E.E. Stoll and the Realist School of Shakespearean Criticism

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E. E. STOLL AND THE REALIST
SCHOOL OF SHAKESPEAREAN
CRITICISM

BY

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A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
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Vita Auctoris

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare is primarily a playwright. It may seem to most people that this is an obvious fact, but, oddly enough, Shakespeare the playwright has been neglected. The main trend in Shakespearean criticism up until our own time has been to treat him as a poet, psychologist, moralist--practically everything, in fact, except as a playwright. Most of the critics of this undramatic group have had little or no connection with the theater. Despite the fact that Shakespeare did write plays, and that the word "play" obviously means something to be played, these critics have consistently taken the undramatic, literary approach to Shakespeare.

This does not mean that Shakespeare does not rate highly in the other categories. His writings have always been and always will be a rich mine of poetry and of philosophy. But the point is that the non-dramatic critical viewpoint has caused in some cases difficulties which obscure the real Shakespeare. Because of a certain exaggerated reverence for Shakespeare, he has been misinterpreted by some. A great number of people have come to feel that Shakespeare is above them, that he can only be understood by the aesthetes and intellectuals.
This attitude is partially due to the fact that for many people the first acquaintance with Shakespeare comes in school. Shakespeare is introduced to them through the medium of the textbook as the great mind, the master poet of the race. And he is that, but Shakespeare would probably have wept bitterly if he had been present at the performance of Hamlet which Margaret Webster and her company gave some years ago in a mid-Western city. She describes the incident in her book Shakespeare Without Tears.¹ Before Miss Webster and her troupe arrived in this particular city, the school children had for weeks heard lectures on the greatness of Shakespeare. They had to attend the performance as a class assignment. The balconies were crowded with children munching candy and popcorn. Several policemen had been called in to help the teachers keep order. The policemen were very conscious of their responsibility of maintaining the proper respect towards Shakespeare. When the children, as quick as they were critical, began to laugh at Polonius, they were cowed by a fiercely respectful "shush" from the police. Imagine, laughing at a tragedy of Shakespeare! Why that was almost as bad as laughing during a funeral in church. Miss Webster's sad conclusion to the story is: "Poor Polonius played frantically to solemn faces throughout the

¹ Margaret Webster, Shakespeare Without Tears, Whittlesey House, New York, 1942, 10.
afternoon."²

Yes, Shakespeare would have wept bitterly. This play, which he wrote for people to enjoy and thrill to, was turned into a solemn and official ceremony. Throughout the tour the Webster company was plagued by the attitude that Shakespeare was above being understood by the ordinary audience. People would come to see the play not because they enjoyed it as they would their Saturday-night movie, but because Shakespeare was something of a demi-god to whom they had to pay reverence. Fortunately, Miss Webster found that even ordinary people would greatly enjoy a play of Shakespeare once they realized that the play had been written primarily for them, and not for critics or aesthetes.

But the well meant conspiracy against the common man's enjoyment of Shakespeare goes on. If Shakespeare were to come back to earth today, he would see his lively, popular plays being pulled apart by professors in their libraries as if the plays had been written for them. Shakespeare would probably feel like the character in the German play, in which Goethe, reincarnated as a college student taking an examination on Goethe, fails miserably. He does not remember all of the incidents which the examiners seem to consider important, and his

² Ibid., 10.
replies run directly counter to the accepted textbooks of Goethe criticism.

Undoubtedly Shakespeare would be at a loss to understand why scholars have made difficulties out of trifles. He would probably tell them that these difficulties are largely of their own making and that would almost vanish if the scholars remembered that he was an Elizabethan dramatist writing for an Elizabethan audience which was, for the most part, composed of rather ordinary people who came to the theatre to be entertained.

The above attitude is in large part the viewpoint of the new school of Shakespearean criticism which has arisen in our century. It is called the school of realism, or the common-sense school, though the former title is preferred. The leader in this modern school is Elmer Edgar Stoll, Professor of English Literature at the University of Minnesota.

