their plots". . . the variety and greatness of characters which are derived to us from Shakespeare and Fletcher. . . ." Cf. Ker, Essays of John Dryden, I, 78. And even in the exposition of the rules in the Grounds of Criticism Dryden adopted a practical point of view on the subject of the importance of the plot. He grants that the plot is the most necessary part of the drama upon which the firmness of the whole fabric depends: "yet it strikes not the eye so much as the beauties or imperfections of the manners, the thoughts, and the expression." Cf. Ker, I, 213. The two statements emphasize the practical basis of Dryden's judgments and his high opinion of the importance of character delineation.
only parts of which are seen in the actual drama. Having created characters, Dryden knew that the dramatist had to endow his characters with the traits necessary to make the plot operate. Dryden was well aware of the fact that endowing each character with a single sharply defined trait or two which are called for by the plot is not enough if the dramatist wants to create life-like characters.

In Dryden's theory, each character in a play is distinguished from the others, not by a single virtue, vice, or passion. A well drawn character possesses a composition of qualities which are not contrary to one another in the same person; thus the same man may be liberal and valiant, but not liberal and covetous; so in a comical character, or humor (which is an inclination to this or that particular folly), Falstaff is a liar and a coward, a glutton, and a buffoon, because all these qualities agree in one man; yet it is still to be observed that one virtue, vice, and passion ought to be shown in every man as predominant over all the rest; as covetousness in Crassus, love of country in Brutus; and the same in the characters which are feigned.5

The theory here stated is in full agreement with René Rapin's observation noted in chapter one of this thesis. The most obvious shortcoming of this standard of character construction is the fact that it establishes a minimum standard which condemns the unnatural joining of contrary virtues, vices, or passions in the same character. The critic is unable to use it to distinguish the masterful portrayal of a character from the barely successful portrayal by the unskillful artist.

5 Ibid., 215-216.
Dryden's comments on the characters of Shakespeare occur in his remarks on the qualities of goodness and suitability which dramatic characters should possess. Shakespeare, according to Dryden, is eminently successful in presenting clearly the manners of his characters. "'Tis one of the excellencies of Shakespeare that the manners of his persons are generally apparent, and you see their bent and inclinations."6 Fletcher does not succeed as well as Shakespeare in creating characters whose inclinations are strongly marked by their actions and discourse. But Ben Johnson of all poets is most highly to be praised because "... the manners even of the most inconsiderable persons in his plays are everywhere apparent."7 It is important to note that Dryden is pointing out, not that Ben Jonson's characters are more life-like, but simply that their inclinations are more evident.

Shakespeare was also successful in attributing suitable character traits to his dramatic personages, and so Dryden claims that Shakespeare's characters conform to Aristotle's second requirement. In Dryden's opinion, the French dramatists commonly failed to give suitable manners to their characters. Thus, "Racine's Bajazet is bred at Constantinople, but his civilities are conveyed to him by some secret passage, from Versailles into the Seraglio."8 Shakespeare is not guilty of this fault. Having

6 Ibid., 217.
7 Ibid.
8 Ibid., 218.
given to Henry the Fourth the character of a king and father, Shakespeare... gives him the perfect manner of each relation, when either he transacts with his son or with his subjects.9

Fletcher was not as successful as Shakespeare when he came to ascribe suitable traits to his characters in the Faithful Shepherdess (c. 1609), the Maid's Tragedy (1611), and Valentinian (1610-14).10 After completing his remarks on Fletcher, Dryden turns his attention again to Shakespeare of whom he says that no one except Ben Jonson... ever drew so many characters or generally distinguished them better from one another...11 To prove this assertion, Dryden presents an example to show the copiousness of Shakespeare's invention and to point out how well the particular character observed the qualities of goodness and suitability.

It is for this purpose that Dryden presents his analysis of the character of Caliban. He claims that in Caliban, Shakespeare has created a character which is outside of human nature. In fact, he has made Caliban "a species of himself, begotten by an incubus in a witch..." and here Dryden pauses to remark that such a birth is not "wholly beyond the bounds of credibility, at least the vulgar still believe it." Having thus attended to the sticklers of probability, he continues,

Whether or not his generation can be defended, I leave to philosophy; but of this I am certain, that the poet has most judiciously fur-

---

9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
nished him with a person, a language, and a character, which will suit him, both by father's and mother's side; he has all the discontent and malice of a witch, and of a devil, besides a convenient proportion of the deadly sins; gluttony, sloth, and lust, are manifest; the dejectedness of a slave is likewise given him, and the ignorance of one bred up in a desert island. His person is monstrous, and he is the product of unnatural lust; and his language is as hobbegoblin as his person; in all things he is distinguished from other mortals. 12

In this analysis Dryden subjects the character of Shakespeare to the discipline of the rules and proves that the portrayal meets the requirements of goodness and suitability. The evaluation is strictly objective. Caliban has passed the test; he has no incapacitating deficiencies. Unfortunately the test does not reveal what, if any, particular traits which appear in his character make Caliban an individual who arouses pathos and amusement in the audience. Perhaps the reader should be satisfied with Dryden's achievement. The first analysis of a Shakespearean character proved that Shakespeare was not guilty of any gross psychological blunder. The later critics could then go on to prove how well Shakespeare understood human nature.

Dryden points out another excellence of Shakespeare's portrayal of characters. In addition to keeping his characters distinct, Shakespeare understood the nature of the passions which he depicted in the lives of his characters. Yet Shakespeare is not completely faultless in depicting the emotions of his characters, "but they [the failings] are not so much in the passions themselves as in his manner of expression..." 13

12 Ibid., 219-220.
13 Ibid., 221.
Concluding his inquiry into "how far we ought to imitate our own poets, Shakespeare and Fletcher, in their tragedies," Dryden concludes that "... Shakespeare writ better betwixt man and man; Fletcher betwixt man and woman. ..." Yet he admits that Shakespeare taught Fletcher how to write about love, and in creating Juliet and Desdemona, Shakespeare had created "originals." In fine, "Shakespeare had an universal mind, which comprehended all characters and passions."  

The Shakespearean criticism of Thomas Rymer is confined to *A Short View of Tragedy*, which appeared in 1693. This small book has a manifold importance in the history of Shakespearean criticism. It contains the first detailed criticism of a Shakespearean play; before this examen appeared, references to Shakespeare's plays and his art had been couched in general terms. Rymer subjected *Othello* to an almost by line examination. The book has several other claims on the critic's attention. The author employs the examen method on *Othello* and includes in his remarks the first discussion of Shakespeare's dramatic method by comparing the play with its source. *Julius Caesar* and *Catiline* are also given a hasty and disapproving examination in the work, but the main section of the book is given over to the examenation of *Othello*, a critical effort which led Macaulay to convict him of being "the worst critic who ever lived," and

14 Ibid., I, 207.

15 Ibid., 228.

which prompted the historian of criticism, George Saintsbury, to sustain the judgment of Macaulay. 17

The verdict of Macaulay and Saintsbury, however, differs from that of Rymer's contemporaries. And it is the latter verdict which is of importance in the history of Shakespearean criticism, for the theory on which Rymer based his judgments on Shakespeare long held an unchallenged place in the science of neo-classical criticism. From 1693 until 1765, a cogent defense of Shakespeare's characters from the strictures of Rymer was lacking. In the latter year in the Preface to his edition of Shakespeare, Samuel Johnson effectively attacked the theory of character decorum which Rymer had championed; but it was not until the middle of the nineteenth century that Rymer's jibe that Shakespeare himself did not know whether Act Three of Othello "contains the compass of one day, seven days, or seven years" 18 was answered. This critic was respected for his great learning in literature and history, 19 and he shared with Dryden the literary authority in England for at least two decades during which time his influence alternately moved Dryden to submission to and reaction from neoclassicism. 20

17 George Saintsbury, A History of Criticism, II, 397.
20 Joel Spingarn, Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century, I, lxiv.
Although Rymer did not produce his examen of Othello and his remarks on Julius Caesar and Catiline until 1693, the introductory letter attached to the Tragedies of the Last Age (1678) had promised to examine them along with Rollo, A King and No King, and the Maid's Tragedy. Only half the design was accomplished in the first book. But Shakespeare and Johnson were condemned by implication when Rymer said that the English poets had taken a byroad that runs directly cross to that of Nature, Manners, and Philosophy, which gain'd the Ancients so great veneration.

And a later reference to the folly of judging Rollo by comparing it to Othello, a folly according to Rymer similar to comparing one crooked line to another, convinced Dryden that a general defense of Shakespeare had best be made before Rymer presented his bill of particulars. 22

In A Short View of Tragedy, Rymer returned to the unfinished task. The result is in every way similar to The Tragedies of the Last Age. The same rigid following of the rules, the same insistence on a

21 The Tragedies of the Last Age, 3.

22 This defense of Shakespeare and Fletcher took the form of "The Grounds of Criticism in Tragedy." It is interesting to note that Dryden cleverly defends Shakespeare from the expected attack by assuming that Shakespeare was a great poet who nonetheless had minor failings. "How defective Shakespeare and Fletcher have been in all their plots Mr. Rymer has discovered in his criticisms; neither can we, who follow them, be excused from the same or greater errors; which are the more unpardonable in us because we want their beauties to countervail our faults." Cf. Ker, The Essays of John Dryden, I, 211. "In the mechanical beauties of the plot, which are the observation of the three Unities, Time, Place, and action, they are both deficient; but Shakespeare most." Ibid., 212. By minimizing the importance of the unities, Dryden did what he could to defend Shakespeare from another attack. Dryden's high opinion of Shake-
rigid interpretation of probability, and the same hail-fellow-well-met
erugacity greet the reader. Rymer selected Othello for his examen because
it was the English tragedy which "is said to bear the Bell away." And
Rymer considers that he is generous to Shakespeare in selecting Othello
because in it Shakespeare had put "some phantom of a Fable." The fable
has always been accounted the soul of tragedy.

And it is the Fable which is properly the Poet's part. Because the
other parts of Tragedy, to wit, the Characters are taken from the
Moral Philosopher; The Thoughts or sense, from them that teach Rhet-
torick: and the last part, which is the expression, we learn from
the Grammarians.

The rigid division of the various arts which are combined in the whole
work strikes an ominous note. The reader wonders if any work of art can
possibly survive such a cold blooded dissection.

First Rymer presents a synopsis of the plot of the play and com-
pares it with Cinthio's novel. In his opinion, Shakespeare's altera-
tions of the original story are made "always, unfortunately, for the worse." Shakespeare gives the Moor a name and calls him "the Moor of Venice, a
note of pre-eminence, which neither History nor Heraldry can allow." Proceeding to the plot, Rymer makes a general examination of it

23 A Short View, 86.
24 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid., 87.
27 Ibid.
before he begins his detailed criticism. The plot in general violates
probability. It is improbable that the Venetians should select a Moor for
their general;28 it is improbable that Desdemona would fall in love with
a Moor and that "all the town should reckon it a very suitable match. .
. ."29 The scene in the Venetian senate is improbable. The Venetians know
that the Turks are making plans to capture Cyprus; yet they neglect state
affairs to listen to Brabantio. "... the public may sink or swim. They
will sit up all night to hear a Doctors' Commons, Matrimonial Cause. .
. ."30 Further, Rymer points out that there is no one scene in the play
which shows that a war is going on. His greatest sarcasm is saved for the
handkerchief which seals Desdemona's fate when Othello sees it in Cassio's
hands. It is unlikely that such a trifle could be the instrument of the
great disaster which follows. He asks,

Why was not this call'd the Tragedy of the Handkerchief? What can
be more absurd than (as Quintillian expresses it) in parvis litibus
has Tragoedias movere?31

The answer to this question was to be supplied by one of the first authors
of a character sketch of Othello in the following century. The other al-
leged improbabilities which are mentioned above are such as never bothered
anyone less sensitive to the truth than Thomas Rymer.

28 Ibid., 90.
29 Ibid., 92.
30 Ibid., 100.
31 Ibid., 139.
If these faults were the only ones which Rymer could find with the plot of the play, it is hard to imagine that even he would have condemned the play as vigorously as he did. The greatest improbability, however, lies in the constitution of the incidents of the plot.

Nothing is more odious in Nature than an improbable lyce; And, certainly, never was any Play fraught, like this of Othello, with improbabilities.\(^{32}\)

Rymer seized upon the improbability of the action's taking place in the duration of time which elapses from the beginning of the second act of Othello to the end of the third act, i.e., about twenty-four hours,\(^{33}\) for his main point of attack.

\(^{32}\) Ibid., 92.

\(^{33}\) The action of Acts Two and Three passes with almost every moment accounted for. In Act Two the whole party arrives in Cyprus from Venice in three groups. Cassio arrives on the first ship; Desdemona, Emilia, Iago, and Roderigo arrive on the second ship; and finally Othello arrives on another ship. Act Two ends on the night of their arrival after Cassio has been removed from his office. Scene One of Act Three begins the next morning with Cassio's bringing musicians to serenade the newly wedded couple as was the custom. Emilia promises to bring Cassio to Desdemona. In Scene Two, which is only a few lines long, Othello, Iago, and the gentlemen of Cyprus go to inspect the fortifications. It is in Scene Three which is an extremely long scene that Iago first arouses Othello's suspicion of his wife and Cassio, after Desdemona has made her first plea for Cassio and has left the stage. She returns to Othello to summon him to dinner, drops her handkerchief which Emilia gives to Iago. Othello returns to the stage, and Iago continues to feed his suspicion by saying that Cassio has Desdemona's handkerchief. As the scene ends Othello and Iago have agreed upon the deaths of Cassio and Desdemona. In Scene Four Desdemona has just discovered the loss of her handkerchief and asks Emilia about it. Othello asks Desdemona for the handkerchief and leaves in a furious temper when it is apparent that she does not have it. Later in the same scene Cassio gives the handkerchief to Bianca and promises to visit her that evening. Act Three thus ends some time after the noon day meal on the day after the whole group had arrived on the island.
The third scene of Act Three with its two meetings during which Iago raises Othello's suspicions "is the top scene, the Scene that raises Othello above all other Tragedies in our Theatres."\textsuperscript{34} The popularity of this scene, however, comes merely from

The Mops and the Mows, the Grimace, the Grins and Gesticulation. Such scenes as this have made all the World run after Harlequin and Scaramuccio.\textsuperscript{35}

Othello's actions and speech during the second meeting between himself and Iago, when Iago tells him of Cassio's dream prompt Rymer to remark

By the Rapture of Othello, one might think that he raves, is not of sound memory. \ldots But we find that Iago, who should have a better memory, forging his lies after the very same Model. The very night of their Marriage at Venice, the Moor and also Cassio, were sent away to Cyprus. In the Second Act, Othello and his Bride go the first time to Bed; the Third Act opens the next morning. \ldots We saw the opportunity which was given to Cassio to speak his busom to her, once, indeed might go a great way with a Venetian. But once, will not do the Poet's Business; the Audience must suppose a great many bouts to make the plot operate. They must deny their senses to reconcile it to common sense; or make it any way consistent, and hang together.\textsuperscript{36}

Summing up the action of Act Three, Rymer remarks that the action begins in the morning, at noon Desdemona drops her handkerchief, after dinner she misses it, and then follows "this outrage and horrible clutter about it." But the action becomes still more confusing because, "If we believe a small Damosel in the last Scene of this Act, this day is

\begin{itemize}
  \item[34] \textit{A Short View}, 118.
  \item[35] \textit{Ibid.}, 119.
  \item[36] \textit{Ibid.}, 123.
\end{itemize}
effectually seven days." 37 This comment of Rymer is drawn from Bianca's speaking of not having seen Cassio for a week. But, according to Rymer, the reader should not be disturbed because the poet himself is confused and does not know whether the act "contains the compass of one day, seven days, or seven years." 38 Rymer concludes that it does not matter what amount of time the act compasses because "the repugnance and absurdity would be the same." 39

There can be no doubt that Rymer's observations on the duration of Acts Two and Three are correct. No reputable scholar denies his analysis of the time element; scholarship since his day indeed has compressed the time of the last two acts of the play. 40 Rymer believed that at the beginning of Act Four Othello and Desdemona have been "a week or two

37 Ibid., 126.
38 Ibid., 127.
39 Ibid.
40 The uninterrupted action of the play is discussed by H. H. Furness in his New Variorum edition of the play. "Bianca asks Cassio what he meant by that same handkerchief which he gave her even now; so that we are still in Sunday in the afternoon, after the generous islanders invited by Othello had had their dinner. Bianca repeats her invitation to Cassio to come to supper tonight. To supper likewise Othello invites Lodovico, who arrives from Venice before this Scene closes. Before the next Scene closes the trumpets summon to this very supper. After Bianca's supper Cassio is wounded, and after the supper to the Venetian Ambassadors, Desdemona is smothered,—on Sunday night, within thirty-six hours after her arrival in Cyprus." Cf. New Variorum Shakespeare, Philadelphia, 1886, VI, 360. See also George Lyman Kittredge, ed., The Tragedy of Othello, New York, 1941, viii, and 59-60 of this thesis.
Married.\textsuperscript{41} Actually as the act begins, Bianca returns the handkerchief which Cassio had given her "even now,"\textsuperscript{42} and Othello and Iago plan Cassio's murder as he leaves Bianca's house after the visit mentioned in Act Three. Samuel Johnson's comment on the duration of the action is typical of comments on this point:

Since their arrival at Cyprus, to which they were hurried on their wedding-night, the fable seems to have been in one continual progress, nor can I see any vacuity into which a year or two, or even a month or two could be put. . . Iago indeed advises Othello to hold him off a while, but there is no reason to think that he has been held off long.\textsuperscript{43}

H. H. Furness points out that Shakespeare was able to convey two opposite notions of the passage of time in a play. By one series of allusions we receive the impression that the action is rushing by without pause, and by another series of allusions we are beguiled into believing that the action extends over days and months. The discovery of Shakespeare conscious use of "two clocks" in some of his dramas was made only during the nineteenth century.\textsuperscript{44} Until that time Rymer's censure of the basic improbability of the plot remained in force. Obviously it was improbable that a man would become jealous and strangle his wife after less than two days of married life. But, as Harley Granville-Barker has pointed out, a sacrifice of probability is necessary in order to make the plot operate.

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 132.
\textsuperscript{42} Act IV, Scene 1, l. 154.
\textsuperscript{44} Furness, New Variorum, VI, 358, 360.
Only by thus precipitating the action can it be made both effective in the terms of his stagecraft and convincing. If Othello were left time for reflection or the questioning of anyone but Iago, would not the whole flimsy fraud that is practiced upon him collapse?45

Rymer's inability to realize or his refusal to admit that the play contained a story of great value which to appreciate the reader has to surrender some part of the probability was a defect of the system which valued common sense more than the illusion of reality. Undoubtedly Thomas Rymer would have found George Lyman Kittredge's comment that the mathematical inconsistency of the plot need not concern the reader46 as flying in the face of all canons of art.

Having thus demolished the plot, Rymer moves on in his examen to the characters. In this part of the drama Shakespeare had not succeeded any better than he did with the plot. In Rymer's opinion,

The characters or Manners, which are the second part in a Tragedy, are not less unnatural and improper, than the Fable was improbable and absurd.47

And in the pages that follow Rymer applies the rules of character decorum with a severity comparable to Chapelaine's earlier Sentiments de l'Academie Francaise sur le Cid.

Othello is presented as a Venetian general, but we see nothing done by him nor related concerning him that agrees with the state of a general or even a man, unless it be killing himself to avoid a death which

46 The Tragedy of Othello, viii.
47 A Short View of Tragedy, 92.
the law is going to impose on him. Furthermore, "His Love and his Jalousie are no part of a Souldier's Character, unless for Comedy." The oath.

Now, by heaven,

My blood begins my safer guides to rule...

is unsuitable to a soldier's character. According to Rymer, "He is to rap out an Oath, not Wire-draw and Spin it out: by the style one might judge that Shakespeare's Souldier's were never bred in a Camp, but rather had belonged to some Affidavit-Office." The idea of the type character with "appropriate" traits is uppermost in his mind. Othello does not act as a Moor should act. According to Rymer, Othello violates the typical character of a Moor when he says as he approaches Desdemona,

Put out the light, and then put out the light:
If I quench thee, thou flaming minister,
I can again thy former light restore...

Rymer asks, "Who would call him Barbarian, Monster, Savage? Is this a Blackamoor?" The answer to the question is obvious. Rymer, and he alone, calls the Moor these names. It is his theory of character decorum

48 Ibid.
49 Ibid., 93.
50 II, ii, 206 ff.
51 A Short View, 113.
52 See this thesis, 24.
53 V, ii, 7-9.
54 A Short View, 138.
which lays it down as an axiomatic fact that a Moor will not have feelings of tenderness and sorrow for a wife whom he suspects of infidelity. In summary, Othello fails as a character on two counts. He does not act like a general, nor do his deep feelings agree with any of the qualities which the codifiers of neo-classical theory on character decorum had seen fit to assign to the Moors.

Desdemona also fails to meet Rymer’s standards. Shakespeare had made the mistake of selecting a soldier to be the knave; "... and a Venetian Lady is to be the Fool." Desdemona acts foolishly in that she continues to press Cassio’s suit when she should have seen that Othello was growing jealous. She is too quiet and without spirit. When Othello accuses her of infidelity her replies are too meek. "With us a Tinker’s Trull, wou’d repartee with more spirit, and not appear so void of spleen." Of her asking Iago in the same scene how she could win back Othello, Rymer comments, ”No woman bred out of a Pig-Style cou’d talk so meanly.” Innocence and lack of suspicion apparently were not traits which could properly be attributed to Venetian ladies. In his critique of Julius Caesar, Thomas Rymer returned to Desdemona’s artless ways to condemn Portia for

55 Ibid., 94.
56 Ibid., 127.
57 Act IV, Scene 2.
58 A Short View, 135.
59 Ibid.
being "... the own Cousin German, of one piece, the very same inpertinent silly flesh and blood with Desdemona." 60

Cassio receives only passing attention from Rymer who thinks that he is not as military as a soldier should be. Cassio is light hearted; soldiers according to type are not light hearted. Hence, of Cassio's speech at the landing of Desdemona:

O behold,
The riches of the ship is come on shore.
Ye men of Cyprus, let her have your knees. 61

Rymer asks, "In the name of phrenzy, what means this soldier? or would he talk thus, if he meant anything at all?" 62 Again Rymer criticizes the character because it does not follow its occupational characteristics. A soldier who is on duty in a garrison or on a battlefield has grave responsibilities, and the critic has a right to demand that the character act in accordance with the graveness of the situation. But Rymer allows the characters to have no private lives. His soldier gets no rest period; he must be always on the qui vive for attack or defense, even though he has just landed after a long ocean voyage and after having endured a storm which disrupted his enemy's fleet.

But Cassio is only a relatively minor character. Rymer saves his full scorn for the character of Iago. In creating Iago, Shakespeare

60 Ibid., 156.
61 II, i, 8b-95.
62 A Short View, 110.
was guilty of errors for which there was no excuse. Othello was poorly
drawn, but the unusualness of his being a Moor offers some slight excuse
for the poet's failure. Iago is, however, more intolerable a character
than Othello, because he should be like the other soldiers of our acquaint-
ance. Never however in tragedy or in comedy has there ever been a soldier
with his character or anything like it. 63 Horace describes a soldier as
Impiger, iracundus, inexorabilis, acer. 64

But Iago is better described in Emilia's words as

some eternal villain,
Some busy and insinuating rogue,
Some cogging, cozening slave to get some office. 65

Shakespeare knew that his portrait of Iago was inconsistent with the gen-
erally accepted traits of soldiers, but, in order to entertain his audience
with something new and surprising, he attempts to pass against common sense
and nature

a close, dissembling, false, insinuating rascal instead of an open-
hearted, frank, plain-dealing soldier, a character constantly worn
by them for some thousands of years in the World. 66

His abetting Desdemona's murder "shows nothing of a Soldier, nothing of a
Man, nothing of Nature in it." 67

63 Ibid., 93. Iago's actions are not probable according to
Rymer's arithmetic view of probability. "Our Ensigns and Subalterns, when
disgusted by the Captain, throw up their Commissions, bluster and are bare-
face'd."--Ibid., 94.

64 Active, wrathful, severe, and sharp.
65 IV, ii, 132-133.
66 A Short View, 94.
67 Ibid., 131.
A character such as Iago is unnatural according to Rymer and is hence not a fit subject for poetry. Iago's murder of Roderigo is apparently the final point which makes him an unnatural character. In Rymer's view Roderigo was Iago's benefactor, and Iago should have been grateful to him. "Philosophy tells us it is a principle in the Nature of Man to be grateful." It is not a sufficient justification to point out that in the past men have been ungrateful; poetry must follow the probable.