Since Professor Stoll's Shakespearean criticism will be the subject of this thesis, it is well that we make his acquaintance at once. He was born in Orville, Ohio, on February 11, 1874. He began college work at Wooster College, Wooster, Ohio, then transferred to Harvard University and received the degree of Bachelor of Arts there in 1895. He then received his Master of Arts degree at the same school the next year. Professor Stoll
then taught at Adelphi College, Garden City, New York, from 1900 to 1902. He went for further studies to Germany and got his doctorate of philosophy at Munich in 1904. After his return to America, Professor Stoll taught at Harvard University during the school year 1905-1906 and at Western Reserve from 1906 to 1912. He then went to the University of Minnesota and became Professor of English Literature. He has taught there ever since. 3

Professor Stoll's specialty, of course, is Shakespeare and the drama. He has gained his position as leader in the school of realism by his outspoken presentation of this group's doctrines in a series of books and articles, the first of which he published in 1907. 4 It is in pertinent, selected portions of these writings that the basic principles of the new school can be found. Of special value for this study are the later books, such as Art and Artifice in Shakespeare, Shakespeare and Other

Masters, and the two monographs, Othello and Hamlet.5

Because this new school is somewhat reactionary, and thus tends to go to an extreme, it has to be approached with caution. Also, it is very important to note right from the beginning that Stoll has as high an admiration for Shakespeare's poetry and character portrayals as has any other critic. To quote an example:

The Tempest is precious...not because of the structure or situations, but because of the characters, the poetry, the rich and dreamy spirit which for the most part informs it.6

Stoll merely maintains that the literary and philosophical aspects of the plays have been overemphasized to the detriment of the dramatic aspects, and that the true Shakespeare has been hidden from many. Stoll and his followers try to throw aside much of the mystery which surrounds Shakespeare. They come to their task with this attitude: "Now what is all of this about? Let's get at the facts!"

The modern school of realism arose as a reaction to the Romantic school of Shakespearean criticism which regarded Shakespeare's plays as meant for readers only. With the slogan,

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5 Also useful for gaining a knowledge of the school are the writings of the members who are playwright-critics, especially Brander Matthews, Shakespeare as a Playwright, Macmillan, New York, 1913, and George P. Baker, The Development of Shakespeare as a Dramatist, Macmillan, New York, 1907.

"Shakespeare wrote to be seen and heard, not to be read and studied," as something of a war cry, Stoll insists that we must study Shakespeare as if we were Elizabethans viewing one of his plays. Only in this way can we appreciate the true Shakespeare, since it was for that audience, not for critics, that the plays were written. Stoll says that in merely reading the plays we miss much of their true significance and beauty, because they were written to be seen and heard by an audience.

In his book, On Reading Shakespeare, Logan Pearsall Smith has an interesting chapter on the difficulties which beset the man who wants to read Shakespeare. He calls the chapter "On Not Reading Shakespeare," because in it he deals with the critics with whom the reader must contend. Smith compares all of the critics to the sphinxes who guard the gates to the temples of Egypt, ready to devour the unwary. The largest of these sphinxes is the monster of Gizeh, which guards the entrance to the valley of the Nile. Smith then says:

Almost as formidable to me is a modern monster of the Middle West which has recently heaved up her bulk in America, and stands gazing across the Mississippi Valley. According to this new-born school of critics, we must, if we wish to understand Shakespeare and the problems he raises, not only fit our heads with Elizabethan eyes and ears, but must furnish them inside with Elizabethan brains as well. The modern idea of Shakespeare,

7 Stoll, Shakespeare and Other Masters, 17.
according to these critics, is nothing but a windy, vast balloon, inflated by German and Scotch professors . . . by propagandists, idealists and blatherskites, who combined to distend and blow it up with the hot air of modern transcendentalism, psychology and introspection— all things of which, of course, the Elizabethans had not the slightest notion. 8

While not agreeing with them entirely, Smith very well expresses the mind of Stoll and of his confreres as he goes on with his description, presenting their tenets as they appear to him:

Shakespeare was an Elizabethan; he was not "a prophet, living in the spirit of the nineteenth century while working in the sixteenth"; not a thinker voyaging alone through strange seas of thought, but a jolly old actor and playwright, who filled his borrowed plots with fine acting parts and thrilling situations, all concocted to suit the taste and temper of the time. To understand them we must understand that taste and temper, and realize that the meaning of the plays— their only meaning— is their surface meaning, as Shakespeare's contemporaries understood it. Shakespeare in writing his plays had . . . no subtle intentions and no deep underlying ideas; his stock characters were those of the renascence stage. 9

Smith then introduces the reader to Stoll. Despite the rather objective presentation here given, it is important to note that Smith is not in full accord with Stoll's realism, as

9 Ibid., 24-5.
will be seen later. Smith prefers the Romantic interpretation of Shakespeare. This is what Smith says of Stoll:

The leader of this American and hardest-boiled of all the hard-boiled schools of Shakespearean criticism is a learned and outspoken American professor, Professor Elmer Edgar Stoll, Ph. D., of Minneapolis. Professor Stoll is one of the most erudite of living Shakespearean scholars, and possesses also an accurate and unrivalled knowledge of dramatic history . . . . His scholarship is accompanied by a vigorous gift of vituperation . . . . Altogether an awkward customer, a fierce eagle in the fluttered dovecotes, a wolf in the quiet fold of literary professors, and who is moved to derision and no pity by their cooings and . . . bleatings. 10