History may tell us that John an Oaks, John a Styles, or Iago were ungrateful. Poetry is to follow Nature; Philosophy must be his guide: history and fact in particular cases of John an Oaks are no warrant or direction for a Poet. Therefore Aristotle is always telling us that Poetry is \( \sigma π ο u d ά λ ο τ ρ ο ν \ Α ι λ ι \ \phi ι λ ο s ο φ ά τ έ ρ o ν \) is more general and abstracted, is led more by the Philosophy, the reason and nature of things than History, which records things higlety piglety, right or wrong, as they happen. History might without any preamble or difficulty say that Iago was ungrateful. Philosophy then calls him unnatural. Rymer concludes that the poet does not deal with what is unnatural, and hence Shakespeare should have saved himself the trouble of describing such a character as Iago.

Having finished his study of the characters of the play, Rymer concludes his study of the play by examining the catastrophe to see what instruction can be gained from it. Rymer feels that there is no need to examine the thoughts expressed in the play or the expression. The plot is fraught with improbabilities; the characters are unnatural and improper.

\[68 \text{ Ibid., I} \frac{1}{4}.\]
\[69 \text{ Ibid., I} \frac{1}{4}-I \frac{1}{4}.\]
\[70 \text{ Ibid., I} \frac{1}{4}-I \frac{1}{4}.\]
The thought need not be examined because "... from such Characters, we need not expect many that are either true or fine or noble."\(^7\) And since there is neither sense nor meaning in the play, "... the fourth part of Tragedy which is the expression can hardly deserve to be treated on distinctly."\(^7\) Rymer points out that the failure of the play to observe poetic justice means that the audience can carry nothing home for their use and edification.\(^7\) Rymer ends the examen by concluding with this summary.

There is in this Play some burlesk, some humour and ramble of Comical Wit, some shew and some Mimickry to divert the spectators; but the tragical part is plainly none other than a Bloody Farce, without salt or savour."\(^4\)

The reactions to Rymer's criticisms of Shakespeare's characters are of great interest to the student of criticism, for they show critics trying to disagree with Rymer's conclusions although they agreed with him in his theory of type characters which were supposed to follow the code of character decorum. In general all the critics objected to his ill-natured attack on Shakespeare and to his refusal to find any "Beauties" in the play; they did not, however, contradict any of his judgments on the play. Dryden's reaction\(^7\) is typical of the refusal of the critics to

\(^7\) Ibid., 95.
\(^7\) Ibid.
\(^7\) Ibid., 146.
\(^7\) Ibid., 146.
\(^7\) Unfortunately Thomas Rymer was a critic who tried to teach
enter into a controversy with Rymer.

Almost all the faults which he has discovered are truly there; yet who will read Mr. Rymer and not read Shakespeare? For my own part I reverence Mr. Rymer's learning, but I detest his ill nature and his arrogance. Indeed, and such as I, have reason to be afraid of him, but Shakespeare has not.

John Dennis in The Impartial Critic (1693) also found that "... his Censures of Shakespeare in most particulars, are very sensible and very just." But Dennis blames Rymer for assuming that because Shakespeare has "Faults" he has no " Beauties." His promise to point them out, however, was not kept for many years, and then he did it rather anticlimactically in the introduction to his corrected version of Coriolanus.

When later critics came to criticize Shakespeare, they followed the lead of John Dryden rather than the lead of Thomas Rymer. Dryden had said that no man except Ben Jonson had created so many characters and had kept them as distinct from each other as Shakespeare. The succeeding critics to a man agreed with Dryden in principle. When they did object to

by example as well as precept. The literary world received his critical dicta submissively enough but did not greet his play Edgar, which carefully followed the rules, with enthusiasm. The play was printed but never produced. Dryden allowed himself this barbed comment in his prologue to Love Triumphant (1693):

To Shakespeare's Critic he bequeaths the curse,
To find his faults, and yet himself make worse;
A precious reader in Poetic Schools
Who, by his own Examples, dams his Rules.

Nicholas Rowe, another practicing dramatist, could not resist the temptation to point out in the prefact to his edition of Shakespeare that Rymer had not succeeded as a playwright. Cf. Rowe, The Works of Mr. Shakespeare, I, xvi.

77 Hooker, Works of John Dennis, I, 41.
specific characters, however, their objections were based as Rymer's objec-
tions had been based, on supposed violations of the decorum proper to
the characters according to their age, sex, quality, employment, and for-
tune. A second criticism of Shakespeare's characters which was occasion-
ally heard concerned his delineation of female characters.

In the first of the three letters "On the Genius and Writing of
Shakespeare" (1712) which John Dennis used as an introduction to his cor-
rected version of Coriolanus, he expressed his opinion that "Shakespear
was one of the greatest Genius's that the World e'er saw for the Tragic
Stage." This is high praise, but Dennis could not praise his characters
without reservation.

His characters are always drawn justly, exactly, graphically, ex-
cept where he fail'd by not knowing History or the Poetical Art.

His ignorance of the "Poetical Art" led him to violate "the Equality and
Conveniency of Manners of his Dramatical Persons" which he took from his-
tory. In Coriolanus Shakespeare had not come up to the proper conception

78 Ibid., II, 4.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid., 5.
of Menenius, the Roman senator; Aufidus, the general of the Volscians; and Coriolanus himself. Shakespeare had not given convenient manners to the first two, and the third was unequal. Aufidus's baseness and profligate villainy do not agree with his rank of general. Menenius's character, which Shakespeare shows to be that of an errant buffoon, is a great absurdity. "For he might as well have imagin'd a grave majestical Jack-Pudding, as a Buffon in a Roman Senator." Since Menenius was known to have been an orator, making a buffoon was a mistake because

Never was any Buffon eloquent, or wise, or witty, or virtuous. All the good and ill Qualities of a Buffon are summ'd up in one word, and that is a Buffon.

The criticism of Dennis follows the rules of decorum in general and of character decorum in particular. There is no reason to doubt that John Dennis admired Shakespeare. His comments on the other plays are couched in general but enthusiastic terms. In presenting his version of Coriolanus, it was natural for him to point out what he considered the faults of the original so that his audience might have a clearer idea of his achievements.

Charles Gildon's adverse comments on Shakespeare are also

82 "For Coriolanus who in the First Part of the Tragedy is shown so open, so frank, so violent, and so magnanimous, is represented in the latter part by Aufidus, which is contradicted by no one, a flattering, fawning, cringing, insinuating Traytor."--Ibid.

83 Ibid.

84 Ibid., 9.

85 In 1709 Nicholas Rowe published his edition of the plays of
based on Shakespeare's violations of the decorum which type characters should observe. To some extent he is responsible for furthering the idea that Shakespeare's female characters are not as fully developed as they might have been.86

When one considers that Gildon examined all the plays, he is surprised that so rigid a neo-classicist found so few faults in the drawing of the characters. What he considers breaches of general decorum take

Shakespeare in six volumes. In 1710 a volume containing Shakespeare's sonnets and poems together with "An essay on the Art, Rise, and Progress of the Stage in Greece, Rome, and England" and "Remarks on the Plays of Shakespeare" appeared ostensibly as volume seven of Rowe's edition. Actually the book was the work of Charles Gildon and was published by Edmund Curll (Jacob Tonson had published Rowe's edition). In 1725 a similar additional volume appeared to Pope's edition. It contained Gildon's "Essay" but not the "Remarks"; however a second edition of the book published in 1728 contains both.—Cf. H. L. Ford, Shakespeare 1700-1740: A Collation of the Editions and Separate Plays, Oxford, 1935, 21-25. Gildon's "Remarks" contains the first systematic examination of all the plays of Shakespeare and uses Rowe's edition for the citations which are very numerous. Gildon uses the examen method, methodically commenting on the plot, conduct of the action, manners, and sentiments. The importance of Gildon's work becomes apparent when it is realized that the next systematic examination of the plays by a critic whose only concern was literary value was made by William Hazlitt in 1817.

86 "It must be own'd that Shakespear drew Men better, than Women; to whom indeed he has seldom given any considerable Place in his Plays; here in Romeo and Juliet he has done most in this matter, but here he has not given any graceful Touches to Desdemona in many places of her Part."—Rowe, Works of Mr. Shakespear, VII, 411.

Dryden had seem'd to minimize Shakespeare's ability to draw female character.—Ker, The Essays of John Dryden, I, 228. Rowe had done the same in the Prologue to The Ambitious Step-Mother (1700):

Shakespear, whose Genius, to itself a law,
Could Men in every Height of Nature Draw,
And copied all but Women that he saw.

place in Othello. Desdemona's marriage to a Negro "takes away our Pity from her and only raises our Indignation against him." Similarly Gildon objects to Iago as one "that can hardly be admitted into the Tragic scene... because he seems to declare himself a settled villain." Gildon also objected to the characterization of the Roman mobs in Coriolanus and Julius Caesar, as Dennis had. The Romans were at least as polite as the citizens of London; Shakespeare would have a difficult time finding "such ignorant unlick'd Cubbs to have fill'd up his Rout" among the citizens of London.

Gildon objects to Shakespeare's portrayal of the quarrel between Elinor and Constance in King John. The quarrel is quite out of character, for Shakespeare allows them to say things which are "indecent for their degree to speak..." Here of course the critic is defending nature as it ought to be; realism has no claim. "For what ever the Ladies of Stocks Market might do, Queens and Princesses can never be supposed to talk to one another at that rate." Here one hears echoes of Dacier's stricture on the conduct of Ephigenia whose pleadings for life were "indigne d'une princesse bien née..." 

87 Gildon, Works of Mr. William Shakespear, VII, 410.
88 Ibid., 411.
89 Ibid., 364-365.
90 Ibid., 340.
91 The later critic Francis Gentleman in his Dramatic Censor.
The characters and the plot of Hamlet were censured severely by Voltaire, whose opinions of Shakespeare varied from the extremes of adulation to condemnation. Taking the "inspired barbarian" view of Shakespeare, Voltaire recognized that Shakespeare's "... great merit consists in his vigorous and ingenuous portraiture of human life." Yet Shakespeare had failed to achieve this perfection in Hamlet both in plot and characterization. Because of the importance of the reaction to his criticism of the play it deserves quotation in full:

I am certainly very far from justifying the tragedy of Hamlet as a whole; it is a coarse and barbarous piece which would not be endured by the lowest of the populace of France or Italy. Hamlet becomes mad in the second act, and his mistress becomes mad in the third; the Prince, pretending to kill a rat, kills the father of his mistress, and the heroine throws herself into the river. Her grave is dug on the stage; grave-diggers make puns worthy of them, holding death's heads in their hands; and Prince Hamlet replies to their abominable coarseness by no less disgusting extravagances. Meanwhile, one of the actors conquers Poland. Hamlet, his mother, and his step-father drink together on the stage; at table, there is

London, 1770, II, 157, also censures the characterization of the royal ladies, but finds that "what passes between Austria and the Bastard also, is fitter for coalheavers than men of rank and education."


93 The answers to Voltaire's criticisms of Shakespeare embrace the whole theory of neo-classicism and hence cannot be treated in their entirety in this thesis. Two standard works on the subject are J. J. Jusserand, Shakespeare in France, London, 1899, and T. R. Lounsbury, Shakespeare and Voltaire, New York, 1902. Typical reactions to Voltaire's criticism of the characters came from Samuel Johnson (cf. page 88 of this thesis). Actually Johnson's refutation of Rymer's, Dennis's, and Voltaire's strictures on Shakespeare's violations of decorum effectively destroyed the validity of the theory of character decorum.
singing and quarrelling, fighting and killing. It would seem that such a work is the fruit of the imagination of a drunken savage. But amid these gross irregularities, which even to the present day make the English stage so absurd and barbarous, this play of Hamlet, by a still greater whimsicality, has sublime touches worthy of the greatest genius. It seems that nature took pleasure in bringing together in Shakespeare's head the strongest and grandest imagination with the lowest and most detestable of dull grossness. 94

Such a criticism as this is based on a most rigorous conception of decorum. It recalls La Mesnardière's conclusion that the writer of a tragedy should be acquainted with the etiquette of a royal court. 95

The characters of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are censured for the same reason by Gildon and other neo-classical critics. The characters fail to conform to Aristotle's requirement that characters possess qualities which are agreeable to their station in life. Gildon comments that "the Character of Macbeth and his Lady are too monstrous for the Stage." But he is forced to admit that the play is popular and it is "in too much esteem with the Million for any Man yet to say much against it." 96 At least three later critics did not allow this popularity to stand in the way of their strictures. Francis Gentleman censures Macbeth's language to the servant who tells him of the approach of the English army because the rage or grief of a king should always preserve peculiar dignity, without which the author cannot boast of a chaste preservation of character. 97

94 Robinson, English Shakespearean Criticism, 245.
95 Cf. this thesis, 27.
96 Gildon, Works of Mr. Shakespear, VII, 394.
97 The Dramatic Censor, I, 99-100.
Macbeth is, he concludes, "as complete a tool for ministers of temptation to work upon, as fancy ever formed, and too disgraceful for nature to admit amongst her works." 98

Lady Macbeth receives more severe treatment from Gentleman and other critics, although the former critic admits almost unwillingly the powerfulness of Shakespeare's drawing of the character. First he speaks of "this matchless lady—we lament so detestable, though a possible, picture of the fair sex." He censures her saying "Was hope drunk..." 99 and concludes that one must blame a lady of high rank for descending to such a vulgar and nauseous allusion as the paleness and sickness of an inebriate state; nor is her comparison of the cat, in the adage, much more the effect of good breeding. 100

Gentleman forgets Lady Macbeth's supposed gentility when he calls her a "bloody minded virago" in reference to her speech about dashing out a smiling infant's brains, and comes to the conclusion that even if such characters do exist, "they are among the frightful deformities and essential concealments of nature, which should be excluded from the stage." 101

Two other critics join in the chorus of condemnation. Edward Taylor calls Lady Macbeth a monster not worthy of the name of a woman. 102 In his work,

96 Ibid, 106.

99 I, vii.

100 The Dramatic Censor, I, 87.

101 Ibid., 88.

102 Cursory Remarks on Tragedy, 67.
The Element of Dramatic Criticism, William Cooke censures Lady Macbeth's speech "The raven himself's not hoarse..." in a very revealing fashion.

This speech we cannot think natural; the most treacherous murder, we hope, was never perpetrated by the most hardened miscreant without compunction; in that state of mind, it is never failing artifice of self deceit, to draw the thickest veil over the most wicked action and to extenuate it by all the circumstances which imagination can suggest; and if the mind cannot bear disguise, the next attempt is to thrust it out of its counsel altogether, and rush in upon action without thought; this last was her husband's action.

It can be said that this comment reveals the weakness of a type of criticism which identifies Aristotle's quality of suitable character traits with those which the critic would like to believe natural. The high standards of conduct which neo-classical critics wanted mankind to possess they demanded of the characters of the drama. Shakespeare's characters came to be praised by the character critics because they found the characters to be drawn with profound insight into what human character was and with a neglect for an artificial standard towards which man should strive.

Just as the adverse criticisms of Shakespeare's characters were made on the basis of the rules which governed Aristotle's four requirements which an author must follow in creating a praiseworthy character, so praise of Shakespeare's characters was accorded on the same basis. Nahum Tate (1652-1715) was the first to follow Dryden's example. In the Preface to his version of King Lear (1681), Tate said of Shakespeare's ability to

103 I, v.

104 67. The emphasis has been added.
create characters that

Lear's real and Edgar's pretended madness have so much of extravagant Nature (I know not how else to express it) as cou'd have started but from Shakespeare's Creating Fancy.\footnote{105}

And the things which they say are so odd and surprising and yet are agreeable and proper. We are satisfied that they are the things that such people would say.\footnote{106}

Not only do Shakespeare's characters have traits which are suitable, his historical Roman characters are "like" the originals, so that one sees "the particular Genius of the Man, without the least mistake of his character, given him by the best Historians."\footnote{107} Antony and Brutus are the characters which he mentions to prove this statement. In what Tate has to say of the two characters we see a typical neo-classical comment on the characters.

You find his Anthony in all the Defects and Excellencies of his Mind, a Scouldier, a Reveller, Amorous, sometimes Rash, sometimes Considerate, with all the various Emotions of his Mind. His Brutus agen has all the Constancy, Gravity, Morality, Generosity imaginable, without the least Mixture of private Interest or Irregular Passion. He is true to him, even in the imitation of his Oratory, the famous Speech which he makes him deliver, being exactly agreeable to his manner of expressing himself; of which we have this account, Facultas ejus erat Mili
taris et Bellicis accommodata Tumultubus.\footnote{108}

\footnote{106} Ibid.
\footnote{107} Ibid., 266-267.
\footnote{108} Ibid.
The analysis is exact and springs from an evident appreciation of the character. Neo-classical criticism, however, could do no more than this; a closer examination of each of the qualities which the neo-classical critic enumerated became the task of the authors of the character analyses of Shakespeare's characters.

With the publication of Nicholas Rowe's edition of the plays of Shakespeare in 1709, more frequent references to the characters begin to appear. Justly enough, the first eighteenth century editor of Shakespeare provided some criticism of the characters in "Some Account of the Life &c. of Mr. William Shakespear" which serves as a preface to his edition. He admits that Shakespeare's plots are frequently faulty, but he points out that Shakespeare excels in showing "The Manners of his Characters in Acting or Speaking what is proper for them, and fit to be shown by the Poet." 109 Following Tate, Rowe points out that the reader will find "the Character as exact in the Poet as in the Historian." Shakespeare shows the good and bad qualities of Henry the Sixth: his simplicity, passive sanctity, want of courage, weakness of mind, and submission to an imperious wife or prevailing faction; and also his piety, disinterestedness, contemning of the things of this world, and resignation to the severest dispensations of divine providence. 110 Although Shakespeare's characterizations of Henry VIII contained fewer faults than the king possessed, this milder picture

109 Rowe, Works of Mr. Shakespear, I, xxviii.

110 Ibid., xxix.
was probably made out of respect for Queen Elizabeth. In Wolsey, however, we have a just picture of a man who was tyrannical, cruel, and insolent in prosperity but worthy of compassion after his fall from power. Rowe follows Tate in praising the exact characterization of the Roman characters.

The comments which Rowe makes upon Falstaff and the various preternatural characters show an appreciation of Shakespeare's ability to maintain his characterization (Aristotle's fourth requirement: equality or consistency). The character of Falstaff is allowed by everyone to be a masterpiece. It is well sustained throughout the three plays in which he appears, and even the account of his death in Henry V is extremely natural and as diverting as any part of his life. Rowe's final comment on Falstaff reveals a personal enjoyment of the character which does not depend upon any rules.

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, Vainglorious, and in short every way Viscious, 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 them, been sorry to see his Friend Hal use him so scourvily, when he comes to the Crown, in the End of the Second Part of Henry the Fourth.

The preternatural characters such as Caliban, the Faeries of A Midsummer Night's Dream, etc.

111 Ibid., xxx.
112 Ibid.
113 Ibid., xviii.
Night's Dream, the Witches of Macbeth, and the Ghost in Hamlet are created by the magic of Shakespeare with thoughts and language proper to them. Caliban is an example of Shakespeare's ability to sustain a "particular wild Image," and in Rowe's opinion, "is certainly one of the finest and most uncommon Grotesques that was ever seen."

These comments and the observation on "that incomparable Character of Shylock the Jew" which Rowe believes "was design'd Tragically by the Author" show an appreciation for the characters which is expressed in terms of the rules but which seem to rise within the critic independently of them.

Shakespeare's abilities as a delineator of character were emphasized by Charles Gildon both in "An Essay on the Art, Rise, and Progress of the Stage" and in the "Remarks on the Plays of Shakespeare." In the former essay he remarks:

In this Shakespear has excell'd all the Poets, for he has not only distinguish'd his principal Persons, but there is scarce a Messenger comes in but is visibly different from all the rest of the Persons in the Play. So that you need not to mention the Names of the Person, that speaks, when you read the Play, the Manners of the Persons will sufficiently inform you who it is speaks; whereas in our Modern Poets, if the Name of the Person speaking is not read, you can never by what he says distinguish one from the Other.

Not only does Shakespeare draw distinct characters, but he draws them so perfectly "that when we read, we can scarce persuade ourselves, but that

115 Ibid., xxiv.
116 Ibid., xix-xx.
the Discourse is real and no Fiction."

After such statements, Gildon’s remarks on the characters are disappointing. He says that he enjoys Falstaff, but he justifies Shakespeare’s conception of the knight on the basis that the historical Sir John Falstaff although a knight of the Garter and a Lieutenant General through "his Cowardice lost the Battle and betray’d the brave Talbot. . . . And such Cowardice ought to stigmatize any Character to all Posterity, to deter Men from the Like." Shakespeare merits applause for this poetic justice. Apparently Gildon felt that he had to have a reason for liking Falstaff.

Although such a comment is not wholly typical of Gildon’s analyses of the characters, one notes in his criticism more than in the criticism of any of the other neo-classical critics the lack of imagination which is apparent in their analyses of the characters. They are able to recognize Shakespeare’s great characters, but when they are called upon to account for them, they remark as Gildon did of Shylock: "The character of the Jew is very well distinguish’d by Avarice, Malice, implacable Revenge, etc." At a little greater length Gildon analyzed Don John of Much Ado About Nothing, one of his favorite plays.

The Character of Don John the Bastard is admirably distinguish’d, his Manners are well mark’d, and everywhere convenient, or agreeable. Being a sour melancholy, satirine, envious, selfish, malicious Temper, Manners necessary to produce these villainous Events,

118 Ibid., 306.
119 Ibid., 345.
120 Ibid., 321.
they did; these were productive of the Catastrophe, for he was not a Person brought in to fill up the Number only, because without him the Fable could not have gone on. 121

Such are the remarks of typical judicial critics on the characters during the first part of the century. This mere naming of the traits which characters display is also the method of later critics such as Gentleman, Taylor, Cooke, and generally is the practice of Samuel Johnson in the notes on the characters in his edition of the plays. The note which he appends to _As You Like It_ is typical of his brief attention to the characters.

I know not how the ladies will approve the facility with which both Rosalind and Celia give away their hearts. To Celia much may be forgiven for heroism of her friendship. The character of Jacques is natural and well preserved. 122

Following the examen method in his remarks on each play, Gildon and the other critics also commented on the "sentiments" or what Aristotle had referred to as "the power of saying whatever can be said, or what is appropriate to the occasion." 123 Here as with the manners all the efforts of the poet which were in compliance with the rules were designated "beauties" and those which did not comply were designated "faults." From

121 Ibid., 305.

122 Raleigh, Johnson on Shakespeare, 86. Johnson's Polonius and Falstaff, however, differ from the rest of his notes on the characters not only in length but in their kind. In analyzing these two characters, he sees them as characters which engage his imagination and he lifts them out of the contexts of the plays and discusses them as characters which are interesting in themselves. For that reason they will be discussed in Chapter III of this thesis.

123 Poetics, Chapter VI.
the examples of the remarks on the manners it can be seen that the comments were brief. This briefness is no doubt due to the method itself which does not provide fine tests to apply to the characters, and to the fact that the main emphasis of judicial criticism was always placed on the plot. The comments on the sentiments were as brief and general as those on the manners. 124

Gildon's "Remarks" provides the best example of such comments. He finds Hotspur's description of the affected courtier "very good," as are his passionate speeches after the king had rebuffed his family "except that ridiculous rant of leaping up to the Moon, and diving to the bottom of the Sea, & which is absolute Madness." Falstaff's impersonation of the king is very pleasant. The remarks of Worchester to Hotspur are judicious and those of the king to his two sons are "very Politic." And finally he thinks that Falstaff's account of his men is very pleasant. 125 More frequently Gildon contents himself with listing "the fine Moral Reflections and Topics of the individual plays." 126

Shakespeare was usually praised for his sentiments with a

124 This clumsy distinction between the actions and the speech of the characters was a useful one in the neo-classical age when rhetoric for its own sake was highly prized. When the characters came to be analyzed as individuals their actions and speech were naturally considered as a unit.

125 Rowe, Works of Mr. Shakespear, VII, 293.

126 The beauties of the sentiments found in Measure for Measure are listed under the headings: Mercy, Great Men's Abuse of Power, The Privilege of Authority, On Place and Form, On Life, and on Death.
general praise by critics who did not examine the individual plays closely. Alexander Pope in his edition of the plays pointed out some of "the most shining Passages" by placing inverted commas in the margins.¹²⁷ When the beauty lay in the whole rather than in particulars, he prefixed a star to the scene. When William Warburton brought out his edition of the plays in 1747, he retained Pope's indications of the beauties and marked his additional selections with double inverted commas.¹²⁸ In 1752 William Dodd brought out The Beauties of Shakespeare, listing Shakespeare's reflections on every conceivable subject in a work which was continually popular during its own and the following century. Samuel Johnson remarked that a system of social duty could be extracted from the plays, but that his precepts and axioms dropped casually from him.¹²⁹ In the same vein Francis Gentleman blamed him for failing to develop a scene in Romeo and Juliet in which he lost an opportunity for presenting a worthwhile sentiment between Juliet and her mother:

We apprehend a very agreeable scene might have been struck out between the mother and daughter, on the subject of marriage, for preferable to Mrs. Nurse's trifling rhapsody of circumstantial nothingness; which though extremely natural, means nothing but to


¹²⁸ Mr. Pope and Mr. Warburton, eds., The Works of Shakespeare, London, 1747, I, xx.

¹²⁹ Raleigh, Johnson on Shakespeare, 21. Earlier in the Preface Johnson had claimed that Shakespeare had omitted opportunities of instructing or delighting which the train of the story seemed to force upon him. He believed that Shakespeare's real power could best be seen in the plot and dialogue and not in selected passages.
raise some laughs, which we deem highly disgraceful to the nature, bent, and dignity of tragic compositions. ... 

It was seldom however that the critics found it necessary to censure Shakespeare on this score. With only slight exceptions Shakespeare was praised for the beauties of his sentiments just as he was praised for the beauties of his manners. 

The judicial criticism of Shakespeare which appeared after Gildon's "Remarks" is neither large in bulk nor very specific. The opinions of William Cooke and Edward Taylor which have already been noted cited Shakespeare to support their critical positions rather than to analyze the characters for their own sake. The extent of Johnson's specific criticism has already been noted, and the criticism of Francis Gentleman in the thirteen plays that he reviews becomes specific only in the consideration of the characters of Macbeth.

Although Shakespeare's characters did not receive much detailed criticism from judicial critics after 1710, the judicial critics continued

130 Dramatic Censor, I, 175.
131 R. W. Babcock's study, The Genesis of Shakespeare Idolatry, Chapel Hill, 1931, 117-118, lists the anonymous work, The Beauties of the English Drama, London, 1777; J. A. Croft, A Select Collection of the Beauties of Shakespeare, London, 1792; and the collections of C. Taylor in 1778, 1783, and 1792 as other examples of works illustrating Shakespeare's beauties. To Babcock's list should be added a series of thirty-two articles entitled "Select Passages from Shakespeare" which appeared in the Universal Magazine during the years 1791-1796. The author, who borrowed his opinions freely, frequently points out beauties of character.
132 Cf. this thesis, 81.
to praise his characters. In the Preface to his edition of Shakespeare, Alexander Pope did not single out any special characters but observed:

His Characters are so much Nature her self, that tis a sort of injury to call them by so distant a name as Copies of her.\(^{133}\)

Theobald, who was concerned in the Preface to his edition in 1733 with defending himself from Pope's attacks and with explaining his methods of editing a corrupt text, paused long enough to praise the characters,\(^ {134}\) and his rival William Warburton added his praises in his edition which appeared in 1747.\(^ {135}\) The general opinion was summed up in the well-bred and polite observation which Lord Lyttelton put into the mouth of Pope in his Dialogues of the Dead (1760):

No author had ever so copious, so bold, so creative an imagination, with so perfect a knowledge of the passions, the humours and the sentiments of mankind. He painted all characters, from kings down to peasants, with equal truth and force. If human nature were destroyed, and no monument were left of it except his works, other beings might know what man was from these writings.\(^ {136}\)

When Samuel Johnson praised the characters of Shakespeare in the Preface to his edition of the plays,\(^ {137}\) he can be said to have confirmed with finality what had always been held by neo-classical critics.

\(^{133}\) Pope, Works of Shakespeare, I, ii.


\(^ {135}\) Mr. Pope and Mr. Warburton, eds., The Works of Shakespeare, I, xiii.


\(^ {137}\) Raleigh, Johnson on Shakespeare, 14-15.
A survey of neo-classical critical comments on the characters of Shakespeare reveals not only the inability of the critics to deal imaginatively with the characters because of the poverty of the system of character evaluation but also the disagreements among the critics when they came to decide what the proper decorum of a particular character should be. Dennis had been offended by the buffoonery of Menenius, but in the same year Gildon had praised him for the very things which made him unacceptable to Dennis. Lady Macbeth's violations of decorum had offended several critics, but Thomas Davies saw her as having an undaunted and determinedly wicked resolution unmatched even in the Greek drama except by the Clytemnestra of Aeschylus. This same critic did not blame Shakespeare as Dennis and Gildon had for giving Roman citizens the rude behavior of English artisans because there were artisans in Rome and the Roman populace was not any more civilized than an English populace.

More important than those disagreements on decorum is the attack on the theory itself. This attack found its most cogent statement in the Preface of Samuel Johnson's edition of the plays (1765). In this work,

138 Rowe, Works of Mr. Shakespeare, VII, 365.


140 Ibid., 209.

141 In her Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare, Compared with the Greek and the French Dramatic Poets, With Some Remarks upon the Misrepresentations of Mons. de Voltaire, London, 1769, Mrs. Elizabeth Montague attempted to make Voltaire's confusion specific. She distinguishes between decorum, which is concerned with manners, and morality, which is concerned with conduct. The observance of the first is a minor matter, and
the main significance of which will be examined in the next chapter, Johnson holds the position that Shakespeare's plays are not either comedies or tragedies in the rigorous and critical sense of the terms as neo-classical criticism conceived them. The plays of Shakespeare are of a distinct kind which exhibits "the real state of sublunary nature." It is in a literal sense that Johnson says that Shakespeare's drama is the mirror of life. With this latter idea as his guiding principle, Johnson examined the criticisms of Shakespeare's characters for their violations of decorum. The passage is a crucial one in the history of Shakespearean criticism and deserves full quotation.

His adherence to general nature has exposed him to the censure of the critics, who form their judgments upon narrower principles. Dennis and Rhymar think his Romans not sufficiently Roman; and Voltaire censures his kings as not completely royal. Dennis is offended, that Menenius, a senator of Rome, should play the buffoon; and Voltaire perhaps thinks decency violated when the Danish Usurper is represented as a drunkard. But Shakespeare always makes nature predominate over accident; and if he preserves the essential character, is not very careful of distinctions superinduced and adventitious. His story requires Romans or kings, but he thinks only on men. He knew that Rome, like every other city, had men of all dispositions; and wanting a buffoon, he went into the senate-house for that which the senate-house would certainly have afforded him. He was inclined to breaches of decorum ought to be forgiven in a work which reaches the sublime. Hence Mrs. Montague can forgive Prince Hal in the incident with Francis, the servant, in I Henry IV, Act II, Sc. 4, but she condemns all the scenes of II Henry IV in which Doll Tearsheet appears as an indefensible fault. Cf. especially, ibid., 58, 85, 105. Her conclusion on the subject is similar to Dryden's observation on the meeting between Octavia and Cleopatra in All for Love. Cf. this thesis, 49.

142 Raleigh, Johnson on Shakespeare, 15.
143 Ibid., 14.
show an usurper and a murderer not only odious but despicable, he therefore added drunkenness to his other qualities, knowing that kings love wine like other men, and that wine exerts its natural powers upon kings. These are the petty cavils of petty minds; a poet overlooks the casual distinction of country and condition, as a painter, satisfied with the figure, neglects the drapery. 144

As David Lovett points out, Johnson clearly departs from the accepted meaning of a type character in this passage by turning the tables on the earlier neo-classical critics whom he accuses of not following "general nature" in their criticism. 145 We see that the six sources of character traits which had been expounded by Mesnardiere and his French and English followers are no longer necessary. In the place of the old generalized characterization Johnson puts a new class which includes them all, human nature itself. 146

Although neo-classical criticism did not produce any great examples of Shakespearean character criticism, it is obvious that neo-classical critics recognized the greatness of the characters. The statements of the critics themselves attest to the fact, and it must be remembered that the last great judicial critic of the period demolished the idea of the type character with its attendant and "probable" traits. Although it may be a coincidence, the most accomplished of the analyses of Shakespeare's characters were written after 1765, the year in which Johnson's Preface appeared.

144 Ibid., 14-15.
146 Ibid.
CHAPTER III

DEFENSES OF SHAKESPEARE'S ART AND RESULTS OF THE FIRST CHARACTER ANALYSES

Just as the judgments of the neo-classical critics on the characters of Shakespeare become more easily understood when the neo-classical theories on which they are based are presented, so an explanation of the critical ideas which the authors of the analyses of Shakespeare's characters espoused will be useful in showing the part they played in the revolt against neo-classicism. This chapter does not propose to prove that the character analysts by the force of their work alone supplanted the neo-classical critical theories. This chapter will attempt to show how these critics fitted into the larger group of which they were a part. Since Shakespeare was one of the facts for which neo-classicism could not give a satisfactory explanation, it can be seen that the work of these critics in making clear Shakespeare's use of art and judgment in his dramas was an important part of the movement which discredited neo-classicism.

As it has been pointed out in Chapter Two, Samuel Johnson's Preface (1765) to his edition of Shakespeare took up the important points of controversy between Shakespeare and the strict neo-classical critics. But it must not be forgotten that Johnson's Preface is also of the greatest importance, as D. N. Smith points out, because it sums up admirably the critical opinions which had been accepted as truths by critics who had gone
before him. Although Johnson's judgments were rendered to support Shakespeare against the proponents of the rules, it cannot be said that Johnson's ideas immediately carried the day. It will be remembered that almost fifty years later Samuel T. Coleridge found it necessary to confute the theory of the unities.

Johnson's first defense of Shakespeare was on the poet's use of tragic and comic material in the same play. Mixing the two produced tragi-comedy, a form of drama which found no authority for its existence in the Poetics. Johnson defends Shakespeare by admitting that his plays are not in the strict sense either comedies or tragedies. They are compositions of a distinct kind; exhibiting the real state of sublunary nature, which partakes of good and evil, joy and sorrow, mingled with endless variety of proportion and innumerable modes of combination.

1 Shakespeare in the Eighteenth Century, Oxford, 1928, 68. Smith lists the following as the critical commonplaces to which Johnson lent his authority. "Shakespeare is above all writers, at least all modern writers, the poet of nature..."--Raleigh, Johnson on Shakespeare, 11. Shakespeare's plays are filled with practical axioms and domestic wisdom. "Yet his real power is not shown in the splendour of particular passages, but by the progress of his fable, and the tenour of his dialogue..."--Ibid. "... perhaps no poet ever kept his personages more distinct from each other."--Ibid., 13. "Shakespeare has no heroes; his scenes are occupied only by men, who act and speak as the reader thinks that he should himself have spoken or acted on the same occasion..."--Ibid., 14. This therefore is the praise of Shakespeare, that his drama is the mirrour of life..."--Ibid.


3 Raysor, Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism, I, xxxviii.

4 Raleigh, Johnson on Shakespeare, 15.
Johnson's defense is an appeal from the laws of criticism to nature itself, for he establishes the fact that Shakespeare's plays possess an artistically effective form even though the conduct of the plot is not similar to the conduct of the plot of a regular drama. Johnson's defense of Shakespeare's characters from the charge that they violated the decorum proper to them has already been noted in Chapter Two. By asserting that the characters

5 Neo-classical critics following the Poetics naturally emphasized the importance of the plot in achieving the total effect of the play, but they were aware that Shakespeare's plots, which did not conform to the rules, were dramatically effective. In Letter I of Dennis's series of letters "On the Genius and Writings of Shakespeare," the author admitted that Shakespeare had such a talent for touching the passions, "that they often touch us more without their due preparations, than those of other Tragic Poets, who have all the beauty of Design and all the Advantage of Incidents."--Hooker, Works of John Dennis, II, l. Alexander Pope made the observation that Shakespeare had such power over the passions that he shows no labor or preparation to guide us to the effect. "We are surprized the moment that we weep; and yet upon reflection find the passion so just that we should be surprized if we had not wept and wept at that very moment."--A. Pope, ed., The Works of Shakespeare, London, 1723, I, iii. Dennis's editor, E. N. Hooker, points out that both critics recognize that a drama in which characterization is highly developed--and admittedly Shakespeare excelled in characterization--might attain the end of tragedy, i.e., arousing the emotions of pity and terror, more successfully than other plays which perfectly fulfill the requirements laid down for the design and conduct of the plot.--Works of John Dennis, II, l25. The idea was repeated more emphatically by Peter Whalley in An Enquiry into the Learning of Shakespeare with Remarks on Several Passages of his Plays, London, 1743, I7. Whalley pointed out that if a "Dissolution" were made of Shakespeare's plays, his art and judgment in developing the consistency and contrasts of his characters and in developing the "different Underplots, which are all made subservient towards the carrying out of the main design" would become more obvious. Three years before Johnson's Preface appeared, Daniel Webb in his Remarks on the Beauties of Poetry, London, 1762, 104-105, remarked that Shakespeare's chief beauty came from his particular kind of plot: "For, as the Poet was not confined to a unity and simplicity of action, he created incidents in proportion to the promptness and vivacity of his genius. Hence his sentiments spring from motives exquisitely fitted to produce them: to this they owe that original spirit, that commanding energy, which overcame the improbability of the scene; and transport the heart in defiance of the understanding."
followed "general nature," (Johnson) was able to free them from the obligations of the code of decorum and at the same time establish the distinctness with which Shakespeare conceived each character. The distinctness of each character is, as shall be seen, one of the qualities of characters which led the authors of the analyses to study the characters in detail.

6 Raleigh, Johnson on Shakespeare, 14.

7 Although Johnson does not say that the characters represent individuals, his using "general nature" as the basis of characterization puts him with earlier and later critics who proclaimed boldly, in spite of Aristotle and his followers, that it was Shakespeare's glory that his characters were individuals. Pope recognized the fact and found it praiseworthy when he said: "His characters are so much Nature her self, that it is a sort of injury to call them by so distant a name as Copies of her... But every single character in Shakespeare is as much an individual as those in Life itself; it is as impossible to find any two alike; and such as from their relation or affinity in any respect appear most to be Twins, will upon Comparison be found remarkably distinct."--Works of Shakespeare, I, ii. Theobald illustrated the idea by remarking that other dramatists are unable to vary their fools and coxcombs. "But Shakespeare's Clowns and Fops come all of a different House; they are no farther allied to one another as Man to Man, Members of the same Species: but as different in Features and Lineaments of Character, as we are from one another in Face or Complexion."--Works of Shakespeare, I, iii. Peter Shalley pointed out that "they are as distinct from each other, as one Man is from a second in real Life."--An Enquiry, 21.

Although Charlotte Lennox was not willing to abandon the idea of the type character, she was willing to make the type more narrow. This she did when she defended Iago in Shakespeare Illustrated, London, 1753, I, 129-130. She admitted that Iago did not possess the traits which soldiers usually possessed but let Thomas Rymer remember that he was an Italian soldier, "born in a Country remarkable for the deep, Art, Cruelty, and revengeful Temper of its Inhabitants." Mrs. Montagu in her Essay, 61, said: "Shakespeare's dramatic personae are men frail by constitution, hurt, by ill habits, faulty and unequal... We are interested in what they do, or say, by feeling every moment that they are the same nature as ourselves." Actually it is a statement very similar to Johnson's "he thinks only on men."--Raleigh, Johnson on Shakespeare, 15.
Lastly, Johnson supported Shakespeare's disregard for the unities of time and place. He did not discredit them absolutely, but he held that they were unnecessary in a drama and could be regarded as a mere flourish of dexterity on the part of the dramatist. To maintain them successfully in a play, according to Johnson, is comparable to an architect's introducing all the orders of architecture in a citadel without reducing its strength. The greatest graces of a play are to copy nature and to instruct life, and these graces may be accomplished in spite of the violations of the unities.

---

8 Raleigh, Johnson on Shakespeare, 25-30.

9 Ibid., 30. Cf. Raysor, "The Downfall of the Unities," Modern Language Notes, XLII, 1-9. Actually the defense of Shakespeare's use of tragi-comedy is a defense of his plots insofar as the unity of action is concerned. Defenses of Shakespeare's violations of the unities are frequently so phrased as to make it difficult to decide whether the critic is defending Shakespeare's unity of action, or his violations of the unities of time and place, or both. Generally few critics paid much attention to the unities of time and place. Almost all critics insist that Shakespeare's beauties of characterization amply make up for his violations of the strict rules of the plot. Even Charles Gildon admitted, "There is such a Witchery in him, that all the Rules of Art, which he does not observe, tho built on an equally Solid and Infallible Reason, vanish away in the transports of those he does observe, so entirely, as if I had never known anything of the Matter."--Gildon, Works of Mr. Shakespeare, VII, v. In his Observations on Poetry, London, 1738, Henry Pemberton devoted the entire book to a general defense of the theory that characterization was more important than plot structure in his attempt to prove the great merits of Richard Glover's epic poem Leonidas (1737). Needless to say he used Shakespeare's plays as his chief justification. The anonymous author of An Examen of the Suspicious Husband, London, 1747, 22-23, admits that Shakespeare does not always follow the mechanical rules of the unities of time, place, and action but he does observe "the most essential and noble Rules of the Drama" which are the preservation and consistency of character and the working up of the passions. Peter Whalley in An Enquiry, 17, insists that the masterly expression of characters and manners is more useful and conducive to the ends of tragedy than the strict following of the rules for the design and conduct of the plot.
These then are the critical attitudes which were current in the struggle against the authority of the rules and which the character analysts used in attempts to gain recognition for Shakespeare's art and judgment by showing that these principles helped to account for the greatness of Shakespeare.

Actually, the body of character analyses which were made during the first half of the eighteenth century is not large, nor are the comments of the critics such as have any more than a historical interest. They are interesting in the fact that the authors of one variety of analyses assume that Shakespeare's characters are accurate transcriptions from life. These authors used Shakespeare's characters as examples of human behaviour in periodical essays. The other variety of essay concerned itself with the characters from a dramatic point of view. Actually, even in the essays which are critical in their intention, a moral interest is frequently present.

In 1710 Richard Steele used the characters of Desdemone and Othello as examples in an essay in which he maintained that the ordinary part of mankind is never highly pleased or displeased but that "the more informed part of mankind" is seldom indifferent and usually spends its time "in the most anxious vexation, or the highest satisfaction." Shakespeare shows us both varieties of informed behaviour in "the most excellent tragedy of Othello."

---

10 *Tatler*, No. 188, June 22, 1710.
In the character of Desdomone, he runs through all the sentiments of a virtuous maid, and a tender wife. She is captivated by his virtue, and faithful to him as well from that motive as regard to her honour. Othello is a great and noble spirit, misled by the villany of a false friend to suspect her innocence; and resents it accordingly. When, after the many instances of passion, the wife is told the husband is jealous, her simplicity makes her incapable of believing it, and say, after such circumstances as would drive another woman into distraction,

I think the sun where he was born
Drew all such humours from him.

This opinion of him is so just, that his noble and tender heart beats itself to pieces, before he can affront her with the mention of his jealousy; and he owns, this suspicion has blotted out all the sense of glory and happiness which before it was possessed with; when he laments himself in the warm allusions of a mind accustomed to entertainments so very different from the pangs of jealousy and revenge. How moving is his sorrow, when he cries out as follows:

I had been happy, if the general camp, etc.

Steele concludes his analysis by remarking; that he did not think that a more strong and lively picture of nature could be found in any other part of Shakespeare's work.

Steele returned to Shakespeare for an example of human nature in an essay on the subject of flattery in which the imaginative conception of the character by the critic is apparent. Steele is confident that the character will meet the requirements of the actual world as well as he met the requirements of the plot of the play.

Thus it is with Malvolio; he has wit, learning, and discernment, but tempered with an alloy of envy, self love, and detraction. Malvolio turns pale at the mirth and good humour of the company if it center not in his person; he grows jealous and displeased when he ceases to be the only person admired, and looks upon commendations paid to another as a detraction from his merit, and an attempt to lessen the superiority

11 Spectator, No. 238, December 3, 1711.
he affects; but by this very method he bestows such praise as can never be suspected of flattery. His uneasiness and distaste are so many sure and certain signs of another's title to that glory he desires, and has the mortification not to find himself possessed of.

It should be noted that Steele completely ignores the use of the characters in the drama. He is concerned only with their trueness to life, and this fact he assumes.

John Hughes in 1715 used Othello in an essay which combined literary criticism with a caution against the vice of jealousy. Actually the form of the essay is overburdened by the author's first telling of a performance of Othello to which he took his female wards, during which he saw them all betrayed into tears. Then follows the analysis of the play, and after the analysis he further enforces the moral of the play by recounting in detail the misfortunes of the jealous Don Alenzo "which really happened some years ago in Spain."

Although the form of the essay is most awkward, it contains excellent observations not only on the characters of Othello and Iago but also on the conduct of the plot. There can be little doubt that he had Thomas Rymer's condemnation of the play in mind as he wrote. Hughes considers Othello a noble but irregular production of a genius who had the power of animating the English theatre beyond the power of anyone else. The touches of nature, i.e., the depiction of the characters, are strong and masterly, but in some respects the probability of the plot was too much neglected. Yet to speak of it in the most severe terms one would have to borrow Waller's remark on the Maid's Tragedy:

Great are its faults, but glorious is its flame.
However, it would be a poor employment for a critic to point out the faults and pay no attention to the beauties of a work "that has struck the most sensible part of our audiences in a very forcible manner."

The beauties of the piece lie in the characters and in a circumstance of the plot. Othello exemplifies the truth that the strongest love is nearest to the strongest hatred. The tempestuousness of his love and the peculiar wildness of his character seem very artfully to prepare for the change which is to follow. Othello's strife of passions, his starts, his returns to love and threatenings of Iago, his relapses toward jealousy, his rage against his wife, and his asking pardon of Iago, whose fidelity he thinks that he has abused,

are touches which no one can overlook that has the sentiments of human nature, or who has considered the heart of man in its frailties, its penances, and all the variety of its agitation.

He concludes his remarks on Othello by saying that the torments of the Moor are so exquisitely drawn as to make him an object of our compassion even in the killing of Desdemona. Hughes approves of the "deep and subtle villany of Iago" which is drawn with a masterly hand. Of the temptation scene,

Hughes has an opinion at variance with that of Thomas Rymer:

Iago's broken hints, questions, and seeming care to hide the reason of them; his obscure suggestions to raise the curiosity of the Moor; his personated confusion, and refusing to explain himself, while Othello is drawn on and held in suspense until he grows impatient and angry; then his throwing in the poison, and naming to him the passion he would raise

O, beware of jealousy

are inimitable strokes of art, in that scene which has always been justly esteemed one of the best which was represented on the theatre.
The circumstance of the plot which arouses Hughes's admiration is the use of the handkerchief to confirm the suspicion of Othello. The very slightness of the circumstance is its beauty. Hughes ends his examination of the play by admitting that it would be easy for a tasteless critic to turn any of the beauties I have mentioned into ridicule; but such a one would only betray a mechanical judgment, formed out of borrowed rules and commonplace reading, and not arising from any true discernment in human nature and its passions.

The criticism of Hughes was examined at length because it defends Othello against Rymer's strictures and because it is the first essay to consider the characters of Shakespeare within the framework of the plot of the play. In Hughes's comment, moreover, on the proper critical attitude resting in true discernment in human nature and its passions is heard the first statement of the opinion which the character critics will hold to be the most important critical requirement as the rules become less and less important.