A more formal commentary on Stoll comes from Augustus Ralli, who is one of the foremost authorities on Shakespearean criticism. In his monumental two-volume work on the history of Shakespearean criticism, Ralli has covered the writings of all Shakespearean critics who wrote in English, French and German from Elizabethan times up to 1923. His opinion of Professor Stoll is well worth quoting:

Professor Stoll is among the first of contemporary critics . . . . We must admit that he is pointing the way to the best criticism of the future . . . . More and more, as the classics recede in time, criticism will draw nearer to research--to a study of the conditions of the age, etc. The impressionistic method will yield to the historical and comparative, and for the latter Professor

10 Ibid., 25-6.
Stoll is admirably equipped with his exact knowledge of the drama from Aristophanes to Ibsen.\footnote{11}

We can see then, that Stoll is definitely worthy of study. An ever growing number of modern Shakespearean scholars are on his side. In their researches as preparation for the production of a Shakespearean play, the directors and producers of our time favor Stoll's dramatic criticism over the traditional literary criticism.\footnote{12}

The aim of this thesis is to present a summary of the chief tenets of the school of realism, especially as they appear in the writings of Stoll. My procedure will be, first of all, to show the chief reasons for the existence of the undramatic, literary school of Shakespearean criticism. It is important that these reasons be understood, because Stoll and his group arose as a direct reaction to the undramatic school. In Chapter Two I will also present a concrete example of the differing viewpoints of the two schools in their interpretations of Hamlet.

I will devote Chapter Three to an exposition of the modern school of realism, especially in its more immediate history, its chief members and principal tenets. Chapter Four will deal with

\footnote{11} Augustus Ralli, \textit{A History of Shakespearean Criticism}, Oxford University Press, London, 1932, II, 258. \footnote{12} Webster, 14.
the all-important point upon which Stoll keeps insisting, namely, the need of studying a Shakespearean play from the standpoint of the Elizabethan audience for whom it was written, and not from the standpoint of the critic. How Shakespeare achieved audience interest through "movement," according to Stoll, may be called the heart of the thesis.

The final chapter will treat another main tenet of this school, namely, the importance of plot structure as the ultimate foundation of audience interest. Stoll and his group are naturally bound to prefer plot over character, but this can be indicated without entering very deeply into the centuries-old controversy. Stoll's insistence on plot structure involves the question of how Shakespeare achieved mastery of it over a period of years in dealing with audiences.
CHAPTER II

WHY THE SCHOOL OF REALISM AROSE

Before going into a positive exposition of the tenets of the school of realism, it is necessary to determine the causes of its rise. Professor Stoll began to write his critical doctrine mainly as a reaction against the Romantic school of Shakespearean criticism. This school has Coleridge and an imposing array of outstanding English and German critics in its ranks, so it may seem at first sight that Professor Stoll is running his head against a stone wall in trying to oppose a system which has been the dominant influence in Shakespearean criticism right up to our own day.

But Stoll is convinced that Shakespeare did not write for the critics, and consequently he has no fear in boldly denouncing their doctrine and in setting up his own. The "big names" do not frighten him at all. He boldly takes up the cudgel against their fundamental approach to Shakespeare, an approach which he says is undramatic.

The Romantic interpretation of Shakespeare had its inception back in Puritan times, shortly after Shakespeare's death. The Puritans closed the theatres while they were in power.
Their constant attitude towards them was one of hostility. They considered acting, writing plays, and anything else connected with the theatre as the tools of the devil himself and therefore cursed by God. This odium against the theatre was in a sense justified by the number of immoral plays which were presented during the Renaissance. But the Puritans went too far and condemned the theatre as evil in itself. Although playwriting was also condemned, even the Puritans had to admit that Shakespeare was a great literary figure. Since plays formed the great bulk of his writings, the Puritans solved the problem by divorcing Shakespeare from the stage.¹ Under Puritan influence Shakespeare was studied as a poet, philosopher and moralist. The trend to emphasize his characters and to study them apart from their relation to the play as a whole began at this time.