Eighteen years before Lewis Theobald published his much maligned edition of Shakespeare in 1733, he published in his periodical, The Censor, the first essays devoted exclusively to the examination of a Shakespearean play. In two essays,12 Theobald examined King Lear by comparing it with the original legend and by using the examen form to point out the faults and beauties of the play. Theobald did not renounce the rules when he criticized Shakespeare; he ignored them. Hence he says nothing of "the General Absurd-

12 No. 7, April 25, 1715, and No. 10, May 2, 1715.
ities of Shakespeare in this and all his other Tragedies. . . "13 They were caused by his ignorance of mechanical rules and by the constitution of the stories; but if they were to come under the lash of criticism, he "could without Regret pardon a Number of them, for being so admirably lost in Excellencies." His purpose is to view the play on its beautiful side by remarking

the Propriety of Lear's conduct, how well it is supported throughout the scenes, and what Spirit and Elegance reign in the Language and Sentiments.14

Censor, No. 7, is largely given over to Theobald's retelling of the story of the ancient king. In the second essay he shows how Shakespeare heightened the distress of the story and yet maintained the same tenor and how finally he "Artfully preserved the Character and Manners of Lear throughout his Tragedy." This is accomplished by pointing out briefly the parts of the play which demonstrate each of these claims. This study, which is completely in the neo-classical manner, finds Theobald in opposition to John Dennis and Charles Gildon in his opinion that Shakespeare's ability in the artful preservation of Lear's character was so great that had Shakespeare read all that Aristotle, and Horace, and the Criticks have wrote on this Score, he could not have wrought more happily.15

This burst of confidence leads Theobald to a further praise of Shakespeare in his depiction of Lear's madness, which had never been equalled in the

13 No. 7.
14 Ibid.
15 No. 10.
past nor, he suspects, will ever be equalled in the future.

Although the study of King Lear was completely literary in its tone and purpose, Theobald did not return to this type of essay again. Allusions to the other plays occur in the Censor, but these references have little to do with literary criticism. Theobald's use of Othello in No. 16 to prove that jealousy arises from a poorness of spirit shows the same use of the characters as Steele and Hughes had employed. Theobald's view of Shakespeare's wisdom was high:

The Plagues and Consequences of this Passion are so exquisitely described in Shakespeare's Othello, that this Play may serve as a compleat Commonplace Book of Cautions against entertaining rash suspicions. But such a remark also shows that Theobald did not realize the beauty of the whole drama but could only see its individual good points.

It cannot be claimed that any one of these essays is remarkable for any deep understanding of the characters or for an enthusiasm which the critic felt and attempted to pass on to his readers. Hughes had mentioned Shakespeare's art, and Theobald returned to the idea in his essays. The

16 Hamlet, Nos. 16, 54, 83, 90, 93, and Julius Caesar, No. 70.

17 No. 16.

18 A typical statement occurs in No. 16: "As I never see the Rage of the Moor when he is worked up by the Villany of Iago, without the greatest pity; so I am strongly pleased to observe the Art of the Poet, with what a curious Happiness he has trac'd this Passion, with what little Baits he has laid to feed Othello's suspicion, and what Sentiments of Resentment he has fir'd him with, at every now suggestion of being injur'd. His very Resolution against Jealouy speaks him prepar'd for Doubts, and bent to sift the Truth."
The neo-classical critic usually spoke of Shakespeare's genius and implied that Shakespeare was not conscious of his powers. The critics who interested themselves primarily in the characters however noted that Shakespeare skillfully worked for the effects which he achieved.

The essays of Joseph Warton (1722-1800) on The Tempest and King Lear appeared thirty-six years after Theobald's essays had appeared in the Censor. Although no character analyses were apparently written during this period, Warton's essays reflect the increasing disregard for the rules on the part of the critics who found them unsatisfactory or on the part of those critics who claimed that Shakespeare was "outside the rules."

19 Adventurer, Nos. 93, September 25, 1753, and 97, October 9, 1753.

20 Adventurer, Nos. 113, December 4, 1753, 116, December 15, 1753, and 122, January 3, 1754.


22 From the beginning of the century Shakespeare presented an embarrassing problem to the followers of the rules. Rowe had observed in 1709, that "It would be hard to try a man by a law he knew nothing of." Steele in the Spectator, No. 592, September 10, 1714, denied their validity, at least insofar as Shakespeare was concerned, when he asked, "Who would not rather read one of his Plays, where there is not a single Rule of the Stage observed, than any production of a modern Critick, where there is not one of them violated?" In the Preface to his edition of Shakespeare, Pope had followed Rowe when he observed that "To judge, therefore, of Shakespeare by Aristotle's rules, is like trying a man by the Laws of one Country, who acted under those of another."--Works of Shakespeare, I, vi. William Warburton's opinion is, as one might expect, similar to Pope's opinion: "For tho' it be true, as Mr. Pope hath observed, that Shakespeare is the fairest and fullest subject for criticism, yet it is not such a sort of criticism as may be raised mechanically on the rules which Dacier, Rapin, and Bossu, have collected from antiquity; and of which such writers as Rymer, Gildon,
The position of the latter group of critics suggested a deficiency in that no critical standards were available to evaluate so important an author as Shakespeare. In Warton's essays one finds an attempt to fill this need.

In the first essay of the series, Warton announced that his purpose was to fix Shakespeare's merit as a poet. In language which recalls Pope's observation on the same subject, Warton states that the regularity of Horace and Virgil confine critics of these poets to perpetual panegyrics on their beauties and afford the critics few opportunities for diversifying their remarks by detecting latent blomishes. Shakespeare is an ideal author to examine because he exhibits more numerous examples of excellencies and faults, of every kind, than are, perhaps, to be discovered in any other author. Although Warton's use of the beauties and faults terminology seems to place him on a level with the judicial critics, he triumphs over the method and uses little more than its technical words.

Before Warton begins his examination of The Tempest, he lists the characteristic faults and beauties of the poet. Shakespeare's plots are sometimes blamable because they violate unity, and his diction is sometimes obscure and turgid. This is the complete list of the faults, and one notices that Warton uses "sometimes" to qualify both judgments. He lists

Dennis, and Oldmixon have gathered only the husks."--The Works of Shakespeare, London, 1747, I, xviii. The work of the character critics of the second half of the century was an effort to provide such a variety of criticism.

23 Pope, The Works of Shakespeare, I, i.
Shakespeare's excellencies under three headings: his lively creative imagination, his strokes of nature and passion, and his preservation of the consistency of his characters.

Evidence of the reaction against the rules of the unities appears in Warton's statement that Shakespeare's excellencies and particularly his ability to preserve his characters are of so much importance in the drama that they amply compensate for his transgressions against the unities of time and place which are often observed strictly by geniuses of the lowest order. But to portray characters naturally and to preserve them skillfully require such an intimate knowledge of the heart of man and happen so seldom that perhaps only two writers have enjoyed them, Homer and Shakespeare.24

Holding these principles, Warton naturally intends to show the consistency of Shakespeare's characters by pointing out some of the "master strokes" in The Tempest. In No. 93, Warton examines Ariel and finds that he has a set of images peculiar to his station and office and that his habitations and pastimes, which he describes in the exquisite song

Where the bee sucks, there suck I,

are delightfully suitable to his character.

In No. 97, Warton examines the characters of Caliban and Miranda. In his opinion, Shakespeare has succeeded in the difficult and hazardous task of creating an original character in Caliban, who is a monster of

24 By the end of the century, Shakespeare had been frequently compared favorably in character analyses with Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.
cruelty, malice, pride, ignorance, idleness, gluttony, and lust. Shakespeare showed delicate judgment in showing Caliban's ignorance by having him ignorant of the names of the sun and moon and in thinking that Stephano was the man in the moon. His using his power of speech to curse and the delight he takes in enumerating the ways in which the sailors could kill Prospero are further touches Shakespeare has used in painting Caliban. Shakespeare seems the only poet who is able to unite poetry with propriety of character. The most striking example of this ability is Caliban's saying to the sailors,

Pray you tread softly, that the blind mole may not 
Hear a foot-fall.

This image is at once highly poetical and exactly suited to the wildness of the speaker. However, Warton thinks that Shakespeare erred in having Caliban change from his fierce and implacable spirit by having him say at the end of the play,

I'll be wise hereafter.

The character of Miranda is entirely original. Shakespeare has so much fancy that he is able to put two originals in the same play. The lovely and innocent Miranda shows the tenderness, innocence, and simplicity of her character in meeting with Ferdinand in the wood as he goes about the task imposed on him by Prospero. Shakespeare is able to depict character by selecting little and almost imperceptible circumstances such as this one. Shakespeare shows character far better in this way than Dryden did by his characters or Rowe did with the amorous declamations which he put into the mouths of his characters.
Warton's painstaking analysis of the characters was undertaken to show how uniformity of character, "that leading beauty in dramatic poetry," is preserved throughout the play. His close attention to his task did not cause him to overlook the spirit of the whole play. He noted with praise the magic of Shakespeare's poetry. Of the lines,

The isle is full of noises
Sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not,

he observes:

The poet is more a powerful magician than his own Prospero. We are transported into fairy land; we are rapt in a delicious dream, from which it is misery to be disturbed; all around us is enchantment.25

Here one can see the beginning of a new appreciation for Shakespeare's art. The critic catches the tone of the play in a way that the judicial critics had been unable to and then communicates it to his audience.

In his series of essays on King Lear,26 Warton proposed to consider the judgment and art of the poet in presenting the origin and the cause of Lear's madness,27 and the three articles follow Lear scene by scene in the play. In the first essay of the series, Warton again asserts Shakespeare's rightful place in literature when he says that Shakespeare has succeeded in showing the origin and progress of Lear's distraction better than any other writer who attempted a similar task. Shakespeare has even excelled Euripides, whom Longinus had commended for his representation

25 No. 93.
26 Nos. 113, 116, 122.
27 No. 113.
of the madness of Orestes.

Warton perhaps felt that such a close examination of a play might seem unnecessary to people who followed the neo-classical examen method.

His defense of his method, a method which came to be the ordinary method in Shakespearean criticism as a result of the work of the character analysts, deserves full quotation:

General criticism is on all subjects useless and uninteresting; but it is more than commonly absurd with respect to Shakespeare, who must be accompanied step by step and scene by scene, in his gradual developments of characters and passions, and whose finer features must be singly pointed out, if we would do compleat justice to his genuine beauties. It would have been easy to have declared in general terms, 'that the madness of Lear was very natural and pathetic'; and the reader might then have escaped, what he may, perhaps, call a multitude of well-known quotations: but then it had been impossible to exhibit a perfect picture of the secret workings and changes of Lear's mind, which vary in each succeeding passage, and which render an allegation of each particular sentiment absolutely necessary.

The passage is remarkable not only for pointing out the growing feeling that the method of the judicial critics was inadequate but also for the assertion that Shakespeare's characters develop gradually. Here are individuals whose characters unfold, not static type characters whose traits are known at the beginning of the play and whose propriety can be checked against the laws of a compiler of the traits which characters ought to possess.

Just as in his remarks on *The Tempest*, so also in his remarks on *King Lear*, Warton is conscious of Shakespeare's great art in giving natural dialogue to his characters in the most trying circumstances. He points out three scenes in which Shakespeare has exercised this art. In the first of
these, Lear informs Regan of the harsh treatment which he had received from Goneril.

Beloved Regan,
Thy sister's naught--O Regan! she hath tied
Sharp-toothed unkindness, like a vulture, here.
I can scarce speak to thee--thou'lt not believe
With how depraved a quality--O Regan!" 29

Warton points out that it is "a stroke of wonderful art" to represent Lear as incapable of saying exactly what ill-usage he had received and to show him breaking off abruptly as if he was choked with tenderness and resentment. 30

The second expression of Warton's admiration for Shakespeare's great art comes when Warton comments on the line,

0 me, my heart! my rising heart!--but down. 31

He points out that other tragic writers would have put a long speech enumerating the causes of his anguish in his mouth.

But Nature, Sophocles, and Shakespeare represent the feelings of the heart in a different manner; by a broken hint, a short exclamation, a word, or a look. 32

The third expression which calls for Warton's praise is Lear's remark, "Wilt break my heart?" when Kent asks him to take shelter in the hovel. Warton presents what he imagines to be the thoughts of Lear at the time as he contrasted the cruelty of his daughters with the kindness of his

29 II, iv, 135-139.
30 No. 113.
31 II, iv, 122.
32 No. 113.
In the third essay, Warton traces the cause of Lear's madness, and in this essay finds that the resignation of his crown to cruel and unnatural daughters is the particular idea on which Lear dwells in his madness. Warton brings all the passages in which Lear speaks of royalty to prove his point. Having thus accomplished his purpose in showing the consistency with which Lear's character is presented and showing the cause of his madness, Warton concludes the series of essays with a paragraph in which he lists "the considerable imperfections" with which the drama has been charged.

Warton's essays on The Tempest and King Lear can be said to be the first indication of the real promise which the new method of Shakespearean criticism showed. The idea that Shakespeare's plays must be examined minutely, and the insistence on the importance of Shakespeare's great gifts as a natural character delineator are the two most important developments.

33 No. 116.

34 Warton's earlier opinion expressed in Adventurer, No. 113, is much more cogent: "Their unnatural ingratitude, the intolerable affronts, indignities and cruelties he suffers from them, and the remorse he feels from his imprudent resignation of his power, at first enflame him with the most violent rage and by degrees drive him to madness and death."

35 These are the Edmund-Edgar plot which distracts the attention and destroys unity, Gloucester's blinding on the stage, the improbability of his leap, some turgid passages and strained metaphors, and the too savage and unnatural cruelty of his daughters. In his notes to King Lear, Samuel Johnson defended Shakespeare from Warton's criticism of the Edmund-Edgar plot and of the cruelty of the daughters. Cf. Raleigh, Johnson on Shakespeare, 160.
although Warton's reference to Shakespeare's magic and "Nature, Sophocles, and Shakespeare" are also important, pointing as they do towards the new appreciation of Shakespeare.

The discussion of Lear's madness in The Adventurer, No. 122, called forth a reply from Arthur Murphy (1727-1805), who devoted three essays to the problem. In the first of these essays, Murphy claims that the behavior of Lear's children is what is uppermost in his mind and that eventually Lear cannot take his attention from the subject of his children's ingratitude. The rest of the essay is given over to a careful examination of the text of the play to prove the correctness of his view. The second essay, No. 66, supposedly written by one of Murphy's readers, points out that both qualities, the loss of royalty suggested by Warton and the filial ingratitude pointed out by Murphy, are responsible for Lear's madness. The last essay of the series, No. 87, returns to Murphy's original position which he considers an adequate explanation. He does not answer the objection that the plot shows Lear's folly.

Murphy's essays show an awareness of Shakespeare's art as a de-

36 Gray's Inn Journal, No. 65, January 12, 1754, No. 66, January 19, 1754, and No. 87, April 7, 1754.

37 Samuel Johnson decided this controversy in Murphy's favor in his notes on the play. Cf. Raleigh, Johnson on Shakespeare, 162.

38 In No. 65, Murphy claims that an examination of the plot shows that it displays "the horrid crime of filial ingratitude." The author of No. 66 counters with the claim that the moral of the play "does not expose the Ingratitude of children, more than the folly of parents." The author points out that the sub-plot shows the same folly in Gloucester.
According to Murphy, Shakespeare’s characters are individuals each of whom operates "according to his peculiar Habit and Frame of Mind." Not only is each character an individual, but Shakespeare also contrives to show us fully rounded characters, as the author of No. 66 points out when he says that Shakespeare not only shows us the characters as they exist in the plays, "but we are also made acquainted, by some nice Touches in each Play, with their former Mode of thinking and acting." This reference to the fulness of Shakespeare’s characterization is one of the points which the later critics came to notice and praise, and it is the actual basis of the work of Maurice Morgann.

As it was noted in Chapter Two, Samuel Johnson’s notes on the characters of the plays are usually short and in the judicial style. Two notes, however, stand in contrast to the others and in them is apparent the quality which distinguishes all character analyses from the judicial enumeration of the traits of character. The quality is the imagination of the critic which lifts the character out of the play and examines it, not according to a code of character decorum but according to the critic’s knowledge of human life.

In his note on Polonius, Johnson’s method recalls that of the

---

39 In No. 41, July 28, 1753, Murphy had placed himself on the side of those who emphasized character depiction at the expense of plot regularity when he said, "But Fable is but a secondary Beauty; the Exhibition of Character, and the Excitement of the Passions justly claiming the Precedence in Dramatic Poetry."

40 No. 65.
periodical essayist who looked for a character to serve as an example of the truth of his remarks. For him, the character of Polonius is one in which Shakespeare shows a truth to life as the critic knows it or to what Johnson called "general nature." No longer is it necessary to ask whether or not a king, a general, a soldier, or a slave would "probably" have a particular feeling. One shifts to another basis of judging and asks whether a man who is a patriot, or in love, or is melancholic, or is jealous, or rash, etc., would act as the character acts. Instead of looking for occupational characteristics, the critics examine the characters in the light of the human emotions.

---

41 "Polonius is a man bred in courts, exercised in business, stored with observation, confident of his knowledge, proud of his eloquence, and declining into dotage. His mode of oratory is truly represented as designed to ridicule the practice of those times, or prefaces that made no introduction, and of method that embarrassed rather than explained. This part of his character is accidental, the rest is natural. Such a man excels in general principles, but fails in particular application. He is knowing in retrospect, and ignorant in foresight. While he depends upon his memory, and can draw from his repositories of knowledge, he utters weighty sentences, and gives useful counsel; but as the mind in its enfeebled state cannot be kept long busy and intent, the old man is subject to sudden dereliction of his faculties, he loses the order of his ideas, and entangles himself in his own thoughts, till he recovers the leading principle, and falls again into his former train."--Raleigh, Johnson on Shakespeare, 190-191.

42 The application of this variety of criticism has been seen in the work of Steele, Hughes, and Theobald. It occurs again in an essay by William Craig in The Lounger, No. 91, October 28, 1786. The author, writing on melancholia, uses the characters of Hamlet, Jaques, and Timon to show the various stages of the development of this quality in an individual. According to Craig, melancholia and a gloomy point of view spring up when a person of genius finds folly where he expects wisdom, falsehood in the place of honor, coarseness in the place of delicacy, and selfishness and insensibility where he had expected to find generosity and refinement. Such a person is in danger of becoming a misanthrope. The misanthropy of which the author speaks does not proceed from hate of mankind but rather "from too much sen-
The new touchstone is apparent in Johnson’s character sketch of Falstaff. The cordiality and gusto of its beginning put it in a class different from the work of men who were more interested in proving a point of their own making than in examining the characters of the plays as they presented themselves. When one reads the note one feels the same warmth of appreciation that one felt in reading the note of Warton on the Tempest.

But Falstaff unimitated, unimitable Falstaff, how shall I describe thee? Thou compound of sense and vice; of sense which may be admired but not esteemed, of vice which may be despised, but hardly detested. . . .

Such ardor, it must be confessed, soon cools, for Samuel Johnson is well aware that Falstaff is possessed of many vices, a great many of which he proceeds to catalogue. To his credit, however, he sees that Falstaff is not simply a cowardly clown but that he is a complex character in whom cowardice is only one and then not even the most predominant vice. In Johnson’s mind, Falstaff’s pleasing qualities are "the most pleasing of all qualities," a perpetual gaiety and the unfailing power of exciting laughter. As if he thought that his enumeration of Falstaff’s vices were a little too unrelenting, Johnson notes that Falstaff’s crimes are not enormous or sanguinary, so that his licentiousness is not so offensive that it cannot be borne for the sake of his mirth.  

---

43 Raleigh, Johnson on Shakespeare, 125.

44 Ibid.
The Shakespearean criticism of Thomas Whately, Maurice Morgann, Henry Mackenzie, and Richard Cumberland illustrates the truth of D. N. Smith’s assertion that Johnson’s summary of the criticism which had gone before left little or no room for further generalizations.\(^{45}\) Already in 1753, Warton had pointed out how meaningless general praise of Shakespeare was. In the work of these later men one sees the efforts to show the achievements of Shakespeare by making minute examinations of the actions of the characters of the plays and by showing that Shakespeare’s achievement was one of art and not chance, and that the approach to artistic achievement need not be made by means of the rules.

Thomas Whately’s *Remarks on Some of the Characters of Shakespeare*\(^{46}\) is an example of the urge to show in detail that Shakespeare was as able to keep his characters distinct from each other as he was to preserve their consistency. Whately proposed to show in detail that each of Shakespeare’s characters was so completely and individually conceived that, although two


\(^{46}\) Although it was written before 1770, *Remarks on Some of the Characters* was first published in 1785 after the death of its author. The edition used in this thesis was edited in 1839 by his nephew Richard Whately, who added his own introduction to the work. According to his nephew, the study of Macbeth and Richard was only one of several parallel studies which Thomas Whately intended to make to show Shakespeare’s power as a delineator of character. After finishing the study of Macbeth and Richard however he set the project aside in order to complete his *Observations on Modern Gardening*, which appeared in 1770. When he died in 1772, the study of Macbeth was still in MS and was printed by Joseph Whately in 1785, who credited it to "the Author of Observations on Modern Gardening." The study was reissued with his name attached in 1809 and was issued with an introduction by Richard Whately in 1839.
characters held the same station in life and did similar things, they were remarkably distinct in their personalities.

Whately's attitude towards dramatic theory is the one which emphasizes the primary importance of character depiction in the drama. He notes that rules for the conduct of the plot in the past have been called the rules of the drama, but he insists that the plot is of secondary importance.

The distinction and preservation of character is more worthy of attention than the common topics of discussion. Without distinction and preservation of character a play is at best a tale and we perceive that the character before our eyes is merely suppositious.\(^47\)

Whately points out that experience has shown that the three unities may be dispensed with and the "magic of the scene" may make the absurdity invisible. Tragedies may not be pathetic and still may be engaging, just as comedies may be destitute of humor and still be amusing. The beauties of poetry and fancy cannot be used with some subjects, and very few of them absolutely require the beauties of poetry and fancy. But variety and truth of character are absolutely required in drama; and when the characters are not well presented, the want cannot be supplied or concealed. The delusion fails, and the interest ceases.\(^48\)

Well conceived characters possess character traits which are as individual as those of people in life. In Whately's theory the audience


\(^{48}\) Ibid., 20.
looks for realism in the characters and finds it in the personal touches which the author has given the character. His attitude towards the subject is also seen in his remark that if the expression does not fit the character exactly, the effect on the audience will be weak because "so much of the reality is wanting in the imitation." In the past, critics have realized the importance of characterization and have attempted to give directions for constructing well distinguished and preserved characters, but they have failed because the general marks of distinction these critics have given to the characters do not show the individual but merely show the general class of mankind to which he belongs.

Whately's theory does not, as it will be seen, advocate a depiction of character which stresses idiosyncracies and praises caricature. In reacting against the type theory of characterization with its neat formulation of the probable character traits, he emphasizes the particular traits and insists that the character is convincing because it possesses a personality which the audience recognizes as human.

The old system of probable traits simply is not convincing. Whately points out that characters are not as simple as the neo-classical critics claimed that they were. He points out the difference between the neo-classical theory and the actuality in this way:

49 Ibid.
50 Ibid., 22.
51 Ibid.
Elevated ideas become the hero; a professed contempt of all principles denotes a villain; frequent gusts of rage betray a violence, and tender sentiments show a mildness, of disposition. But a villain differs not more from a saint, then he does in some particulars from another as bad as himself: and the same degree of anger excited by the same occasion breaks forth in as many shapes as there are various tempers.\(^5\)

The artful depiction of character by the author in such a way as to portray a natural character must therefore avoid the extremes of giving the character a collection of general traits which are not particularized and hence making the character vague in outline, and must avoid on the other extreme giving the character so many distinguishing peculiarities that the imitation is overcharged. The first fault is commonly committed by tragic writers who fall short of depicting character, and the second fault is commonly committed by comic writers whose work runs to caricature.\(^5\)

Using this theory of characterization as a guide, Whately finds that Shakespeare has generally avoided both faintly defined characters and caricatures. In character depiction, "the most essential part of the drama," Shakespeare is excellent beyond comparison.

No other dramatist could ever pretend to so deep and so extensive a knowledge of the human heart, and he had a genius to express all that his penetration could discover. The characters therefore which he has drawn are masterly copies from nature; differing each from the other and animated as the originals though correct to a scrupulous precision.\(^5\)

Shakespeare's excellence as a delineator of character suggests that a study

\(^{52}\) Ibid., 23-24.

\(^{53}\) Ibid., 24.

\(^{54}\) Ibid., 25.
of his characters is worthy of our attention even though general rules such as are used in criticizing the plot are not available. Each character suggests a variety of remarks, and the critic soon becomes accustomed to observing traits of character which is a useful and agreeable method of forming one's judgment on dramatic characters and on one's fellow men.