With the restoration of the Stuarts came also the restoration of Shakespeare to the stage. But unfortunately for Shakespeare and for his plays, the Neo-classical criticism began at this time and remained in vogue for over a hundred years. The Neo-classical critics such as Pope and Dryden admitted that Shakespeare was a playwright, but would not admit that he was a good one. Shakespeare failed in their estimation because he did not observe the three unities and the other sacred canons of

dramatic art which they considered inviolable. They could not see that Shakespeare was too new, too big for them, that his genius set its own laws.\textsuperscript{2} As Coleridge later wrote of them:

They arraigned the eagle because he did not have the dimensions of the swan. They were like the blind and deaf man who fills his three ounce phial at the waters of Niagara and then determines positively that the greatness of the cataract is neither more nor less than his three ounce bottle has been able to receive.\textsuperscript{3}

The Neo-classicists said that nature and reason demanded the unities and they insisted that dramatic illusion was impossible without them. Because Shakespeare did not hold or use the three unities, he was considered lacking in dramatic skill. These critics could not see that Shakespeare's art was of a different kind. As Thomas M. Raysor says:

The structure of Elizabethan tragedy lent itself to crowded incidents developing a story from beginning to end, developing it for love of the story itself, while the great classical drama concentrated upon a single great crisis, to which the dramatist was expected to give a moral interpretation. There is here a valid antithesis between romantic and classic, and it carries with it implications which not only affect the three unities, but every phase of dramatic method. Shakespeare's refusal to mould the chaos of experience into a definite moral meaning

\textsuperscript{2} Thomas M. Raysor, \textit{Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism}, Oxford University Press, London, 1, xxiii.  
\textsuperscript{3} Samuel T. Coleridge, \textit{Lectures and Notes on Shakespeare and Other Dramatists}, Oxford University Press, London, 1931, 49.
... set his dramatic genius in opposition to that of the Greeks. 4

But Garrick's presentation of Shakespeare in the 1741 season gave concrete proof that dramatic illusion did not depend on the unities. Kames in 1762 attacked the Neo-classicists' stand by showing that holding to the unities forced the dramatist into many improbabilities. Kames said that the spectator gladly accepts with his imagination many difficulties hard to justify to the reason. 5

But the judgement that Shakespeare was a failure as a plot builder persisted as long as the Neo-classicists were in power. They admitted his greatness only as a moralist and as a portrait of character. The power of the Neo-classical school began to wane, however, in the latter half of the eighteenth century, when the earliest pre-Romantic critics made their appearance. It was about this time that Richardson initiated the new method of character analysis which became well established by the end of the eighteenth century. Morgann helped along this trend with the publication of his book, Essay on the Dramatic Character of Falstaff, in 1774. 6

These men anticipated and influenced the methods of the

4 Ibid., xli.
5 Ibid., xix.
6 Ibid., xxiv.
greatest of the Romantic critics, Samuel Taylor Coleridge. In 1811 Coleridge lectured in London on the dramas of Shakespeare and other Elizabethan dramatists. Coleridge gave these lectures while he was under the influence of dope, out of a job and almost starving. To these lectures were later added notes from his copybooks and marginalia from his text of Shakespeare's plays. The whole body of his Shakespearean criticism was published in one volume, *Lectures and Notes on Shakespeare and Other Dramatists*, from which we have already quoted.\(^7\)

Coleridge's writings on Shakespeare have had a tremendous influence on subsequent dramatic criticism of Shakespeare. Stoll thinks, as we shall see, that this influence tended in the wrong direction. There were two main points in Coleridge's Shakespearean criticism. The first was his typically Romantic viewpoint in regarding Shakespeare as flawless and above reproach. This attitude made him incapable of true objective criticism and led him into difficulties when he tried to make merits out of evident flaws in Shakespeare.

His other contribution was the great emphasis on psycho-analysis of the characters almost without regard to their relation to the plot. It would be unjust though to name him as the only founder of the psycho-analytic school. The study of

\(^7\) Cf. supra, page 13.
the individual characters to the neglect of the pattern and meaning of the whole play was begun by Morgann. But Coleridge certainly did give this method a great popularity. As Granville-Barker says:

When Coleridge released the truth that Shakespeare already in Venus and Adonis and in Lucrece gave proof of a most profound energetic and philosophic mind, he was perfectly right, if we use the adjectives correctly, but he supplied a dangerous stimulant to the more adventurous . . . . The sense of the profundity of Shakespeare's thought has so oppressed some critics that they have been forced to explain themselves by unintelligibles. 8

Stoll finds another weak point in Coleridge's criticism in the fact that he admitted openly that he preferred to read Shakespeare in his study rather than to see his plays performed on the stage. 9 This preference betrays an unfortunate tendency to handle Shakespeare's plays as closet drama, which is characteristic of Romantic criticism. Shakespeare certainly never intended his plays to be so handled. The result of such criticism is always to subordinate plot to character; that is, to criticise plays as if they were novels, and to forget the conventions of drama for the sake of psychology. This approach cannot be used with Shakespeare because he filled his plays with condensed meaning, nevertheless adapted to the comprehension of

9 Raysor, II, 85-6; 97.
the audience. Writing as he did with a full knowledge of the theatre and with actual stage performance as his chief objective, he had little regard for the paradoxes and hidden meanings which scholars and critics look for.\textsuperscript{10}

Coleridge also confessed his ignorance of the Elizabethan stage and of Shakespeare's contemporaries. The reason for this ignoring of Shakespeare's stage and contemporaries was his desire to prove that Shakespeare was superior to and even distinct from his age. Undoubtedly Coleridge also hated to think of Shakespeare as an actor-playwright writing for the ordinary audience. With such an approach inter-relation between Shakespeare and his contemporaries or even between Shakespeare and the social life of Elizabethan England was almost necessarily disparaged. He was lacking in a detailed historical knowledge of Elizabethan idiom or Elizabethan sources for the plays. In fact, he was inclined to undervalue such information in favor of critical intuition.\textsuperscript{11} Although it was not until our own times that E. K. Chambers and other Elizabethan scholars made their researches concerning that era, Raysor thinks that Coleridge had enough information available but did not care to use it because of his inclination to favor critical intuition.

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., I, liv.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., I, xlv.
It was this Romantic love of individual personality that led Coleridge to interpret Hamlet as a moody and melancholy character. Coleridge said that excessive reflectiveness accounted for Hamlet's supposed weakness of action. He presented Hamlet as a brooding, melancholy individual, to whom the external world was unreal and an object of interest only when reflected in the mirror of his mind. Hamlet's aversion to action is typical of those who have a world in themselves. 12

To this Stoll, using his historical and comparative method replies:

Before Mackenzie's day, there was, so far as we can discover from popular literary opinion concerning Hamlet, nothing wrong with him. He was a gallant, romantic figure, instrument and (at last) victim of fate. The most remarkable thing to be noted in our survey is the fact that at the close of the seventeenth century and the beginning of the eighteenth, when the moralizing and classicising tendency was at its zenith, critics and censors such as Jeremy Collier, James Drake and John Dennis, who could hardly have been expected to find in him anything psychological, did not even find poetic justice fulfilled on the head of the hesitating prince . . . . Dramatists so imbued with classical theory as Nicholas Rowe, Aaron Hill and Samuel Johnson would have discovered a tragic fault, you would think, or would have had none of him. Actually they find nothing in him either psychologically or morally faulty, but hold him to be an heroic nature, instrument of fate and its victim. 13

12 Coleridge, 123.
13 Stoll, Hamlet, 11-12.
Stoll maintains that the psychological, morbid Hamlet is exclusively the discovery, or invention, rather, of the Romantic age:

I cannot be sure of the reality of a tragic fault in the hero of a great popular tragedy not discovered in the two centuries nearest it, not discovered by a moral philosopher like Shaftesbury, by dramatists like Rowe, Fielding or by the massive mind of Samuel Johnson which sought for it and was troubled for the lack of it and first brought to light by Scotch professors and sentimentalists and the rest of the Romanticists who knew not and loved not the stage or its ways. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are far nearer in time and spirit to Shakespeare and the people for whom he wrote and played. Nor is time the only factor. The present Hamlet theory arose and was developed far away from every tradition and echo of the stage. It arose in a land where the theatre was anathema; it was developed, in the hands of Coleridge, by a dreamer, philosopher and maker of closet plays; it was perfected in Germany, Coleridge's foster land--then at least a land of dreamers, philosophers, and makers of closet plays. So too arose the prevailing interpretations of Shylock, Falstaff and Othello. They are not therefore to be rejected because they are in origin literary and Romantic, German or Scotch. But when such interpretations of early drama can be shown to have broken sharply with tradition, they should be scrutinized with care.14

As is evident, one of Stoll's chief arguments against Coleridge's interpretation of Hamlet is that the very popularity of the play itself is evidence for the gallant, heroic quality

14 Ibid., 12.
of the leading character. The normal audience will not stand for morbid, unrealistic, weak or vacillating characters; the popular imagination cannot be touched by them. People like to see themselves on the stage, but none, least of all the jovial Elizabethans, think themselves mad or melancholy.