Having thus set up his principles, Whately selects the characters of Macbeth and Richard III to show how differently Shakespeare has conceived and developed the two characters even though they are similar in their surface situations. Of all of Shakespeare's characters, none seem to agree so much in situation, and differ so much in disposition as Richard the Third and Macbeth. Both are soldiers, both usurpers, both attain the throne by the same means, by treason and murder; and both lose it too in the same manner, in battle against the person claiming it as lawful heir. Perfidy, violence and tyranny are common to both; and those only, their obvious qualities, would have been attributed indiscriminately to both by an ordinary dramatic writer. But Shakespeare... has ascribed opposite principles and motives to the same designs of the same events upon different tempers. Richard and Macbeth, as represented by him, agree in nothing but their fortunes.55

The comparison of Richard and Macbeth is made in great detail on the bases of their basic feeling towards humanity, their ambition, courage, attitudes towards their crimes, disguising of their wickedness, and attitude towards the outcome of the decisive battle. Whately finds that the characters are not only marked by opposite qualities but even differ in cause, kind, and degree of the similar qualities which they possess. Ambition is common to both, but Macbeth's ambition proceeds from vanity which is flat-

55 Ibid., 28.
tered by the splendour of a throne, and Richard's ambition is founded in pride and his ruling passion is lust for power. 

Whately compared their courage and found that Richard's courage is intrepidity and that of Macbeth is no more than resolution. According to Whately, Macbeth's courage comes with a conscious effort and not naturally. In his actions he betrays some fear although he is able to stifle it.

The reader of Whately's book is struck by the good judgment of the critic which is apparent in his remarks on the characters and in the conclusions. He does not insist that Shakespeare was conscious of the con-

56 Ibid., 48-49.

57 Whately's opinion of Macbeth's courage led to a controversy. John Philip Kemble (1757-1823) took an opposite point of view in a book which will be discussed later in this chapter. George Steevens, the Shakespearean editor, praised Whately's essay highly. "The late Mr. Whately's Remarks on Some of the Characters of Shakespeare have shown, with the utmost clearness of distinction and felicity of arrangement, that what in Richard III is fortitude, in Macbeth is no more than resolution." He "dissents in one particular from an Essay, which otherwise is too comprehensive to need a supplement and too rational to admit of confutation." Steevens objects to Whately's opinion that Macbeth's inferiority of courage is caused by his natural disposition. In Steevens's opinion his genuine intrepidity forsook him when he ceased to be a virtuous character. He sums up Macbeth's character in these words: "To conclude; a picture of conscience enroaching on fortitude, of magnanimity once animated by virtue and afterwards extinguished by guilt, was what Shakespeare meant to display in the character and conduct of Macbeth."--Isaac Reed, ed., The Plays of William Shakespeare, 5th ed., London, 1803, X, 296-299. The fact that Steevens took no notice of Kemble's work so annoyed Kemble that he included a confutation of Steevens's opinion in the 1817 edition of his book.

58 The book had more influence than any other study of the characters which was made in the eighteenth century. Charles Knight, the Victorian publisher, notes that Whately's Remarks, which he read in 1811, gave him his first critical understanding of Shakespeare. In 1838, Knight first published his Pictorial Edition of Shakespeare. Cf. Charles Knight, Passages of a Working Life, London, 1864, II, 261. William Hazlitt in speaking of
contrast between the two characters. In his opinion the distinctness of the two characters comes from Shakespeare's different idea of each man which he followed so closely that the contrast is surprising when the two characters are compared.59 Also noteworthy is the fact that Whately does not praise indiscriminately. He finds, for instance, that the character of Richard is carelessly drawn in comparison with the character of Macbeth.

Through whole speeches and scenes character is often wanting; but in the worst instances of this kind Shakespeare is but insipid; he is not inconsistent; and in his peculiar excellence of drawing characters, though he often neglects to exert his talents, he is rarely guilty of perverting them.60

Whately's opinion of the relative poorness of the characterization of Richard is somewhat indicative of what close attention to character development can achieve for the critic. Using other methods, the modern "Shakespeare dis-integrators" have reached the conclusion that Shakespeare had only a small part in the writing of Richard the Third.61

The study of the two characters shows Shakespeare as a masterful delineator of character by contrasting Macbeth and Richard. Whately imagines that they are real characters and discusses them independently of the plot.


59 Whately, Remarks, 119.

60 Ibid., 120.

This is a tribute to the characters; however such a restricted treatment slight a consideration of the plot which provides the occasions for the characters to act in such a characteristic fashion.  

Whately's Remarks provoked a sharp answer from John Philip Kemble, the Shakespearean actor, who published Macbeth Reconsidered to defend Macbeth from what he considered an accusation of cowardice by Whately. In his comparison of the courage of the two men, Whately had said that Richard's courage is intrepidity and Macbeth's no more than resolution. Kemble thought that this opinion did less than justice to Macbeth. His book, however, is more interesting for its author's critical attitude towards the characters of Shakespeare in general and his method of analyzing them than it is for the conclusions he reaches. Actually his book attacks a position which neither Whately nor Steevens had held. Kemble finally came to the conclusion that the courage of Richard is simple intrepidity and the courage of Macbeth is intrepidity and feeling. It is obvious to the reader that Whately and Kemble are using different words to express the same idea. As

62 Morgann's analysis of Falstaff also does not pay attention to the plot. This neglect is not of course an oversight on Morgann's part but a necessity if he is to fascinate the reader by proving Falstaff's constitutional courage. See below, pages 132, 143. But in Morgann's work Falstaff is the occasion of a much more searching investigation of Shakespeare's ability. See below,

63 London, 1786. This edition of Kemble's book was unavailable for use in writing this thesis. The second edition, entitled Macbeth and King Richard the Third, London, 1817, was used in its place.

64 Remarks, 54.

65 Macbeth, 169.
Richard Whately points out, the character of Macbeth presented by Thomas Whately is possessed of a kind of courage that would make him welcome to the general of any army. One feels that Kemble has overstated his case when he claims that he has rescued Macbeth from a charge of constitutional timidity.

The critical supposition of Kemble's book has an interest for the historian of criticism because Kemble views the character, as an actor naturally would, from the point of view of the construction of the play. He points out that the shortness of the time allotted to the presentation of a play does not allow the main characters to unfold themselves gradually and that the audience is to take at face value the descriptions of the characters presented by other characters before they enter the scene. In general Kemble's critical position on the characters development is similar to that of Elmer Edgar Stoll.

Kemble's attitude towards characterization shows that he followed

66 Remarks, xiii.
67 Macbeth, 171.
68 Ibid., 15. Kemble's position is one which presupposes static rather than dynamic characters. No doubt Kemble would not insist on it categorically, for he would recognize that what a character says of another may be used by the playwright to characterize the speaker.

69 His Shakespearean Studies Historical and Comparative in Method, New York, 1927, and Art and Artifice in Shakespeare, Cambridge, England, 1933 insist on the necessity for interpreting the plays in strict accordance with their construction and their adherence to contemporary theatrical conventions.
the trend towards emphasizing the importance of characterization over plot.

Truth of character and passion, the real touchstone and test of dramatic worth, is the unrivalled attribute of Shakespeare's muse; and, in the general estimation of mankind, this charm will probably maintain to him the highest place among the poets of the stage, as long as Human Nature shall hold on its appointed course. 70

As an actor, his opinion of the individuality of the characters is worthy of attention. He speaks of them as human creatures individuated by peculiarities, but always connected with the general nature of man "by some fine link of universal interest and by some passion to which they are liable in common with their kind." 71

The character analyses which William Richardson (1743-1814)72 produced are proof of the ever growing belief that Shakespeare's characters were so lifelike that for all practical purposes an examination of the characters of Shakespeare was the same as an examination of living persons.

The purpose of Richardson's examinations of the characters is not literary, however; he is not concerned with demonstrating Shakespeare's accuracy as a depictor of character, he assumes it. He is not interested in the esthetic problems of the parts the characters play in the total effect

70 Macbeth, 6.

71 Ibid., 166.

72 Essays on Shakespeare's Dramatic Characters, 6th edition, London, 1812, is the final edition of his work on the characters of Shakespeare which he began in 1774. The sixth edition contains studies of Macbeth, Hamlet, Jaques, Imogen, Richard III, Falstaff, King Lear, Timon, and Fluellen, and also essays on the faults of Shakespeare, the female characters, and a concluding essay on the chief objects of Shakespearean criticism.
of the drama. Richardson's purpose is moral rather than critical, as he admits:

It is therefore my intention to examine some of his remarkable characters and to analyze their component parts. An exercise no less adopted to improve the heart than to improve the understanding. My intention is to make poetry subservient to philosophy, and to employ it in tracing the principles of human conduct.73

As R. W. Babcock points out,74 Richardson selected the plays of Shakespeare because in them we can note the passions statically whereas it is impossible for us to analyze our own fleeting passions. By seeing Shakespeare's imitations of the passions we may be improved morally and conquer our own passions to our own everlasting salvation.

Richardson's primary purpose of making "poetry subservient to philosophy" makes his criticism of Shakespeare of only secondary interest,75 and for that reason his work will not be considered in detail. The subservience of poetry to philosophy is so complete that only at rare intervals does Richardson remember that he is examining a literary work.

His method recalls that of the earlier analyses of Steele, Hughes, and Theobald, although the detail is many times increased and the whole attitude is much more solemn. The method is strictly a priori. Richardson


begins by noting some truth of human nature, next he examines the character, and finally he draws a moral conclusion. It can be seen that this type of criticism contains a grave danger in that the critic merely shows that this piece of literature supports his contention or does not support it. Less fraught with dangers is the method which examines the play carefully and then asks whether the picture of life corresponds to life as the critic knows it. Richardson’s axioms never conflict with Shakespeare but the reader wonders if the moralizing would not have succeeded just as well without using the characters. It cannot be said that Richardson’s insight makes most of the examinations worth the trouble. His conclusion to the study of Macbeth’s character is that

by considering the rise and progress of a ruling passion, and the fatal consequences of its indulgence, we have shown, how a beneficient mind may become inhuman. 76

Nor did Richardson’s insight into the significance of the struggles of a Shakespearean tragic hero increase with the passing years. In the volume which he published in 1784, he concluded that the study of the character of Lear shows us that

mere sensibility, undirected by reflection, leads men to an extravagant expression both of social and unsocial feelings; renders them capriciously inconstant in their affections; variable and irresolute. 77

The character of Timon shows us

---


the consequences of that inconsiderate profusion which has the appearance of liberality, and is supposed even by the inconsiderate person himself to proceed from a generous principle; but which, in reality, has its chief origin in the love of distinction.78

Robinson points out that Richardson did not reach a high degree of success in his analyses. The moral and ethical implications which he abstracts from the characters may be correct, but the analyst fails to make the cause of the dramatic strength of the characters explicit.79 One feels that the character is little less real after reading an analysis of it by Richardson.

None the less it would seem to be impossible for a critic to devote as much attention as Richardson did to the characters and fail to note some of the achievements of Shakespeare as a delineator of character. R. W. Babcock80 has found three achievements in Richardson's work. In the first place he emphasized the fact that Shakespeare's female characters were to be considered as finished portraits not less skilfully made than his portraits of his male characters.81 He also noted that Shakespeare presented various national traits skilfully in comedy. Lastly he noted the seeming lack of motivation for Hamlet's hesitation.

78 Essays on Shakespeare's Dramatic Characters, 85, as cited in Robinson, English Shakespearean Criticism, 186.

79 Robinson, English Shakespearean Criticism, 186.


81 In Tatler, No. 42, July 16, 1709, Steele had praised Shakespeare for showing women as they were in his day when they were seen usually as mothers, sisters, daughters, and wives, and not as "shining wits, politicians, virtuosae, free-thinkers, and disputants." And he praised Desdemona in Tatler, No. 188. Warton's praise of Miranda in Adventurer, No. 97, seems to be the only other notice of the female characters in analyses before this.
CHAPTER IV

MAURICE MORGANN'S RECOGNITION OF SHAKESPEARE'S CONSCIOUS ARTISTRY

Although the work of Richardson on the characters is specifically non-literary, it is based on the assumption that they are exactly true to life. A work written in the same year that Richardson's first studies appeared (1774) but published three years later proves that the poet who produced this trueness to life was an artist who was supremely conscious of the effects which he was achieving. Maurice Morgann's essay, On the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff,¹ which was published in 1777, stands alone and far above all the other specifically literary criticism which concerned itself in detail with Shakespeare during the eighteenth century.² It is undoubtedly one of the most successfully carried out literary tours de force of any age. Its purpose according to its title is to investigate


² Maurice Morgann (1726-1802) was not a professional man of letters. He held a variety of governmental positions, the chief of which were under-secretary to William Fitzmaurice Petty during his administration of 1782 and secretary to the embassy for ratifying the peace with the United States in 1783. His essay on Falstaff is apparently his only work of literary criticism, his other published works being anonymously issued pamphlets on public questions. At his death he directed that all his unpublished papers be destroyed.
Falstaff's character, and this it does with a precision and attention to detail which anticipates later romantic criticism. However, Morgann announces early in the essay that his purpose is much broader than the title suggests:

The reader need not be told that this Inquiry will resolve itself of course into a Critique on the genius, the arts, and the conduct of Shakespeare: For what is Falstaff, what is Lear, what Hamlet, or Othello, but different modifications of Shakespeare's thought?

But in spite of this statement, Morgann's essay concerns itself primarily with the character of Falstaff. All of Morgann's principles and opinions on Shakespeare, in which he clearly anticipates Coleridge and Hazlitt in insight and enthusiasm, are scattered through an essay which baffles the reader who attempts to follow Morgann in his argument in order to discover just how he is able to vindicate Falstaff from the charge of cowardice.

The whole essay is a tribute of praise to Shakespeare, and in that it is no novelty in eighteenth century criticism; but Morgann's essay is a tribute, not to an inspired barbarian, but to a craftsman who worked consciously to achieve the effects his plays created. It was not by chance that Falstaff was such a popular character, for Shakespeare had decided to produce a more complete comic character than had ever been seen before on the stage. Before Shakespeare's time, the "fools and Zanys" had been crude characters possessed of one essential folly together with a dash of knave and coxcomb. Shakespeare had decided to produce a more difficult figure, an eminent buffoon who had the high relish of wit, humor, birth, dignity,

---

3 Maurice Morgann, Sir John Falstaff, in Eighteenth Century Essays, 225.
and courage. This opinion of Morgann on Shakespeare's art in creating Falstaff is the one, of course, which he expects the reader to accept as correct after the reader has followed him in his demonstrations and reasoning.

Morgann's critical ideas occur in large part in digressions from his examination of the character of Falstaff, although these ideas implicitly underlie the whole work. The examination of Falstaff's character is undertaken on the basis of Morgann's opinion that Shakespeare created characters so real that they can be considered as historical rather than dramatic characters. The second opinion which Morgann insists upon is that Shakespeare's great art consists in his concealing his art. Lastly, the whole criticism of Morgann is based on his belief that true poetry is magic and hence is able to achieve its effects without its causes being recognized. The working out of these critical ideas can best be seen in Morgann's use of them in the essay.

The essay takes the form of a discussion of what might well be called "the Falstaff problem." How is it that Falstaff is such a favorite character if he is essentially a coward, and further, how is it that no part of his character seems fixed in our minds? We all like "Old Jack" and yet "we all abuse him and deny him the possession of any one single good or respectable quality." It cannot be that his wit, cheerfulness, and good humor are enough to win us over, for if they were united to vice, then

4 Ibid., 287.
these qualities would make us hate the man more thoroughly than if he lacked them. Yet they do not, for when he has ceased to amuse us, we feel no disgust and can scarcely forgive "the ingratitude of the Prince in the new born virtue of the king." 5

Because we all like Falstaff, Morgann believes that Shakespeare did not intend to make cowardice an essential part of his character. It is strange that the question of Falstaff's courage can be raised and that the reader finds that he does not know whether he respects Falstaff for possessing courage or despises him for lacking it. But, according to Morgann, this difficulty may have arisen through the art of Shakespeare, who has contrived to make secret impressions on us of Falstaff's courage and to maintain them in a character which was to be held up for sport and laughter on account of his actions of apparent cowardice and dishonor. If such a feat was intended by Shakespeare rather than by any other dramatist we have less reason to wonder "as Shakespeare is a Name which contains All of Dramatic Artifice and Genius." 6

The solution which Morgann proposes for this problem is that Shakespeare has carefully constructed the character of Falstaff so that Falstaff appears as a complex character whose incongruities make him richly comic. Morgann points out that the reader preserves both respect and good will for Falstaff but has the highest disdain for such cowardly soldiers as Parolles.

5 Ibid., 223.
6 Ibid., 224.
and Bobadil. The reader would be surprised to see them possess themselves in danger, but the reader does not accuse Shakespeare of violating the consistency of Falstaff's character when Falstaff gayly acts under the most trying circumstances. Why should this be the case?

Perhaps, after all, the real character of Falstaff may be different from his apparent one; and possibly this difference between reality and appearance, whilst it accounts at once for our liking and our censure, may be the true point of humour in the character, and the source of all our laughter and delight.

Since this is possible solution, Morgann asks his readers to suspend their judgments and follow him in his proof that "Cowardice is not the Impression which the whole character of Falstaff is calculated to make on the minds of unprejudiced audience. . . ."8

As Morgann admits, the evidence seems to go against Falstaff. From the beginning of the play Falstaff is involved in apparent dishonor; he is called a coward by his friends; the audience sees him run away at Gadshill and then use lies and braggadocio as cowardly military men usually do; and finally the audience sees him escape death at the hands of Douglas by counterfeiting death. Further, these things are presented as the great business of the play. The facts which indicate that Falstaff is not a constitutional coward are more hidden; the business of the essay is to bring them forward.9

7 Ibid.
8 Ibid., 220.
9 Ibid.
In good dramatic writing, the impression is the fact.\textsuperscript{10} Even though this is true, cowardice is not the impression which the whole character of Falstaff makes on an unprejudiced audience. The purpose of the essay is to examine exactly what the impression is.

The basis of Morgann's analysis of the character of Falstaff lies in his distinction between man's feelings and his understanding. Shakespeare according to Morgann, has produced a character, parts of which are understood and other parts of which are felt by the reader to be true. The two faculties are frequently at variance with each other.

The Understanding seems for the most part to take cognizance of actions only, and from these to infer motives and character; but the sense we have been speaking of proceeds in a contrary course; and determines of actions from certain first principles of character, which seem wholly to be out of reach of the Understanding.\textsuperscript{11}

Morgann's investigation of Falstaff's courage\textsuperscript{12} takes up the first

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid. This statement is of course a complete denial of the neo-classical theory of literal delusion in the drama, which demanded among other things the observance of the unity of place on the stage because the stage was a symbol of that place in the world where the action supposedly happened. Cf. this thesis, 32, for d'Aubignac's rule on the unity of place. Morgann's statement recognizes that the success of the artist in achieving his effect is sufficient warrant for his method. Morgann's statement is more emphatic than Johnson's earlier statement. Cf. Raleigh, \underline{Johnson on Shakespeare}, 26-28.

\textsuperscript{11} Morgann, \underline{Sir John Falstaff}, in \underline{Eighteenth Century Essays}, 220.

\textsuperscript{12} "It is true that this Inquiry is narrowed almost to a single point: But general criticism is as uninteresting as it is easy: Shakespeare deserves to be considered in detail;--a task hitherto unattempted." Ibid., 229. Morgann repeats Warndon's comment. Whately's comparison of Macbeth and Richard had been written but not published at the time.
part of the essay. In it he proposes to investigate the charge that Falstaff is a constitutional coward, by discovering what impressions of cowardice or courage Falstaff had made on the other persons of the drama, by examining all evidence of persons and facts relative to the matter, and finally by accounting for the appearance which seem to have led to the opinion of his cowardice. The two events which have led to this opinion are the robbery at Gadshill and his encounter with Douglas. Morgann asks that the reader allow him to postpone his discussion of the robbery until the rest of the examination has been made.

Before Morgann begins his investigation of Falstaff's courage, he presents in a provisional way his conclusions on Falstaff's character. He finds that the leading quality in Falstaff from which all others take their coloring is "a high degree of wit and humour, accompanied with great natural vigour and alacrity of mind." Falstaff's mind was always free from malice or any evil principle, but he never took trouble to acquire any good prin-

---

13 Morgann distinguishes two kinds of courage: moral and constitutional. The former which is an acquired trait operates in spite of man's nature and because of moral promptings; the latter extends to a man's whole life and is a part of his nature. Morgann claims that Falstaff possessed constitutional courage but was losing moral courage as well as all his other moral qualities late in life. - Ibid., 229.

14 Ibid., 216-228. The second half of the essay which takes up the whole character of Falstaff is slightly shorter, extending from 289-303.

15 The unsuspecting reader plays into Morgann's hands by agreeing to this arrangement. See below, 143-144.

16 Morgann, Sir John Falstaff, in Eighteenth Century Essays, 226.
ciple. He had also a spirit of boldness and enterprise necessary for a soldier. His most notable lack was a lack of prudence, "alike the guardian of virtue and the protector of vice..." If he had spurred and ridden the world with his wit instead of allowing the world, boys and all, to ride him, he would have been the admiration and not the jest of mankind. Hence he has a character every wise man will pity and avoid, every knave will censure, and every fool will fear.

And accordingly Shakespeare ever true to Nature, has made Harry desert, and Lancaster censure him:—He dies where he lived, in a Tavern, broken hearted without a friend; and his final exit is given up to the derision of fools.

We unjustly censure him as a coward by nature and a rascal on principle. If he were these things, we should not see him with pleasure and delight.

Lest the reader misunderstand what Morgann means by constitutional cowardice, he uses Falstaff's encounter with Douglas as an example. He admits that Falstaff's actions are externally a mark of cowardice. Actually, however, although Falstaff does not display moral courage and although what he does may be dishonorable, "he neither does nor says anything on this occasion which indicates terror or disorder of mind..." Falstaff "saw the point of honour, as well as everything else, in ridiculous lights, and began to renounce its tyranny."

In examining what impression Falstaff made upon the persons of the

17 Ibid., 227.
18 Ibid., 228.
19 Ibid., 230.
drama in regard to his cowardice, Morgann finds that the "vulgar" persons do not consider him to be a coward, nor do the higher placed individuals: Lord Bardolf; Prince Hal, who gets him a charge of foot; the Chief Justice; Coleville of the Dale, and Shallow. Finally, we see Falstaff in the royal party when the rebels come to parley with the king.20 Thus the persons of the drama do not give us the impression that Falstaff is a coward.

The second part of the investigation of Falstaff's courage is made by examining his past life, and it is in this part of the essay that Morgann first lays down the principle that Shakespeare's characters have the reality of historical rather than merely dramatic characters and makes his claim that true poetry is magic.

From an examination of Falstaff's past life we gain the impression that he is a man of courage. Falstaff had been a familiar of John of Gaunt; he was of noble birth;21 he maintained a retinue and had a place in the

20 Morgann admits that it may be said that Falstaff was a coward after all and that introducing him into the court group was an indecorous thing for Shakespeare to do. But Morgann's answer is adequate: "In camps there is but one virtue and one vice; Military merit swallows up or covers all. But, after all, what have we to do with indecorums? Indecorums represent the propriety or impropriety of exhibiting certain actions;--not their truth or falsehood when exhibited. Shakespeare stands to us in the place of truth and nature: If we desert this principle, we cut the turf under us; I may then object to the robbery and other passages as indecorums, and as contrary to the truth of character."--Ibid., 239. The statement that Shakespeare stands in the place of truth and nature make explicit the whole general neo-classical praise of Shakespeare at the same time that it shows the artificiality of the theory of decorum.

21 Morgann claims that in feudal days "rank and wealth were not only connected with the point of honour but with personal strength and courage."--Ibid., 240.
country in addition to his lodgings in London; he had been a page to the Duke of Norfolk; his knighthood itself was acquired by the courage which we deny him; and finally he had a pension which is a sign of his past prowess. 22

These things may seem to be minute incidents from which Morgann has inferred principles which are too general, but he is confident that a consideration of the nature of Shakespeare's characters will satisfy the objection that he is bringing too minute facts to bear on the situation. This consideration of the characters has led Morgann to two conclusions. The first has to do with the principles of human character which Shakespeare regarded as fundamental, and the second deals with the kind of characters which Shakespeare created.

This analysis of what Shakespeare seems to have considered the first principles of conduct obviously is based on the idea that Shakespeare was a conscious artist and is similar in its assumptions to Whately's opinions of Shakespeare as an artist who worked from definite principles. Morgann finds that the qualities and capacities which Shakespeare held to be first principles are

certain capacities of courage and activity according to their degrees; together with different degrees and sorts of sensibilities, and a capacity, varying likewise in degree, of discernment and intelligence. 23

This is the broad nature shared by all the characters, but it is only the

22 Ibid., 240-245.

23 Ibid., 246 n. Morgann does not define more specifically what he means by "courage." It would seem to be similar to self-assertiveness.
basis of each character who is individuated from all the others by the 
various influences which work upon them. These influences include the dif-
ferent ranks and inequalities in society; and the different professions of 
men which encourage or repress different sorts of passions and induce differ-
ent modes of thinking and habits of life. Shakespeare seems to have known 
instinctively what these various influences were and which influences would 
be most inbibed by certain characters and which influences would most easily 
associate and coalesce.24

Such is the basis of Shakespeare's characterization. Of the 
characters themselves, Morgan is equally emphatic. Not only did Shakespeare 
work from a clear understanding of the principles of human nature, he lived 
every situation which he created and spoke through the character which he 
had formed. Because this is true, it is not surprising that Shakespeare's 
characters that are seen only in part are capable of being unfolded and 
understood because every part of Shakespeare's characters is a fact relative 
to and inferring all the other parts.25 Because this is true, Shakespeare 
frequently makes a character speak and act from parts of his character which 
are merely inferred and not shown. The effect of characterization of this 
sort is to carry us beyond the poet to nature itself and to give an integrity 
and truth to facts and character which they could not otherwise attain.

24 Ibid.

25 "It is true we feel no pain for Shallow, he being a very bad 
character, as would fully appear, if he were unfolded; but Falstaff's de-
liberation in Fraud is not on that account more excusable."--Ibid., 300.
"And this is in reality that art in Shakespeare which being withdrawn from our notice, we more emphatically call nature."

This is, of course, a wholly new idea which had not been stated before. Its importance can be realized when one considers that it is identical with S, T. Coleridge's conception of the characters which still maintains its position in Shakespearean criticism. Morgann's statement of the idea is forceful and concise:

If the characters of Shakespeare are thus whole, and as it were original while those of almost all other writers are mere imitation, it may be fit to consider them rather as Historic than Dramatic beings; and when occasion requires, to account for their conduct from the whole of character, from general principles, from latent motives, and from policies not avowed.

26 Ibid., 247 n.

27 A good example of Coleridge's assumption that the characters have a fulness which cannot be seen in the limited stage presentation and a consistency which can be established by analyzing motives which can be assumed is found in his brief discussion of Richard III, Iago, and Falstaff in his "Outline of an Introductory Lecture upon Shakespeare." Cf. Reysor, Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism, II, 286-287. The whole problem of the nature of the characters was reopened by Levin L. Schuckling, who noted what he considers inconsistencies in the characters in Die Charakter-Probleme bei Shakespeare, Leipzig, 1919 and 1927. E. B. Stoll has, in keeping with his general position, tended to disagree with those who have found nothing but praise for the life likenesses of the characters. Lionel C. Knights continued this critical attitude toward character analysis in a book whose title indicates the nature of its contents, How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth, Cambridge, England, 1935, vi. In his introduction to C. Wilson Knight's The Wheel of Fire, London, 1930, xviii, T. S. Eliot maintains the Coleridge-Bradley theory. J. Dover Wilson in The Fortunes of Falstaff, London, 1944, recognizes the value of the work of the earlier character analysts but cautions against abuses of the method. See below, page 185. Hardin Craig in An Interpretation of Shakespeare, New York, 1948, 270, points out that consistency in characterization was unknown as a theory to Shakespeare, but "as a sane man, he made people do things which it was natural for such people to do."

28 Morgann, Sir John Falstaff in Eighteenth Century Essays, 247 n.
To his credit it must be said that Morgann not only enunciated the principle but first put it into operation, both when he examined the particulars of Falstaff’s past life and when in the second part of the essay he makes it the basis of his examination of the whole character of Sir John Falstaff.

This attitude towards Shakespeare’s conception of human nature and the reality of his characters is Morgann’s defense of his using every available allusion which Shakespeare makes in an attempt to throw light on all parts of Falstaff’s character. Morgann does not here return to a consideration of Falstaff’s character; the thoughts of Shakespeare’s achievements which rises to a level of eulogy which makes earlier praise of Shakespeare seem tame and half-hearted.

This section is introduced by Morgann’s observation that Shakespeare has not been fortunate in the labors of his editors, some of whom gave their own works the attention which they should have given to his and others who, although they were more professional critics, did not succeed in removing all the interpolations found in his works. Morgann feels that in spite of the neglect of some and the censure of others, "this wild uncultivated barbarian" does not yet have half his proper fame, and that some new Stagyrite will arise who will enter into the inward soul of his compositions and by the force of his congenial feelings expell those foreign impurities which have disgraced his page. The reference to the new Stagyrite is merely the prelude. Morgann continues:

29 Ibid., 248. Unfortunately Morgann does not specify what impurities he refers to.
When the hand of time shall have brushed off his present Editors and Commentators, and when the very name of Voltaire, and even the memory of the language in which he has written shall be no more, the Apalachian mountains, the banks of the Ohio, and the plains of Sciota shall resound with the accents of this Barbarian: In his native tongue he shall roll the genuine passions of nature; nor shall the griefs of Lear be alleviated, nor the charms and wit of Rosalind be abated by time. There is indeed nothing perishable about him, except that very learning which he is said to want so much. He had not, it is true, enough for the demands of the age in which he lived, but he had too much for the reach of his genius, and the interest of his fame. Milton and he will carry the decayed remnants and fripperies of ancient mythology into more distant ages than they are by their own force intitled to extend; and the Metamorphoses of Ovid, upheld by them, lay in a new claim to unmerited immorality.  

It is difficult to imagine eulogy going any further.

But still Morgann feels that he has not said all that can be said. Falstaff is forgotten as Morgann returns to the idea that Shakespeare is above all things a conscious artist. Morgann points out that we feel rather than understand Shakespeare and are possessed by him rather than possess him. He scatters the seeds of things, the principles of character and action with so cunning a hand yet with a careless air, and being master of our feelings submits himself only slightly to our judgments. All incidents and parts look like chance, yet we feel that the whole is design.  

30 Ibid., 249.  

31 The idea is, as has been pointed out (Cf. above, 94) one which many eighteenth century critics felt to be true. Coleridge seemingly was unaware of the long tradition and claimed priority. "... I own that I am proud that I was the first in time who publically demonstrated to the full extent of the position, that the supposed irregularity and extravagance of Shakespeare were the mere dreams of a pedantry that arraigned the eagle because it had not the dimensions of the swan."--Raysor, Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism, II, 223.
His characters not only speak and act in strict conformity to nature, but in strict relation to us; just so much is shown as is requisite, just so much is impressed; he commands every passage to our heads and to our hearts, and moulds us as he pleases, and that with so much ease, that he never betrays his own exertions. We see these characters act from the mingled motives of passion, reason, interest, habit, and complexion, in all their proportions, when they are supposed to know it not themselves; and we are made to acknowledge that their actions and sentiments are, from those motives, the necessary result. 32

This leads Morgann to speak of the individual characters. Shakespeare is able to convert everything into excellence; nothing is too great or too base. He produces a Richard III and a Hamlet; action produces the excellence in the one and inaction in the other. The king, the beggar, the hero, the madman, the sot, and the fool are drawn with a genius which pervades them all. 33

Such praise is conventional; however, when Morgann comes to speak of Shakespeare's abilities to show the progressive changes in some characters and to comprize the action of years within the hour, he comes to the point where he stands with the greatest romantic critics in his recognition that true poetry is magic which accomplishes its effects without paying attention to those very reasonable neo-classical rules which merely reduced nature to method.

The Understanding must, in the first place, be subdued; and lo! how the rooted prejudices of the child spring up to confound the man! The Weird sisters rise, and order is extinguished. The laws of nature give way, and leave nothing in our minds but wildness and horror. No pause is

32 Morgann, Sir John Falstaff in Eighteenth Century Essays, 250.
33 Ibid.
allowed us for reflection: Horrid sentiment, furious guilt and compunction, air drawn daggers, murders, ghosts and incantment, shake and possess us wholly. In the meantime the process is completed. Macbeth changes under our eye, the milk of human kindness is converted to gall; he has supped full of horrors, and his May of life is fallen into the sea, the yellow leaf; whilst we, the fools of amazement, are insensible to the shifting of place and the lapse of time, and till the curtain drops, never once wake to the truth of things, or recognize the laws of existence.  

Here is open defiance of the established order. Morgann imagines Thomas Rymer waking from his trance and arresting Shakespeare in the name of Aristotle, only to have Aristotle fall prostrate at Shakespeare's feet to acknowledge his supremacy. Aristotle confesses that he had been led astray by the Grecian practice of precision in copying the details of nature which are forced upon the Grecian dramatists by their use of the chorus. He had not been aware that a more compendious nature might be obtained, a nature of effects for which the relations of space or continuity of time are not always essential. In ordinary daily life nature shows a regular chain of cause and effect. But poetry delights in surprise and reaches her object without showing her steps:

True Poesy is magic, not nature; an effect from causes hidden and unknown. To the magician I prescribe no laws; his law and his power are one; his power is his law. Him, who neither imitates, nor is within the reach of imitation, no precedent can or ought to bind, no limits to contain. If his end is obtained, who shall question his course? Means, whether apparent or hidden, are justified in Poesy by success; but then most perfect and most admirable when most concealed.

Putting such words into the mouth of Aristotle makes the reader feel that

34 Ibid., 251.
35 Ibid., 252.
finally Aristotle has found someone in the eighteenth century who speaks in
his name and recognizes, as he did, first the excellence, and only then
attempts to account for it.

After these digressions which mark the high point of Shakespearean
criticism in the eighteenth century, Morgann returns to his vindication of
Falstaff's constitutional courage. After reading Morgann's account of Shake-
speare's greatness, one is convinced that the consideration of a work by
Shakespeare cannot avoid being a close analysis of the whole work. But the
return to Falstaff is an abrupt one.

The next point in the proof of Falstaff's constitutional courage
consists in showing that Falstaff is not a miles gloriosus. This he does
by showing that Falstaff's boasting is spoken only to those who understand
him. 36 His remark, "Would it were bed time, Hal, and all were well" is not
the fearful outcry of a coward but the frank and honest breathing of a
generous fellow. 37 Lancaster's remarks to Falstaff should be carefully
weighed, for his integrity and candor are not above suspicion after his in-
famous trick on the rebels. His censuring of Falstaff's "tardy tricks" at
best is a condemnation of Falstaff's idleness and debauch in London before
he set out to meet the army. 38 On the other hand, we must remember that
Coleville of the Dale yielded himself up to Falstaff without a battle on the

36 Ibid., 225.
37 Ibid.
38 Ibid., 256.
strength of Falstaff's reputation. It should also be remembered that all but three of the soldiers under Falstaff's leadership have been killed in battle. His jests with Hal about sack during the battle do not prove that he is a coward. "No, a sober character would not jest on such an occasion, but a Coward could not; he would have neither the inclination, or the power." The Evidence shows that Falstaff's courage is purely natural and has no relation to honor, for we see that he says that he will not seek Percy or death but will die if he has to. His encounter with Douglas forced him to choose between death and a stratagem. Lastly we note that the prince does not mention cowardice when he thinks that Falstaff is dead.

Only one charge remains to be considered, Falstaff's running away after the robbery at Gadshill, the discussion of which Morgann had asked the reader to postpone until after all the other evidence had been examined. Faced with the necessity of justifying Falstaff's conduct on this occasion, Morgann now says that a discussion of the robbery is unnecessary because even if we grant that

Falstaff was surprised with fear in this single instance, that he was off his guard, and even acted like a Coward; what will follow, but that Falstaff, like greater heroes, had his weak moment, and was not exempted from panic and surprise.

39 Ibid., 260.
40 Ibid., 263.
41 Ibid., 266.
42 Ibid., 268.
43 Ibid., 271. The reader was warned that Morgann had prepared a
Although the reader may object that this is too easy a dismissal of a principal piece of evidence, Morgann points out that the wit of the whole situation lies in baffling Falstaff rather than in ridiculing his cowardice. Falstaff's lies, rather than his courage, are called into question by Poins and Hal; moreover Falstaff's lies are so preposterous that one may doubt that they were intended to be believed and so ought to be called humorous rhodomontades. Even more conclusive is the fact that Hal apparently does not consider Falstaff a coward for his running away at Gadshill because the very same night Hal says that he will get Falstaff a charge of foot, and further we see and hear no more of this action nor does any imputation arise from it.

Thus Morgann concludes his vindication of Falstaff's courage, but before he goes on to his examination of Falstaff's whole character he pauses to point out that it is the incongruities in his character which make Falstaff richly comic. Shakespeare knew that laughter was to be raised by the opposition of qualities in a man and not by their agreement or conformity to each other. Hence he has created an eminent buffoon who had "the high relish of wit, humour, birth, dignity, and Courage." Because these qualities very clever defense. Obviously, the whole dramatic force of the robbery is lost when it is taken from its proper sequence in the plot.

144 Ibid., 277-284. Morgann points out that the lies of Parolles and Bobadil are intended to be believed.

145 Ibid., 286.

146 Ibid.
produce respect, an impression opposite to laughter, Shakespeare has dressed these qualities in fantastic forms and colors, cheating the eye with shows of baseness and folly in order to make Falstaff's character more incongruous and depriving him of every good principle at the same time that he conceals every bad one.

He has given him also every infirmity of body that is not likely to awaken our compassion, and which is most proper to render both his better qualities and his vices ridiculous: he has associated levity with age, corpulence and inactivity with courage, and has rogishly coupled the gout with Military honours, and a pension with the pox. He has likewise involved this character in situations out of which neither wit nor Courage can extricate him with honour. The surprize at Gad's Hill might have betrayed a hero into flight, and the encounter with Douglas left him no choice but death or stratagem. 47

Hence Falstaff is ridiculous in his figure, situation, and equippage. But these are mere superficial qualities. Shakespeare desired to throw on Falstaff "that substantial ridicule which only the incongruities of real vice can furnish. . . ." 48

To investigate Falstaff's whole character in which these vices are found, Morgan employs the principle that Shakespeare's characters are historic rather than dramatic persons. The investigation of Falstaff's courage was undertaken to show the readers that their feelings that Falstaff was not a coward were correct and thus to correct their understandings of Falstaff on this point. Morgan points out that:

Most stage characters can only be examined in this fashion, for most of them are only impressions or appearances which can be praised or con-

48 Ibid.
demned as such without further inquiry or investigation. 49

But when we want to account for our impressions or for certain sentiments or actions in a character which are not derived from its apparent principle but yet seem natural, we must then look further into the character to see whether or not there is something in the character which is not shown and which is inferred but which is not brought to our special attention. Few characters can bear this kind of examination because most characters are not drawn in exact conformity with the principles of human nature to which we must refer. Morgann points out that:

this is not the case with regard to the Characters of Shakespeare; they are struck out whole, by some happy art which I cannot closely comprehend, out of the general mass of things, from the block as it were of nature: And it is, I think, an easier thing to give a just draught of man from these Theatrical forms, which I cannot help considering as originals, than by drawing from real life, amidst so much intricacy, obliquity, and disguise. 50

The remaining part of the essay is given over to an examination of those parts of Falstaff's character which are hidden from the reader.

The external view of Falstaff, which we gather from our impressions, is good. He is a man of birth and fashion, bred up in the learning and accomplishments of the time, filled with ability and courage, capable of the highest affairs, trained to arms and possessing the tone, deportment, and manners of a gentleman. 51 The internal view of Falstaff, which we gain by examining his actions

49 Ibid., 289.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid., 295.
in the light of human nature, presents a picture of vices which strike through and stain the exterior view of the character. The vices which we infer are licentiousness of mind, insolence and oppression towards his inferiors, and a capacity for accommodation to and flattery of his superiors. 

Also we infer that there is a natural activity in Falstaff which for the want of proper employment shows itself in a bustle to which many of the things which he says and does which appear to be natural can be referred. 

Morgann concludes his essay with a graceful tribute to Falstaff, who cannot be demolished by hostile moralists. Every time he is seemingly defeated by these men he rises with new strength like Antaeus because his ill habits and the accidents of age and corpulence are no part of his essential constitution. They solicit our notice, but they are second natures which we pursue in vain. Falstaff himself has a distinct and separate substance. Other characters are forgotten when plays end but not Falstaff. He passed through the play like a lawless meteor, and we wish to know what course he is afterwards to take. Even the Fleet would have been no bad scene of further amusement, and perceiving this, Shakespeare knew that this character could not be dismissed but by death.

So ended this singular buffoon; and with him ends an Essay, on which the reader is left to bestow what character he pleases: An Essay pro-

52 Ibid., 296-297.

53 Ibid., 297.

54 Ibid., 299. By this statement Morgann means that although they are an essential part of the Falstaff of nature, they are secondary qualities in the character which Shakespeare has produced.
fessing to treat of the Courage of Falstaff, but extending to his Whole character; to the arts and genius of his Poetic-Maker, Shakespeare; and thro' him sometimes with ambitious aim, even to the principles of human nature itself. 55

That Morgann's essay deserves a high place among all the evaluations of Shakespeare is obvious. The essay itself shows the full extent of the possibilities which an attitude unbiased by the rules can achieve in analyzing Shakespeare's plays and by implication any other works of art. Morgann's critical opinions on Shakespeare as a conscious artist whose great art lay in concealing it, on the fulness and historical nature of the characters, and most important of all, on the true nature of poetry being magic whose success is its justification are still accepted as true. It is difficult for the modern critic to remember that these opinions were not always held. He owes a debt of gratitude to the man who first enunciated them.

It is ironical that the essay did not achieve greater fame and circulation than it did. 56 Coleridge and Hazlitt 57 apparently did not know

55 Ibid., 303.

56 In 1785, Tom Davies mentioned Morgann's essay but saw in it nothing more than the effort of a man "to convince the public that he was very competent to support any hypothesis by brilliancy of wit and plausibility of argument."--Dramatic Miscellanies, I, 272-273. Henry Mackenzie knew the essay. See below. It was listed in Isaac Reed's "List of Detached Pieces of Criticism on Shakespeare" in his edition of The Plays of William Shakespeare, London, 1803, II, 169-180. Henry James Pye mentions it in his Short Observations on the Genius and Writings of Shakespeare; and the Labors of his Commentators, London, 1807, ix. Morgann's essay was finally reprinted in 1820 and again in 1825.

57 Hazlitt claimed that he knew the work of only three men: Whately, Richardson, and Schlegel. See above, 118-119.
of its existence, but it is on a level with their work. Coleridge's editor, Thomas M. Raysor, states clearly his opinion of the worth of Morgan's essay in comparison to Coleridge's Shakespearean criticism.58

If Morgan did not influence Coleridge, he certainly anticipated the method of his character studies more fully than any other critic. He treats Shakespeare as a supreme and conscious artist, philosophizes over human nature and aesthetic questions, and analyzes the character of Falstaff as if he were not merely a character in a play but also a real human being. This is the method of Coleridge, and it is applied with as much sensitiveness and power as Coleridge could show, except in the very best of his Shakespearean criticism.59

58 Morgan, Sir John Falstaff in Eighteenth Century Essays, 303.

CHAPTER V

THE APPLICATION OF THE PRINCIPLES OF CHARACTER CRITICISM

IN THE WORK OF MACKENZIE AND CUMBERLAND

In turning from the Shakespearean criticism of Maurice Morgann to
that of Henry Mackenzie (1745-1831),¹ the reader soon discovers that Mackenzie is still working towards that full appreciation of Shakespeare which is only possible to a critic who prefers to consult his reactions to a work before he consults the rules. Mackenzie's critical position on the subject of character criticism presents no new ideas, and for that reason a discussion of it can be brief. Mackenzie's criticism of the characters deserves close attention.

Mackenzie's position in regard to the validity of the rules is ambiguous; at least when he comes to judge Shakespeare this is true. He points out that no one can doubt Shakespeare's sublimities and irregularities. The former provide the occasion for his admirers to praise him; the latter the occasion for his detractors to blame him. Shakespeare's standing outside the rules leaves no legal code whereby a passage which strikes two readers differently can finally be judged.²

¹ The Mirror, Nos. 99-100, April 18 and 22, 1780, contains a study of Hamlet. The Lounger, Nos. 68-69, May 20 and 27, 1786, contains a study of Falstaff.

² The Mirror, No. 99.
Such a beginning seems unpromising, but Mackenzie redeems himself by claiming that Shakespeare really cannot be judged from particular passages or incidents. Some of the former of these suffer from distortion and some of the latter from a lack of probability. This is true in spite of how much his admirers deny these faults. Mackenzie finds, however, that Shakespeare's superiority lies "in the astonishing and almost supernatural powers of his invention, his absolute command over the passions, and his wonderful knowledge of Nature." The reader is now aware that Mackenzie belongs to that school which believed that character depiction makes up for plot deficiencies. Shakespeare may select his plots at random from legendary tales or extravagant romances, but his intimate acquaintance with the human heart seldom or never forsakes him; and amidst the most fantastic and improbable situations, the persons of his drama speak in the language of the heart, and in the style of their characters.

Mackenzie with his thoughts too much on a strict interpretation of the probability apparently did not see that his own remark demonstrated that truth to character is able to hold an audience even though the action is outside their ordinary experience.

Mackenzie's other critical opinion has to do with the form of Shakespeare's plays. He recognizes that Shakespeare's plays follow their form, a form which he finds more natural than the pure classical comedy or tragedy because it gives the poet

3 Ibid.
4 Ibid.
an opportunity of delineating the passions and affections of the human mind, as they exist in reality, with all the various colourings which they receive in the mixed scenes of life; not as they are accommodated by the hands of more artificial poets, to one great undivided impression or an uninterrupted chain of congenial events. Mackenzie follows his opinion logically, and hence he objects to attempts to regularise Shakespeare's plays because such attempts to make them pure comedies or pure tragedies can be pursued only at the expense of depriving them of their particular excellence of mirroring life as it is.

In his character studies, Mackenzie is similar to Whately, Kemble, and Morgann in that he looks for a leading principle in the character which will explain its actions satisfactorily. This he does in his analysis of Hamlet and of Falstaff.

Mackenzie's analysis of Hamlet has an important place in the history of Hamlet criticism, for in his essays Mackenzie finds an apparent contradiction in the character of Hamlet. Actually, the purpose of the essay is to vindicate Shakespeare's consistency in creating the character of Hamlet.

---

5 The Mirror, No. 100.

6 Ibid.

7 The reader is referred to Paul S. Conklin's excellent study, A History of Hamlet Criticism, New York, 1947, 63-81 for the exact history of the Hamlet problem, which Conklin traces both in its theatrical and literary origins. Before 1770, according to Conklin, there was no Hamlet problem; Hamlet was a hero like any other Shakespearean hero, a man of action, who put off his revenge because of a scruple that can easily be understood, i.e., he was not sure of the king's guilt. Conklin points out that slowly critics began to see what they considered to be inconsistencies in his character. In his notes to Hamlet, George Steevens in The Plays of William Shakespeare, London, 1773, X, 343-344, suggests that Hamlet delays inexcusably, and on
In Mackenzie's mind this is the apparent contradiction in Hamlet's character:

With the strongest purposes of revenge, he is irresolute and inactive; amidst the gloom of the deepest melancholy, he is gay and jocular; and while he is described as a passionate lover, he seems indifferent about the object of his affections. 8

The solution to the difficulty lies in finding a "fixed or settled principle" which will explain the apparent contradictions in his actions. Mackenzie finds this principle in

an extreme sensibility of mind, apt to be strongly impressed by its situation, and overpowered by the feelings which it excites. Naturally of the most virtuous and amiable dispositions, the circumstances in which he was placed unhinged those principles of action, which, in another situation, would have delighted mankind and made him happy. 9

This principle of extreme sensibility Mackenzie finds sufficient to explain Hamlet's character, which is often variable and uncertain. For we see amidst the gloom of melancholy and the agitation of passion, occasional breakings out of a richly endowed and cultivated mind, gentleness in his demeanor, wit in his conversations, taste in his amusements, and wisdom in his reflections. Mackenzie is convinced that such a character is the exact one

various occasions is cruel, emotionally unstable, and "immoral" in tendency. William Richardson was the first to attempt to resolve the contradictions. His Hamlet is a man moved by higher principles than those of self interest and his reactions are far more intense than those of the average person. His Hamlet is in the grasp of emotions which almost tear him asunder. Naturally such an emotional conflict as Richardson suggests puts the integrity of Hamlet's feigned madness under suspicion. The old Hamlet of action becomes in Richardson's criticism the new Hamlet of thought.