Raysor, a profound student of Coleridge's Shakespearean criticism, comes to Stoll's aid in the latter's contention that one of the reasons why Coleridge was wrong in his interpretation of Hamlet was his lack of a detailed knowledge of Elizabethan times. For instance, Raysor says that Coleridge was ignorant of the contemporary literary analogies to Hamlet's refusal to kill the king because he was at prayer, and secure from damnation. Coleridge also refused to accept the possibility that Hamlet's voyage to England might have been introduced because this incident was present in his source, a motive, which, in a semi-historical plot that was well known, might be of prime importance. Coleridge insisted on interpreting both of these as proofs of Hamlet's unwillingness to act. Raysor thinks that though this interpretation has been followed by many, it is quite debatable when the historical viewpoint is taken.15

In still another place Raysor backs up Stoll's attack on Coleridge's interpretation of Hamlet's character:

15 Raysor, I, lv.
Coleridge said that excessive reflectiveness accounted for Hamlet's supposed weakness in action. This may be questioned because of its inconsistency with the impression of vigor which Hamlet seems always to make upon any audience. If Hamlet's weakness was not noticed before the end of the eighteenth century and still perhaps remains unnoticed by audiences, it may be questioned whether Shakespeare, obliged as a dramatist to make his central meaning obvious to the dullest mind, could have had the intention ascribed to him. Coleridge himself says: "The general idea is all that can be required from the poet, not a scholastic logical inconsistency in all the parts so as to meet metaphysical objections." With the addition that the general idea is indispensable, this is sound and penetrating dramatic criticism, which can be turned against Coleridge himself in his subtle interpretation of Hamlet, or when he remarks, "Shakespeare, secure of being read over and over, of being becoming a family friend, provides this for his readers and leaves it to them." 16

Raysor's opinion is an example of the growing tendency to accept Stoll's viewpoint and to see Shakespeare's plays as the Elizabethan playgoer saw them. In many cases where this is done the difficulties over which critics have argued for a long time diminish or vanish altogether. Stoll, on the question of why Hamlet did not stab the king, remarks, "Men in this world do not post off to stab a man on the affidavit of a ghost. Why should such a man as Hamlet not shrink from the deed and cast about for new incentives? And why should he not then reproach himself for

16 Ibid., liii-liv.
Shrinking?  

Stoll insists that it was only when Hamlet was played as a romantic hero, as he was, both in England and in Germany in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, that he firmly held the stage. As he became something of a morbid, pathological figure, the play became more of a "highbrow" or closet, play.  

The interpretation of Hamlet as proposed by Coleridge was used by the German Romantics also. They loved the philosophical approach, and wrote and lectured on Hamlet and other characters of Shakespeare as if each stood in a dramatic monologue instead of in a play, and as if a trait were to be found in every deed or syllable. Stoll attributes this to some lack of artistic sense in Anglo-Saxon and German criticism, which seeks in art meaning and reality more than form and beauty. He maintains that the correct critical viewpoint in drama is this:  

The whole play is greater than the sum of its parts. The characters are not the beginning and source of the plot. What they do or say is only in part their own doing or saying. The dramatis personae do not undergo experiences in order to exhibit their characters, but it is because of what they are to go through that they are invested with character. A situation, not a character, is the author's point of departure. This is true of the Greek and Elizabethan dramatists, who fitted improbable old  

17 Stoll, 19 (Italics mine.)  
18 Ibid., 8.
stories for the stage. Even in the modern play, in which the action is supposed to rise and flow out of the characters alone, they are not to be taken out of the web of circumstance and the fabric of convention and structure, any more than the figures are to be cut out of a painting. Out of the pattern of the plot they have no existence. And if we really love art . . . then the picture the poet has painted must, as much as in us lies, be mirrored in our criticism even as we fondly think was his vast vision of life upon his canvass—steady and whole.19

Stoll cannot tolerate the methods of the critics who, it seem to him, mutilate the play. He insists that Shakespeare did not write for the German professors who turn the pages back and forth and out of the scattered speeches of every separate character try to fashion a finished whole.20 In this, of course, he also condemns Coleridge, who, as we have seen, gave such a great impetus to this method of Shakespearean study.

The difficulties which the critics raise certainly exist in many cases, but Stoll wants these critics to remember that if they paid attention to Goethe and what he has to say about Shakespeare's plays, they would have no excuse for bringing up the difficulties. He quotes Goethe as saying, "Shakespeare regarded his plays as a lively and changing scene which would pass rapidly before eye and ear and his only interest was to be

19 Stoll, Othello, 69-70.
20 Ibid., 58-9.
effective and significant for the moment."

Stoll explains away some of the difficulties which the critics bring up in this manner:

Sudden conversions and lapses are only the most unplausible part of a system common in Elizabethan plays, least plausibly carried out in Othello, most brilliantly in Beaumont and Fletcher, whereby the chief characters, before all is said and done, run the whole gamut of emotions . . . . In the three hours traffic of the stage, there has always been, because of the need both of the condensation and of stage effect, a far wider range of emotion than is probable in life. But in three centuries of approach to realism, that range has been narrowed, the boldness of modulation or acuteness of contrast, have been subdued. And now the dramatists preserve the mood and tone of a scene, just as they preserve, more scrupulously, the integrity of the character. Authors, like actors, then "made points" . . . instead of presenting a character from first to last. Quite Elizabethan is the art by which the free souled Othello passes under a cloud of jealous fury and at the end shines forth again.22