8 The Mirror, No. 99.
9 Ibid.
which Shakespeare intended Hamlet to have.

Mackenzie's analysis of the plot puts all the emphasis on Hamlet's mental struggle:

His misfortunes were not the misfortunes of accident which, though they may overwhelm at first, the mind will soon call up reflections to alleviate, and hopes to cheer; they were such as reflection only serves to irritate, such as rankle in the soul's tenderest part, her sense of virtue and feelings of natural affection; they arose from an uncle's villany, a mother's guilt, a father's murder. According to Mackenzie, arranging the plot and the character in this fashion makes us more interested in Hamlet than we would have been if Hamlet had pursued his vengeance with a steady determined purpose through difficulties which arose from accidental causes and not from causes deep within his mind. Had the plot been based on accidental events we should have been anxious for the event and not for the person. Sophocles' Orestes lays down a plan of vengeance which he resolutely carries out. As a result of this kind of plot, we are interested in him only as the instrument of justice which overtakes the murderers of Agamemnon, but when Horatio exclaims on the death of his friend,

'Now crack'd a noble heart!'

we forget the murder of the King, the villany of Claudius, the guilt of Gertrude; our recollection dwells only on the memory of that 'sweet prince' the delicacy of whose feelings a milder planet should have ruled, whose gentle virtues would have bloomed through a life of felicity and usefulness."

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid. This sentiment is exactly consistent with what one would imagine the author of The Man of Feeling would say.
The sensibility of Hamlet places him under the dominion of melancholy, and it is this principle which we see influencing Hamlet from the beginning of the play. Mackenzie uses it to account for the problem of Hamlet's madness, his conduct towards Ophelia, and his occasional marks of gaiety and playfulness.

Mackenzie is of the opinion that Hamlet's distraction is always subject to the control of his reason but that his mind shows some temporary marks of a real disorder at the grave of Ophelia. However Mackenzie points out that Hamlet's counterfeit madness suits his character exactly because Hamlet is not strong enough to be the complete master of his feelings. Mackenzie proves his assertion by pointing out that in the real madness of Lear and Ophelia both characters constantly speak of the object which has driven them mad: Lear speaks of nothing but his daughters' cruelty and the resignation of his crown, and Ophelia speaks of nothing but the death of her father. On the contrary, Edgar never speaks of a father's cruelty or a son's misfortune.

Hamlet, in the same manner, were he as firm in mind as Edgar, would never hint any thing in his affected disorder, that might lead to a suspicion of his having discovered the villany of his uncle; but his feeling, too powerful for his prudence, often breaks through the disguise which it seems to have been his original, and ought to have continued his invariable, purpose to maintain, till an opportunity should

12 Conklin points out that Steevens quoted Dr. Aikenside in his edition of 1778 to the effect that Hamlet's conduct was unnatural and indefensible unless he was regarded as a man whose griefs had in some degree impaired his reason. Cf. A History of Hamlet Criticism, 70.
present itself of accomplishing the revenge which he meditated.\textsuperscript{13}

The ambiguousness of a madness of this kind is obvious. Hamlet according to this account is sometimes mad and sometimes sane in his madness.

Paradoxically, MacKenzie is able to justify Hamlet's treatment of Ophelia on the grounds that he loves her deeply. Since he had chosen his love for her as the cause of his madness, such an attitude towards her was the only course open to a man of his tender feelings. If he had only loved her slightly, he might have kept up some appearance of love for her; but really loving her, he would have been hurt by a resemblance in his counterfeit love because a downright caricature can be borne with more easily than an unfavorable likeness.

Hamlet's melancholy also justifies his occasional gaiety and playfulness of deportment because his type of melancholy arises neither from a natural sourness of temper nor from chagrin, but it is the effect of a delicate sensibility impressed with a sense of sorrow or a feeling of its own weakness. A man with such a sensibility will often be found indulging in a sportiveness of external behavior amid the anguish of a broken heart. He has a double person and gives to the world an indifferent person which accommodates itself to the world but keeps from the world his inner person which is deeply concerned with its misfortunes.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{13} The \textit{Mirror}, No. 100.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid. MacKenzie defends the scene of Hamlet and the grave digger on the grounds that it contributes to the tragic effect of the play. When he hears Hamlet's transient jests he is aware of the deepest melancholy being rooted in Hamlet's heart.
Mackenzie's interpretation of Hamlet as a character whose conflicts were largely caused by his own constitution is the eighteenth century contribution to an interpretation of Hamlet which Coleridge was to develop still further. 15

Mackenzie's analysis of Falstaff 16 is also based on his idea of a leading principle in each character. In the two essays on Falstaff a somewhat greater appreciation of Shakespeare's abilities as a delineator of character is apparent. Perhaps this appreciation is more apparent in these essays because Falstaff's character is more richly normal than the character which Mackenzie assigned to Hamlet.

In the first essay, Mackenzie observes that Shakespeare has been compared with Homer in fancy and imagination. In the invention of incidents, the diversity of character, and the assemblage of images it may be that Homer cannot be surpassed; but in the creation of fancy nothing in the Iliad can compare with The Tempest and Macbeth. Homer used a machinery which was known to men; Shakespeare produced and combined the machinery by himself. Although many of his characters are founded on fancy, his personages are so true that the reader recognizes their justness even though he has never seen their like.

This observation is not new; Dryden had made it in his observations on Caliban. 17 Mackenzie also finds that Shakespeare excels in producing

---

16 The Lounger, Nos. 68-69, May 20 and 27, 1786.
17 Ker, Essays of John Dryden, I, 219-220.
in the beaten field of ordinary life, characters of such perfect originality, that we look on them with no less wonder at his invention, than on those preter-natural beings, which 'are not of this earth'; and yet they speak a language so purely that of common society, that we have but to step abroad into the world to hear every expression of which it is composed. 18

And in this ability to make his characters speak naturally on the subjects of daily life, Shakespeare is surpassed by no one, not even by the ancients. The delineation of manners found in the Greek tragedians is excellent and just; but it consists chiefly of those general maxims which the wisdom of the schools might insculcate, which a borrowed experience might teach. 19

This recognition of Shakespeare's ability to create particular characters can easily be seen to be similar to Morgann's recognition of the special quality of the characters. Mackenzie sees that within certain limits it is possible for all dramatists to describe characters naturally. Shakespeare's characters go beyond the achievements of other dramatists.

Falstaff is an example of this ability of Shakespeare to create characters from the ordinary paths of life, for we see him in a play in which Shakespeare has as his purpose to illustrate the dissipated youth and extravagant pranks of the eldest son of Henry IV. In order to create a

18 The Lounger, No. 68.

19 Ibid. The same observation had been made by Peter Whalley in his Enquiry into the Learning of Shakespeare, 78: "For marking every character with Sentiments which cannot possibly be applied to any other, he was under less Necessity of having recourse to any common-place Topics; and especially to that curious Mixture of the fierce and the tender; of ranting against the God's, idolizing a Mistress, or unnaturally braving one's misfortunes; than all which nothing can be more dextruous, it being as easy as lying."
character which would illustrate this wanton extravagance of the prince, he had to endow a character which would attract the prince. Hence we see that Falstaff possesses an infinite wit and humor together with an admirable sagacity and acuteness in observing the characters of men. To these qualities is added grossness of mind which the prince must see, and seeing despise. These are the necessary ingredients for Falstaff's character; for if his talents had been less, he would not have attracted the prince, but if his profligacy had been less gross and contemptible, he would have attracted the prince too strongly.  

Mackenzie's preliminary analysis is noteworthy in that he recognizes the fact that Shakespeare had very carefully created the character to fit the plot. Falstaff is not merely a wonderfully comic character whose qualities are wholly those of a buffoon; he is a character whose qualities are such that they will raise laughter and accomplish his share in the action at the same time.  

In analyzing Falstaff's character, Mackenzie finds that three qualities, the first of which he considers Falstaff's leading principle. Falstaff is primarily a sensualist, "truly and literally Ex Epicuri greg porcus" who is placed in the world to batten at his leisure, neither disturbed by feeling nor restrained by virtue. However, he was not positively much of a villain, and Mackenzie notes, as Morgann did, that Shakespeare had skillfully worked to present such vices as would produce contempt rather

20 The Lounger, No. 68.
than indignation for his crimes. Hence we enjoy the ridicule of the situation and the admirable wit he uses in speaking of his deeds. Lastly he is endowed with a superior degree of good sense and discernment of character, and "we see that he thinks like a wise man, even when he is not at pains to talk wisely." Falstaff's admirable wit and humor are, however, always marked by the Epicurean grossness which Mackenzie found to be Falstaff's leading quality.

In the second essay, Mackenzie subjects the character of Falstaff to an investigation largely on the basis of his consistency with his Epicurean nature and concludes the essay with a thoughtful comparison first of Falstaff to Don Quixote to show that the same essential idea had guided Shakespeare and Cervantes in the creation of their great comic characters and finally of Falstaff, Richard III, and Macbeth to show the similarities in their characters.

In showing the consistency of Falstaff's character with the principles of Epicurean grossness, Mackenzie points out that none of his passions ever rise beyond the control of his reason, self-interest, or indulgence. Falstaff in love in The Merry Wives of Windsor intends to make love the factor of his interest and he wishes to make his mistresses "his Exchequer, his East and West Indies, to both of which he will trade." Falstaff's admirable wit and humor are, however, always marked by the Epicurean grossness which Mackenzie found to be Falstaff's leading quality.

21 Ibid. This enumeration of qualities shows a close resemblance to Morgan's conception of Falstaff. It should be noted that cowardice is not mentioned among Falstaff's leading qualities.

22 No. 69.
staff's cowardice, 23 Mackenzie concludes, is not a weakness but a principle. He has sagacity in his cowardice in that "he has the sense of danger, but not the discomposure of fear." Falstaff's cowardice, Mackenzie concludes, is only proportionate to the danger, as every wise man would be a coward if other feelings did not make him valiant. 24

The amusement which audiences derive from Falstaff is based on the incongruities of Falstaff's character, which join a gross, sensual, and brutish mind to the admirable powers of invention, of wit, and of humor found in his conversation.

We are astonished at that art by which Shakespeare leads the powers of genius, imagination, and wisdom in captivity to this son of earth; 'tis as if, transported into the enchanted island in the Tempest, we saw the rebellion of Caliban successful, and the airy spirits of Prospero ministering to the brutality of his slave. 25

The analysis of Falstaff's character does not introduce any new lights on Falstaff, but it shows the recognition of Shakespeare's ability to create characters which engage the imagination of the reader by their significance to the total meaning of the play. In the same way the later part of the essay shows how the reader's understanding of the character can be enhanced by comparing it with other characters to show their essential similarities and differences.

23 Mackenzie says that "he will not go so far as a paradoxical critic has done and ascribe valour to Falstaff." 24

24 It is hard to see any important difference in the analyses of the courage of Falstaff by Morgann and Mackenzie.

25 No. 69.
The comparison of Falstaff with Don Quixote shows that the essential part of comic characters lies in the incongruous joining of their character traits. Cervantes has shown Don Quixote's essential ridiculousness by raising low and vulgar incidents in his imagination to a rank of importance, dignity, and solemnity which is exactly opposite to the truth. In the character of Falstaff, Shakespeare has reversed the order by subjecting wisdom, honor, and other grave and dignified principles to the control of grossness, buffoonery, and folly. 26

Mackenzie concludes his study of Falstaff by contrasting Falstaff with Richard III 27 and then both characters with Macbeth. The comparison of the first two is a very close one and chiefly revolves around their sagacity and understanding and their contempt for refined feelings, motives of delicacy, and restraint of virtue. There is little difference in their attitudes; their objectives differ because Richard is ambitious and Falstaff is only luxurious and dissipated. The two characters are so similar that Mackenzie thinks that it were not difficult to show in the dialogue of the two characters, however dissimilar in situation many passages and expressions in a style of remarkable resemblance.

The comparison of Macbeth with Falstaff and Richard III is useful in showing how it is that Macbeth retains our sympathy while Richard does not. Mackenzie claims that Falstaff is a knave and sensualist on principle,

26 Ibid.

27 Coleridge's comparison of Falstaff, Richard III, and Iago has already been noted. See above, 137.
Richard a villain on principle, and Macbeth a villain of passion. The first two characters are almost devoid of feeling and even passion. Macbeth produces horror, fear, and sometimes pity in the audience; Richard produces detestation and abhorrence. Macbeth is sometimes more sanguinary than Richard whose cruelty is only proportionate to his ambition just as Falstaff's cowardice is proportionate to the object of his fear. But the bloody Macbeth is susceptible to compassion and subject to remorse and hence we regret the perversion of his nature even when justice overtakes him.

The imaginative quality of all the character analyses is apparent in Mackenzie's summing up of the leading principles of the three characters. Richard is the product of the worldly and creeping demons who place on earth their instruments of mischief to embroil and plague mankind; the weird sisters, the gigantic deities of northern mythology, are the agents who form Macbeth; Falstaff is formed by less sanguinary influences:

Falstaff is the work of Circe, and her swinish associates, who, in some favoured hour of revelry and riot, moulded this compound of gross debauchery, acute discernment, admirable invention, and nimble wit, and sent him for a consort to England's madcap Prince; to stamp currency on idleness and vice, and to wave the flag of folly and dissipation over the seats of gravity, of wisdom, and of virtue.28

It would be vain to deny that the imagination of the critic has not seen qualities in the character which aid the reader in a new evaluation of Shakespeare's art.

The form of the Shakespearean criticism which Richard Cumberland (1732-1811) employed in his studies of the characters of Macbeth, Richard
III, and Falstaff and his associates in The Observer\textsuperscript{29} during 1786 shows that the critic realizes that the neo-classical examen form is not suited to a consideration of Shakespeare's plays. He examines the plays of Shakespeare in the light of their characters; the plays of other dramatists he examines by using the examen form.\textsuperscript{30} Cumberland, who was well educated in the classics and who was a practicing dramatist, paid tribute to Shakespeare as the peer of Aeschylus and as a dramatist whose skill and artistry might well be imitated.

The comparison of Aeschylus and Shakespeare suggested several interesting parallels to Cumberland, who declares that Shakespeare is Aeschylus's superior in character depiction. Both are styled the fathers of tragedy in that it can be said that they had no models to look to, but Aeschylus was a warrior of high repute, of a lofty and generous spirit, and was deeply erudite whereas Shakespeare was humbly born, of menial occupation, and as it is generally thought, unlearned. In point of plot, both poets stand on the same ground in regard to originality; both so modified their fables as to make them their own. Aeschylus alone created persons from heaven and hell and in his heroic and military figures excelled Shakespeare.

\textsuperscript{29} Nos. 69, 70, 71, 72, contain a comparison of Macbeth with Richard III. No. 73 contains an analysis of Falstaff and the other comic characters of Henry IV. The series is not dated.

\textsuperscript{30} No. 75 contains an analysis of The Fox by Johnson; No. 76, an analysis of Samson Agonites, Nos. 77-79, a comparison of Rowe's Fair Penitent with Massinger's Fatal Dowry, and No. 76, an analysis of Congreve's Double Dealer. As the author of forty plays himself, Cumberland's remarks on the drama deserve respect.
He stands as a respectable but not equal rival to Shakespeare in his imaginary being.

but in variety of character, in all the nicer touches of nature, in all the extravagancies of caprice and humour, from the boldest feature down to the minutest foible, Shakespeare stands alone. ... 31

cumberland, however, justly recalls that Greek tragedy allowed for little variety of character and that Aeschylus never offended against nature or propriety in his characters. The comparison ends with the admission that both poets are sublime and sometimes extravagant and hence provide faults for the critic who looks for them.

Cumberland signals out Shakespeare’s ability to portray individual characters as a virtue which he possessed preeminently. He agrees with Whately and Mackenzie in finding particularly praiseworthy not the depiction of the great passions, because every poet can describe them,

but Shakespeare gives you their their characters’ humours, their minutest foibles, those little starts and caprices, which nothing but the most intimate familiarity brings to light; other authors write characters like historians; he like the bosom friend of the person he describes. 32

Cumberland’s observations on the characters of Mcbeth and Richard III follow the lines laid down in Whately’s study of the two characters but emphasize the skill with which Shakespeare created the plots in which the characters move. It cannot be said that Cumberland abandoned the rules in considering Shakespeare’s plays; he found, however, in Shakespeare an artist whose work made their use superfluous. 33

31 No. 69.
32 No. 72.
33 This is seen in the comparison he makes of Jonson to Shakes
In his analysis of the character of Macbeth, Cumberland points out the skill with which Macbeth is led to his guilty ambition. Because Macbeth does not stand in the line of royal succession, it is necessary that the occasion which moves him to think of gaining the crown be preternatural and prodigious. The weird sisters provide this occasion; his discovery of the truth of their first prediction moves him to think of striking for the crown which their second prediction promised. His soliloquy reveals, however, that he does not have a disposition prone to evil and that he is struggling against the evil which suggests itself. Richard on the contrary presents himself as a villain and announces his decision.

I am determined to be a villain.

Because Richard is a settled villain we do not look upon him with the sympathy with which we view Macbeth. The struggle which Shakespeare portrays in Macbeth's character affords the noblest theme for the drama and puts Shakespeare's creative fancy to a test in which he has been rivalled only by Aeschylus in the prophetic effusions of Cassandra, the incantations of the Persian magi to raise the ghost of Darius, and in the conception of the Furies.

---

Shakespeare in The Observer, No. 75, which contains his examen of The Fox. "In one we may respect the profundity of learning, in the other we must admire the sublimity of genius; to one we pay the tribute of understanding, to the other we surrender up the possession of our hearts. . . ."

34 I, iii, 130-142.
35 Richard III, I, i, 30.
36 No. 69.
Cumberland is the first critic to emphasize Lady Macbeth's importance in the final determination of Macbeth's guilt in assassinating Banquo. In No. 70 he examines Macbeth's conduct from the time of his decision to kill Banquo until the deed is done and shows that Lady Macbeth has a relative as well as a positive importance in the plot. The promptings she is forced to use show as strongly as possible Macbeth's reluctance to strike for the crown. Her natural influence on Macbeth, which springs from her high and predominant spirit, makes the weird sisters only secondary influences in bringing about the action of the drama.

Cumberland follows the action of Act I, Scene 7, very closely in order to show exactly how Macbeth is moved to action. When Macbeth announces

We will proceed no further in this business

her satire and questioning reproaches are pressed so fast upon him that he can only command her to be silent as he clings to his last fragment of innocence and honor. His wife then realizes that satire and contempt cannot serve to move him and changes her argument by appealing to his honor, claiming that when he first dared to do the deed he was a man and that by

37 Whately had pointed out that the speech of Lady Macbeth, "I have given suck and know..." (Act I, Scene 7, ll. 54-59), which had been objected to by neo-classical critics because it violated decorum, was used by Lady Macbeth to remove all remains of humanity from his breast, because only such an urging could overcome his objections. Cf. Whately, Remarks, 34-35.

38 I, vii, and II, i-ii.

39 Cumberland sees that if the weird sisters had been the principal movers of Macbeth he would appear as the mere machine of an uncontrolable destiny and his actions would not appear to be free with the result
doing it he would

Be so much more than man.

Having parried his objection by sophistry, she breaks into vaunting display of intrepidity calculated to remove his last objection:

I have given suck and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me;
I would, whilst it was smiling in my face,
Have pluck'd my nipple from its boneless gums,
And dash'd its brains out, had I but so sworn
As you have done in this.

Of the speech Cumberland says:

This is a note of horror, screwed to a pitch that bursts the very sinews of nature; she no longer combats with a human weapon, but seizing the lightening extinguishes her opponent with the stroke; here the controversy must end, for he must either adopt her spirit, or take her life; he sinks under the attack...

Cumberland's attitude toward the speech is wholly realistic; it would take such a speech to move Macbeth, and Lady Macbeth realizes the fact and uses the argument which will succeed.

According to Cumberland, the strong and sublime strokes of a master in this scene make it a model of dramatic composition. Such praise from a dramatist is not to be taken lightly. Cumberland points out that the omission of all references to the prophecies of the weird sisters cannot be supposed to be anything but a conscious stroke. A weaker genius would have relied on these instruments, but Shakespeare was strong enough to use natural means and to show his mastery "took his human agent from the weaker sex."
Cumberland's examination of Macbeth and Richard during the time that they hold sway shows how Shakespeare maintains the consistency of the two characters in showing the openness with which Richard hires Tirol to kill the princes and the long conversation Macbeth has with the assassins in which he strives to blind his conscience and make the assassins personally responsible for the deaths of Banquo and his son.

Shakespeare's artistry in creating theatrical effects and at the same time maintaining truth to character is seen in the management of the appearance of Banquo's ghost. Cumberland points out that Shakespeare achieves an effect by having the ghost appear without any forewarning to the audience. By having Banquo's ghost appear Shakespeare makes it seem natural that Lady Macbeth does not see it because she had no prior knowledge of the murder. If Duncan's ghost had appeared we would expect her to see it, but because the intrepidity of Lady Macbeth is so marked we imagine that no waking terrors would shake her. Hence it is a natural expedient to have her give expression to her agonies in her sleep. Cumberland points out that Aeschylus and hundreds of other dramatists had used dreams to create terror but that those dreams had merely been related.

41 No. 71.

42 In this essay Cumberland points out that whenever Macbeth's mind turns to a distasteful subject his language becomes highly figurative. Of the language in Act III, Scene 2, Cumberland says, "The critic of language will observe that there is a redundancy and crowd of metaphors, but the critic of nature will acknowledge that it is the very truth of character. . . ."
This, which is done by Aeschylus, has been done by hundreds after him; but to introduce upon the stage the very person, walking in sleep, and giving vent to the horrid fancies that haunt her dream, in broken speeches expressive of her guilt, uttered before witnesses, and accompanied with that natural and expressive action of washing the blood from her defiled hands, was reserved for the original and bold genius of Shakespeare only. 43

In the last essay of the series, 44 Cumberland contrasts the catastrophes which finally overtake Richard and Macbeth. There is nothing in this essay of special note except the remark on the truth to nature in Macbeth's striking the messenger who brings the news of the approach of Birnam wood.

A burst of fury, an exclamation seconded by a blow is the first natural explosion of a soul so stung with scorpions as Macbeth's; the sudden gust is no sooner discharged, than nature speaks her own language and the still voice of conscience, like reason in the midst of madness, murmurs forth these mournful words—

I pall in resolution, and begin
To doubt the equivocation of the fiend,
That lies like truth.

Such a comment is the result of the critic's observation of human nature; he does not ask himself what the code of decorum allowed to a king who heard the unwelcome news that a hostile army was moving against him.

The study of the comic characters of Henry IV 45 concentrates most of its attention on Falstaff as one would expect, but the whole play is studied in a manner which anticipates the studies of Hazlitt in his Charac-

43 No. 71.
44 No. 72.
45 No. 73.
The ideas of Cumberland on Falstaff present no new opinions. He sees Falstaff as Morgam and Mackenzie did, a skillfully created character who possessed enough pleasant qualities to attract the prince and sufficient bad qualities to make the attachment only a passing one. Needless to say, he did not see Falstaff as a simple cowardly buffoon. For Cumberland, as for the other character analysts, the good nature and the wit of the character were its chief attractions.

His lies, his vanity, and his cowardice, too gross to deceive, were to be so ingenious as to give delight; his cunning evasions, his witty resources, his mock solemnity, his vapouring self-consequence, were to furnish a continual feast of laughter to his royal companion; he was not only to be witty himself, but the cause of wit in other people; a whetstone of raillery; a buffoon, whose very person was a jest. . .

Cumberland points out that Falstaff bears the comic part of the first part of the play almost by himself, but that Shakespeare, feeling the difficulty of sustaining Falstaff as the only comic character added several recruits to aid Falstaff in the second part. Ancient Pistol is so new, whimsical and extravagant a character that one would think him a character as wild and imaginary as Caliban if it was not known that his dialogue comes from the absurd and fustian passages of many plays. 46 Shallow and Silence also please Cumberland:

Surely two pleasanter fellows never trod the stage; they not only contrast and play upon each other, but Silence sober and Silence tipsy

46 Cumberland prefers Jonson's Bobadil to Shakespeare's Pistol, apparently because Shakespeare founded his bully on parody while Jonson founded his on nature.
make the most comical reverse in nature; never was drunkenness so well introduced or so happily employed in any drama. . . .

Mistress Quickly's character varies slightly in Part Two so that Doll Tearsheet can be introduced. Cumberland does not excuse Shakespeare for the introduction of Falstaff's scene with Doll, but he does point out that Shakespeare managed the scene with care by showing Falstaff in a ridiculous light without indulging in any of the gross indecencies which poets of his age used in similar circumstances.