As we see, Stoll always keeps coming back to the Elizabethan viewpoint. He thinks that the interest in psychology, the subtle analysis of character and the revealing of mental states should no longer be the chief object of Shakespearean criticism. In fact, he seems to imply that those who hold to the Romantic interpretation of Shakespeare are somewhat

21 Ibid., 58.
22 Ibid., 59.
primitive and naive. What they call psychology in Shakespeare is something else entirely. As Stoll says:

How primitive and unsophisticated it is not to consider Shakespeare only as a dramatist and poet, not to be content with poetry and drama (as we are with mere music in Mozart, mere painting in Rembrandt) and that too, the poetry and drama, not of Browning or Ibsen, but of his own simple and spacious days? Shakespeare may have been concerned with the effect of the moment, but he is all that he ever promised to be, poet and dramatist from beginning to end. He may be concerned only with the effect of the moment in respect to the psychological consistency of his character, but not always in respect to the poem or play. There is harmonious relation of first scene to the last scene, the repetition of motive and inter-weaving of them. There is poetic unity and identity of characters. It is this poetic identity, this fine differentiation of tone, this concrete and intense reality of utterance, which people have mistaken for psychology itself.23

In his indictment of the Romantics Stoll certainly gives credit to what is valuable in their contribution to literature. He admits that some of the poetry of the Romantic epoch has enduring value. But its dramatic criticism? It was based on incorrect principles and should therefore be rejected. In the following statement he attempts to do away with the Romantics' criticism and to set up his own:

In its [the Romantics'] criticism of early literature, epic, ballad and drama alike, poetry overwhelmed history, the spirit of

23 Stoll, Othello, 63.
the present, the spirit of the past. Indeed it was of the essence of Romantic criticism to break with tradition or ignore it. The Romanticists believed . . . in genius, genius omnipotent as a god, self-taught and self-impelled. They did not conceive of genius as utterly dependent, potent only as it absorbed all the living thoughts and sentiments of the period and was initiated into the newest mysteries of the craft. It is only so that even a lyric poet can reach and move his audience and how much more the writer for the public stage! And if it is only so through the medium of tradition and convention that this greatest of dramatists reached and moved his audience, how otherwise than as we become acquainted with that tradition and convention shall we ourselves in a later age come in contact with him?24

A brief summary of the way in which each of the schools of criticism interpret the character of Hamlet will bring out the divergence of opinion among them. According to Stoll and the realists, Hamlet is a gallant, heroic and romantic figure. He does have a tragic character, but the picture of him as having a diseased spirit and limping will Stoll rejects. He denies that there was anything psychologically or morally wrong with him, and bases this denial on the contention that the play could not have been so popular if Hamlet had been played according to the interpretation of the Romantics, because a morbid, weak or vacillating character does not appeal to the popular imagination. Hamlet goes to England not because he is of hesitating character, but because the incident of the voyage is

24 Stoll, Hamlet, 89.
present in the earlier Hamlet on which Shakespeare based his version, and which the Elizabethan audience knew. Hamlet does not kill the king at prayer because of a weakness of will, but because he does not want the king to go to heaven. Men do not ordinarily hurry off to kill a man on the word of a ghost, and Stoll thinks that there is no reason why Hamlet should either. He is a normal, romantic figure. As such he was played in Shakespeare's time and long after. This also, according to Stoll, is the way in which the early critics, such as Collier and Drake, interpreted his character.

Coleridge, on the other hand, said that the character of Hamlet could be traced to Shakespeare's deep science of mental philosophy. In order to understand Hamlet we must know the working of our own minds. Ordinarily there is a balance in the mind between the impressions from the outside and the interior operations of the mind. But in Hamlet there is an overbalance of the contemplative faculty. He becomes a creature of meditation and loses the power of action. In him the faculty of imagination is in morbid excess, mutilated and diseased. There is no balance between the real and the imaginary worlds, but instead a great intellectual activity and a proportionate aversion to action. This lack of balance is shown in the everlasting broodings of Hamlet's mind, which is constantly abstracted from the world outside and is always occupied with the
world within. Hamlet's senses are in a state of trance and he looks upon external things as signs only.25

These are the diverging opinions of the two schools on Hamlet. Stoll, emphasizing the historical and comparative approach, says that there is no mystery in Hamlet. Coleridge, limiting his approach to the literary and philosophical aspects, makes of Hamlet a study in psychology. This latter interpretation may be questioned to some extent, since it is cut off from the stage, and especially Shakespeare's stage. But it may well be that even though the early critics did not find in Hamlet all that the later ones did, the psychology was really there, waiting to be discovered. Perhaps the truth is not on either side but rather in the middle, and the true interpretation of Hamlet will not be found until the truly valuable elements in the contributions of both schools are utilized and blended into one.