The essay concludes by Cumberland's observing that Shakespeare had put Falstaff to death in order to put him out of the reach of other dramatists. We are not to imagine that Shakespeare was unable to sustain Falstaff any longer. Shakespeare had such a talent for comedy that he was able to introduce comedy even in scenes of the English army's distress before the battle of Agincourt. The dialogue between Captain Gower and Fluellen provides such comedy and on that occasion the talk was of Falstaff.

Fluellen: . . . . as Alexander killed his friend Cleitus being in his ales and his cups; so also Harry Monmouth, being in his right wits and his good judgment, turned away the fat knight with the great belly doublet. He was full of jests, and gipes, and knaveries, and mocks; I have forgot his name.

Gower: Sir John Falstaff.

Fluellen: That is he.47

Cumberland notes that the passage has always given him a pleasing sensation because it marks Shakespeare's regret at parting with a favorite character and it is a tender farewell to his memory. The passage is put with a par-
ticular propriety into the mouth of Fluellen, who stands in this play as Falstaff's substitute and whose humor as well as that of Nym may be said to have arisen out of the ashes of Falstaff.

Cumberland was the first critic to note this reference to Falstaff in Henry V and to comment on it. His comment is in keeping with the appreciation of Shakespeare and his art which the character studies fostered. As long as the critic had before him the rules for producing regular plots and decorous characters, he could have only a partial enjoyment of Shakespeare, who not knowing that such rules existed produced great plays by skillfully working to achieve the exact effect he desired.

Cumberland's study of Falstaff was the last study of importance. The following other studies of the characters of the plays were written during the last fourteen years of the eighteenth century, but in none of them are found any principles which have not already been discussed. James Wright brought out Falstaff's Letters, London, 1789, which is supposedly a collection of the letters of the fat knight. It shows the interest which the characters had aroused, but it cannot be considered character criticism in the strict sense. Thomas Robertson's "An Essay on the Character of Hamlet, in Shakespeare's Tragedy of Hamlet," Transactions of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, II, 1790, 251-267, comments on Shakespeare's dramatic skills in a negligible way and its interpretation of Hamlet's character modifies Mackenzie's interpretation only slightly. In The Bee, or Literary Weekly Intelligencer, Edinburgh, I, January 12, 19, and 26, 1791, the author, a "W.N." studies the characters of Othello and Iago very closely from the opening of the play until the end of the temptation scene. Wostenholme Parr's Story of the Moor of Venice, London, 1795, contains a translation of Cinthio's novel, an essay on Coriolanus, and a study of Othello's character. The rarity of this book made its examination impossible. The last essays on Shakespearean characters are found in Essays by a Society of Gentlemen at Exeter, edited anonymously, London, 1796, "An Apology for the Character and Conduct of Iago," 395-409, and "An Apology for the Character and Conduct of Shylock," 552-573. The author, who signs himself "T.O.", pays no attention to Shakespeare's skill as a dramatic artist. In the first essay the author playfully attempts to justify Iago's conduct by magnifying the supposed injuries which he had suffered from Othello. The essay on
of a Shakespearean character in the eighteenth century. Cumberland's ranking of Shakespeare as an equal to Aeschylus, his recognition of Shakespeare's skill in delineating characters by showing their inmost traits, and his recognition of the skill with which Shakespeare constructed his scenes, recall appropriately enough the opinions of the earlier dramatist and the father of Shakespearean criticism, John Dryden. This thesis has attempted to show the continuity of the praise of Shakespeare's achievement during the period which extends from Dryden to Cumberland and it has attempted to show the part which the character analysts played in demonstrating the weaknesses of the neo-classical rules as these critics pointed out the conscious artistry by which Shakespeare achieved his great success as a dramatist.

Shylock is an attempt to prove that Shylock is a character which the audience should sympathize with rather than laugh at.
CHAPTER VI
CONCLUSION

Although Shakespeare's great achievements as a dramatist were not seriously disputed by anyone except Thomas Rymer during the one hundred and twenty-one years surveyed in this thesis, the critics who wrote during this period gave various emphases to their evaluations of his work. The basic fact of his achievement, however, was testified to by the continuing dramatic productions and printings of his plays. This popularity can attest to the fact that the plays pleased the majority of playgoers and readers who, uninterested as always in critical theory, asked only to be entertained. Critics, however, could not be content with their unguarded reactions to literature and had to qualify them by judging the piece of literature in terms of their literary standards. Then as now, in such an operation the critic may find that his original reaction does not coincide with the judgment which the canons of his criticism impose on the work. This was the situation which developed when neo-classical critics applied their theories to the plays of Shakespeare.

It was pointed out in Chapter I that French and English neo-classical critics as a group in their attempts to follow Aristotle's observations in the Poetics seriously misunderstood his observations on the key doctrine of probability. Undoubtedly the pervading rationalism of the age was
largely responsible for the attitude or "Common Opinion" which restricted the probable in Dryden's words to "that which succeeds or happens oftener than it misses." With such an arithmetic attitude as a criterion, it is not surprising that these critics attacked as improbable both actions and characters which were not to be met in their ordinary experience. As Irving Babbitt has pointed out, these critics identified the world of ordinary fact with the world of artistic creation. Whatever facts the poets employed which did not correspond with reality as the critics had experienced it were condemned as improbable by these critics.

Just as such an outlook made it necessary to condemn many plots because they did not conform to everyday experience, so the confusion of the world of ordinary fact with the world created by the poet banished all imagination in regard to the dramatic presentation of the plot. The whole theory of the unities of time and place was established to make the presentation on the stage more like the life which the critic experienced from day to day. According to the neo-classical critics, such as d'Aubignac, Rapin, Rymer, Gildon and Dennis, the audience was aware that it spent only a few hours in the theatre. That play, then, was most true to life whose total action took no longer in its representation on the stage than it would take in everyday life, but the absolute limit to the audience's credulity was reached in a play which represented the action of more than

1 Ker, Essays of John Dryden, I, 209.

2 Rousseau and Romanticism, 22.
a day taking place in a few hours in the theatre. In keeping with this same rigidly logical theory, these same critics rejected any play whose plot demanded that the scene of the action shift from one locality to another. The audience, according to these critics, would refuse to believe that the stage which represented one place at the beginning of the action could represent another place during the same play.

The stifling and restricting effects of this interpretation of probability on the poet's choice of dramatic material are self evident. Vast areas of human experience were declared to be outside the scope of dramatic poetry because they contained situations which the critic could not verify from his own experience or which could not be dramatized in such a fashion as to conform to the restrictions imposed on the poet by the observations of the unities of time and place. Even more disastrous for the poet, however, was the application of the neo-classical concept of probability to the characters of the dramatis personae.

Aristotle's observations on the goodness and agreeableness or suitability of the traits assigned to the characters were interpreted in terms of the same rigid idea of probability. The desire to strive after the average led neo-classical critics in general to refuse to see or to see with great difficulty anything which particularized a character and distinguished it in some way from a similar character. Hence it is natural that in analyzing a character they should think of it in the most generalized terms. In Gildon's words, Homer shows us in Achilles "what Violence and Anger wou'd
The assumption that these critics make is that the most important traits of classes of men spring from similar sources and that the actions and thoughts of two similar characters will be identical in similar situations.

It is true that the idea of type characters was not originated by the neo-classical critics. As it has been pointed out, they found the idea in Horace's Ars Poetica and mistakenly accepted it as a correct interpretation of Aristotle's thought. Horace's modest catalogue of type characters with their attendant probable traits provided the model; the industry and lack of imagination of a Mesnardiere provided the complete list of all the traits which were appropriate to the various ages, sexes, qualities, employments, and fortunes of all the characters who could possibly find their way among the dramatis personae.

Thus the critic directed his attention to deciding whether or not the traits which the poet had given to his characters were the ones which the codifiers had assigned to the various types as the ones which they probably possessed. If a poet had depicted a king in love or as an accessory to a crime, or a Moor with tender feelings, or a soldier who was not a hale and hearty individual, he had violated probability and had committed a breach of decorum by presenting a characterization which shocked the audience by its lack of probability. A careful poet could avoid such mistakes.

---

3 The Works of Mr. William Shakespear, VII, xli.

4 J. A. Spingarn, A History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance, 86.
by consulting the critics who had solved all the problems involved in this
difficult art.

The result of this attempt to standardize the traits of the char-
acters is obvious. The characters are seen only in a superficial way, and
as a result their actions and thoughts can be predicted from the time they
enter the scene because they are allowed no individuality or private life
by the critic. They act, so to speak, in an official capacity and can pass
from one play to another and take up their new parts without anyone's no-
ticing the change. Such characters lack any depth and move through the
action of the play impelled by only the most obvious motives.

The critic who judged characters from the point of view of a
standard of decorum was poorly equipped for his task, for all his tenets
and dicta gave him a purely negative approach to the subject. He was pre-
pared to say whether or not the character had the proper traits; he was
unable in the terms of neo-classical criticism to judge between two similar
characters with strongly marked traits which were proper to them. It would
be instructive and at the same time amusing to see such a critic evaluating
Hamlet and Philaster. One could not be sure, however, that Shakespeare's
character would receive the laurel.

Attention to characterization does not occupy the position of
being foremost in importance in neo-classical criticism as it does in ro-
mantic criticism. In neo-classical criticism, primary consideration was
given to an examination of the plot, and only after the plot had been ex-
amined did the critic go on to consider the characters in his examen of the
play. In considering the plays of Shakespeare such an emphasis was un-
fortunate, for as it has been pointed out, a distorted idea of probability
influenced the examination. Using the observations made by Aristotle and
modified by his interpreters to include the unities of time and place in
addition to other refinements, these critics were forced to find the plots
of Shakespeare's plays very faulty. It is true that when the critics
evaluated the characters they did so in terms of high if somewhat general
praise. But the praise of the characters was not able to remove the impres-
sion that Shakespeare's works were not examples of an art which consciously
sought after the effects which it achieved.

Neo-classical critics generally praised Shakespeare for his fine
characterization, but these critics evaluated the characters in terms of
the neo-classical theory of the type character and the attendant idea of
probable character traits. As a result, when his characters were criticized
adversely, the same theory was the basis of the blame. The distinctness or
goodness of Shakespeare's characters was noted by all the critics from the
time of Dryden. The remark of Charles Gildon, who always carefully observed
the minutiae of the rules, that Shakespeare excelled all poets in distin-
guishing the traits not only of his principal characters but also of his
minor characters became a critical commonplace during the eighteenth cen-
tury. It is remarkable that no one observed that Shakespeare had sharply
distinguished his similar characters by individualizing them.

Praise for the suitability of the traits which Shakespeare gave
to his characters was not unanimous, however, although even the censure of
Shakespeare on this score was restricted to the condemnation of a few characters. Dryden produced the first analysis of a Shakespearean character when he demonstrated that the traits which Shakespeare had given to Caliban exactly fitted the monster. Beatrice and Benedict, Shylock, and the ever popular Sir John Falstaff were only a few of the characters whose traits were singled out for praise. But when the critic attempted to become specific in his praise, the weaknesses of neo-classical criticism becomes apparent. The neo-classical critic merely named the traits which he found in the character and did not show how or why the traits fitted the character. The neo-classical critic did not conceive of the character in an imaginative way and did not attempt to see the character outside the dramatic context.

When critics censured the characters, they blamed Shakespeare for ascribing unsuitable traits to the characters and thus violating decorum. The standard of conduct which the critics invoked was based on their idea of propriety. The critics asked whether or not a character ought to act in such and such a fashion and not whether or not the action of the character was understandable. Hence Gilson blamed Shakespeare for showing the bitter argument between the royal ladies in *King John* because, in the opinion of the critic, ladies of their rank should not talk in such a fashion. The strictures of all the critics on this score were based on the idea that the characters should show in their traits the good manners prescribed by an etiquette rather than the natural traits of human beings.

The modern reader is at a loss to explain how such a superficial theory of character analysis could long remain unchallenged. The modern
reader, however, fails to take into account the appeal which this completely elaborated and logically consistent theory had during an age in which men relied upon reason and distrusted imagination. However, when the attack on the unities and the theory of character decorum was made by Samuel Johnson, he based his arguments on an appeal to fact and showed that the probability which was protected and fostered by the rules was unnecessarily strict. Men did not find it impossible to enjoy a play whose action exceeded the time allowed by the rules and which took place in more than one locality. In demolishing the idea that dramatists had to ascribe traits according to the canons laid down by the codifiers of character decorum, Samuel Johnson emphasized the fact that men share the same nature and differ only in insignificant ways. Johnson indeed made it a mark of highest praise that Shakespeare had not been confused by non-essentials. He had always made nature predominate over accident; and if he preserves the essential character, is not very careful of distinctions superinduced and adventitious. His story requires Romans or kings, but he thinks only on men. . . . a poet overlooks the casual distinctions of country and condition, as a painter, satisfied with the figure, neglects the drapery.5

Although Johnson vindicated Shakespeare's genius by demonstrating that the rules which Shakespeare was accused of violating were based on an exaggerated and invalid concept of probability, the critics who ignored the rules and concentrated their attention on his delineation of character also showed that Shakespeare was a genius of the highest order. The difference in the tone of the work of these critics from the tone of the work of the

5 Raleigh, Johnson on Shakespeare, 15.
judicial critics is at once apparent. The neo-classical critic, even when he attempted to restrain himself and not judge the plays by the rules, was unable wholly to conceal the uneasiness which he felt when he was faced with the freedom and spontaneity of Shakespeare's plays. The character analyst, on the contrary, faced the plays without preconceptions and simply examined the characters in terms of human nature.

The purpose of the character analyst's work was to make specific the general praise accorded to Shakespeare's characters by neo-classical critics who praised the distinctness with which Shakespeare had conceived his characters and the propriety of the traits which he had attributed to them. As Warton pointed out, the neo-classical critic satisfied himself that he had commented adequately when he remarked that Lear's madness was very natural and pathetic. The character analyst took upon himself the task of showing why the remark was true by examining the character's speech and actions closely.

The examinations of the characters of Shakespeare's plays resulted in discoveries which were at variance with neo-classical theory, for these analyses made it clear that Shakespeare had consciously sought after the effects which he had achieved and in doing so had obviously ignored the central doctrines of the neo-classical theory of plot and characterization. A close study of the individual character as it moved through the play was achieved more successfully in the library than in the theatre, and hence the work of the character analysts is more literary than theatrical in its procedures and findings. It is of capital importance to remember this
circumstance when one comes to evaluate their work, for this circumstance carried with it both advantages and disadvantages.

The critic who thus analyzed the characters of Shakespeare soon came to the conclusion that these characters were drawn with such penetrating insight into the truths of human nature that they were far more than type characters. These critics came to the conclusion that each of these characters possessed a very real individuality which went far beyond the surface traits dear to the lovers of character decorum. Thomas Whately's analysis was undertaken to show how complex the characters of Macbeth and Richard III were and how completely different were these two men who were usurpers and tyrants and hence should have possessed similar traits. Whately and the later character critics claimed that Shakespeare's characters impressed the audience so much because the audience recognized their great trueness to life.

Not only did the character analysts demonstrate that Shakespeare's admittedly superior characters were not conceived as type characters, but in the criticism of Maurice Morgann the romantic conception of Shakespeare's characters is first met. The central thought behind Morgann's theory of Shakespeare's characterization was that it was possible to consider the characters as historic rather than dramatic beings. This idea is the cornerstone of the romantic theory of Shakespearean character criticism and was accepted not only by Coleridge, Lamb, and Hazlitt, but also by later nineteenth century critics such as Edward Dowden, C. A. Swinburne, Henry N. Hudson, and A. C. Bradley.
Although this thesis has limited itself to chronicling the decline of the neo-classical criticism and the emergence of those views of Shakespeare's characters which are still current, it should be noted that in recent years a group of critics has called for certain revisions in the opinions commonly held on certain characters which were arrived at by critics who followed Morgan and Coleridge in their work. These critics emphasize the importance of remembering that the characters must be analyzed in terms of their own art form, the drama, and that the playwright originally envisaged his characters in action on a stage. Mr. J. Dover Wilson, who is the most penetrating of these critics, in his book, The Fortunes of Falstaff, pointed out several deficiencies in A. C. Bradley's analysis of Falstaff. Mr. Wilson finds that character criticism frequently suffers from the danger of having the critic read his own personality into the character. He also objects to the critic's ignoring the serial nature of the drama by considering the episodes of a play in an order in which they did not occur, and he objects to a critic's treating a play as a historical document and collecting evidence in support of any point from any place in the text. The abuse which Mr. Wilson points out are obvious; equally obvious, it would appear, is the observation of David Nichol Smith:

The criticism of the nineteenth century as a whole owes some of its finest qualities to its habit of forgetting that they are creatures of art. But it has also been led by the same cause into
much needless discussion. ... It is a supreme testimony to Shakespeare that the life which he gave to his characters should be treated as if it carried them beyond their dramatic conditions in which they alone have their existence.

No one certainly can regret the development of the romantic theory of character criticism which provided a more satisfactory means of appraising the characters than had existed previously, nor will the prudent modern critic fail to realize that by no means all nineteenth century romantic criticism is vitiated by the abuses enumerated by Mr. Wilson.

Just as the character analysts were the first to show that Shakespeare's characters did not follow the ideals of neo-classical criticism but that their greatness lay in their originality, so the character analysts joined in the attack on the critics who condemned Shakespeare's plays because his plots did not conform to the rules established to guard against tragicomedy and violations of the unities of time and place. It has been pointed out that both John Dennis and Alexander Pope had recognized at least implicitly that a drama in which characterization was highly developed might arouse the emotions just as a drama which fulfilled the requirements laid down for the proper design and conduct of the plot. The remark that Shakespeare's genius and skill in characterization more than compensated for his so-called deficiencies in plot structure was commonly accepted as true. However, as the plays were examined more carefully by succeeding critics it became apparent to them that Shakespeare's plots possessed their own kind of unity which united elements which neo-classical critics had
considered to be completely opposed to each other. Samuel Johnson's statement that Shakespeare's plays differed in kind from comedy and tragedy as they were understood by the neo-classical critics provided the basis for the new and all important romantic theory of literature which put aside the a priori neo-classical rules and considered each work of art in terms of itself and not in terms of preconceived rules which were to be applied in an undeviating way to all members of the same literary genre.

To Maurice Morgann must go the credit of making a general application of Johnson's observation that Shakespeare's plays are great works of art which do not conform to the neo-classical divisions of the drama. Morgann saw clearly that each work of art must be approached without preconceived notions of how it should achieve its effects. In Morgann's observation that true poetry is magic which achieves its effects by means of hidden and unknown laws, we see the insistence on the effect of the literary work rather than on the conformity of its technique to accepted standards. When the work of art has achieved its effect it is foolish to point out reasons which apparently make it impossible for it to do what it has done. Morgann anticipated Coleridge's similar theory when Morgann said, "Means, whether apparent or hidden, are justified in Poesy by success; but then most perfect and admirable when most concealed." When Coleridge came to formulate his attitude on the subject of how to judge a work, he contrasted the mechanical regularity of a work with its consistency with its organic form. As it can be seen, he considered mere mechanical regularity to be superficial:
The organic form on the other hand is innate; it shapes as it develops from within; and the same fulness of its development is one and the same with the perfection of its outward form. Such as the life, such is the form.\(^9\)

The clearness with which both critics express themselves leaves no doubt that they were aware of the primary importance of the theory.

The specific opinions of the critics on the various characters are of less importance in the history of Shakespearean criticism and in the decline of neo-classicism than the critical theories which they espoused. These critics saw that Shakespeare's characters were conceived in terms which were far more complex than characters were which were formulated in terms of the rules. They saw also with varying degrees of clarity that the plots of Shakespeare's plays possessed their own form and unity which achieved its effect in a masterly way. However, a summary of the work of the character analysts in the eighteenth century must suffer from the danger of presenting their achievements as a main cause in the decline of the prestige of the rules or as the criticism which established for all time Shakespeare's reputation as a conscious artist. Such a presentation would suffer from a serious fault of emphasis, for the character analysts find their place in the larger movement which was in reaction to neo-classicism.

Nor can it be said that the works of the character analysts hold the decisive place in the establishing for all times of Shakespeare's reputation as a conscious artist. The extent of their influence has been

---

9 Raysor, Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism, I, 224.
noted in this study, and it would seem not to have made itself felt very widely. Thomas M. Raysor, however, points out that although Coleridge does not refer to any Shakespearean critics except the editors, it is unlikely that so omnivorous a reader would have entirely neglected his English predecessors. Hazlitt admits an acquaintance with the works of Whately and Richardson, but does not lead his readers to think that the influence is an important one. The work of the character analysts, however, does show that it was during the last half of the eighteenth century that men were slowly arriving at a realization of Shakespeare's art which anticipated in various scattered studies of minor literary figures the opinions which Coleridge and Hazlitt were to give permanent form during the first twenty years of the nineteenth century.

10 Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism, I, xxiv.

11 Characters of Shakespear's Plays, in Works, I, 171.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

I. BIBLIOGRAPHIES


II. PRIMARY SOURCES

A. BOOKS

1. EDITIONS OF SHAKESPEARE'S WORKS


191


2. CRITICAL WORKS


An Examen of the New Comedy Call'd The Suspicious Husband, London, 1747.


Jacob, Giles, The Poetical Register; or the Lives and Characters of All the English Poets, 2 vols., London, 1723.


Le Bossu, Rene, Monsieur Bossu's Treatise of the Epick Poem: Done into English from the French, with a New Original Preface upon the Same Subject, translated by W. J., London, 1695.

Lennox, Charlotte, Shakespear Illustrated: or the Novels and Histories on Which the Plays of Shakespeare are Founded, 2 vols., London, 1753.


Morris, Corby, An Essay Towards Fixing the True Standards of Wit, Humour, Mallery, Satire, and Ridicule to which is added an Analysis of the Characters of an Humourist, Sir John Falstaff, Sir Roger de Coverly, London, 1744.


Pye, Henry James, A Commentary Illustrating the Poetic of Aristotle, London, 1792.

Pye, Henry James, Short Observations on the Genius and Writings of Shakspere; and the Labors of His Commentators, London, 1807.


Rymer, Thomas, The Tragedies of the Last Age Considered and Examined by the Practice of the Ancients and the Common Sense of All Ages in a Letter to Fleetwood Sheppard, Esq., London, 1678.


Whalley, Peter, An Enquiry into the Learning of Shakespeare with Remarks on Several Passages of His Plays, London, 1748.


White, James, Falstaff's Letters, anonymously edited, London, 1877.

B. ARTICLES


"Characters of Shakespeare's Plays" [a review], Edinburgh Review, XXVIII, August, 1817, 472-488.

Cumberland, Richard, The Observer, Tunbridge Wells, Nos. 69-72 [a comparison of Macbeth and Richard III], n. d.

Cumberland, Richard, The Observer, Tunbridge Wells, No. 73 [a study of Falstaff and his group], n. d.


Mackenzie, Henry, The Mirror, Edinburgh, Nos. 99-100 [Hamlet], April 18 and 22, 1780.


Theobald, Lewis, The Censor, London, Nos. 7 and 10 [Lear], April 25 and May 2, 1715.


Warton, Joseph, The Adventurer, London, Nos. 93 and 97 [characters of The Tempest], September 25 and October 9, 1753.


W. N., The Bee or Literary Weekly Intelligencer, Edinburgh, I, January, 12, 19, and 26, 1791 [an essay on Othello].

III. SECONDARY SOURCES

A. BOOKS

Babbitt, Irving, Rousseau and Romanticism, Boston and New York, 1929.


Bosker, A., Literary Criticism in the Age of Johnson, Gronigen, Netherlands, 1930.


Bray, Rene, La Formation de la doctrine classique en France, Lausanne, 1931.


Clarke, Charles Cowden, Shakespeare Characters, Chiefly Those Subordinate, London, 1863.


Cooper, Lane, The Poetics of Aristotle: Its Meaning and Influence, Boston, 1923.

Craig, Hardin, An Interpretation of Shakespeare, New York, 1948.


Gosse, Sir Edmund, Modern English Literature, New York, 1928.


Harbage, Alfred, Cavalier Drama, New York, 1936.


Lounsbury, Thomas R., *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist*, New York, 1901.


B. ARTICLES


Walcott, Fred G., "John Dryden's Answer to Thomas Rymer's The Tragedies of the Last Age," Philological Quarterly, Iowa City, XV, April, 1936, 194-214.

APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by Harry F. Sebastian has been read and approved by three members of the Department of English.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

[Signature]

Date: January 30, 1957

Signature of Adviser: James F. Young