25 Coleridge, 177-8.
CHAPTER III
THE MODERN SCHOOL OF REALISM

In the last chapter we tried to see the reasons for the rise of the modern school of realism. The chapter for the most part consisted in a negative "tearing-down-and-hauling-away" process, with only a brief, incidental mention of the realists' positive critical doctrine. It will be the purpose of the remaining chapters to present this doctrine in some detail, especially as it is found in the writings of Stoll.

But first it is necessary to see the more recent history of the school and to meet some of its other members. After reading their denunciation of the traditional criticism, a person may well ask, "Who are these people who so boldly attack the great gods of Shakespearean criticism? Are they mere upstarts who are trying to attract some cheap attention?" No, E. E. Stoll and his group represent a critical approach to Shakespeare which will probably have a lasting influence on literary opinion. The common-sense attitude of this group is constantly attracting an ever-growing number of followers. Many prefer this school because it stands midway between the excesses of both the Neoclassical school and the Romantic school.

The modern school grew out of the exhaustive researches
into Elizabethan times of such men as E. K. Chambers, W. J. Lawrence, W. W. Greg, A. W. Pollard and others. E. K. Chambers, of course, is the chief figure in this group of scholars with his monumental five-volume work, *The Elizabethan Stage*, and the later *William Shakespeare*, in two volumes.

Chambers and the other early scholars did the spadework in bringing to light facts about Elizabethan theatre conditions, the people for whom Shakespeare wrote, the actors, the printers of the plays, the early manuscripts and other related topics. A. W. Pollard's contribution was to emphasize the value of the neglected Quartos as against the Folio editions. Another of the scholars, with more of a theatrical bent, William Poel, produced Shakespeare's plays in the exact Elizabethan manner, even erecting in London theatres which were true reproductions of the Elizabethan stages.

On the basis of these scholarly investigations, Stoll and the realists are giving not the Neo-classical or Romantic or Victorian Shakespeare, but the Elizabethan Shakespeare writing for an Elizabethan audience. In almost every important play of Shakespeare's, critic has criticized critic and fought over hidden meanings until the play was so covered by glosses that it

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itself was obscured. So the realists did the most practical thing. "Forget about this criticism," they said, "and try to see the play as Shakespeare's public saw it." This may seem to be too simple an approach, yet, by the application of this common-sense principle, new light is thrown on many Sheakspearean critical problems. As Professor Dover Wilson remarks:

> It is one of the most important literary discoveries of our age that Shakespeare wrote, not to be read, but to be acted; that his plays are not books, but, as it were, libretti for stage performance. It is amazing that so obvious a fact should so late have come to recognition. The truth is that critics writing when the English theatre was at its nadir could not bring themselves to believe that Shakespeare had ever served so shabby an art . . . . This new criticism has been made possible by two distinct though not unrelated developments of modern times--the renaissance of the English theatre, and the virtual rediscovery at the hands of William Poel, W. J. Lawrence, E. K. Chambers and others, of the character and methods of the Elizabethan stage . . . . The new critics have shown us that no school of dramatic criticism is--I will not say valueless--but safe, which is divorced from theatrical experience.3

After this preliminary work had been done by Chambers and the others, the men who might be called the real members of the school of realism began to appear. Sir Walter Raleigh was the pioneer. L. L. Schucking and G. A. Beiber followed him by turning to the evidence of the plays and contemporary dramatic

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conventions for their proofs, for instance: that soliloquies in
Shakespeare are to be taken at their face value, that statements
made by one character about another are to be believed, and a
score of other common-sense tenets. Others of this school in
England are T. S. Eliot, G. B. Shaw, Dover Wilson, and H. B.
Charleton, to mention a few. H. B. Charleton is working on
Shakespeare's plays from the standpoint of the critical concep-
tion of the drama in the time of the Renaissance.

Perhaps the leading figure of this school in England,
though, was Harley Granville-Barker, who had transferred his
investigation from the study to the theatrical laboratory. As
a result of this work he wrote his now famous series of Prefaces
to Shakespeare. In the "Preface" to Hamlet he gives his method
of approach:

The point of view I have adopted is to try to
look at Shakespeare's dramatic art in the
light of the effect which he, surmisedly meant
to make of it . . . . Since the great Shake-
spearean scholars of the past thirty years--
Pollard, Chambers, and their colleagues and
disciples brought knowledge of the Elizabethan
scribes and printers, theatres and actors,
into the admitted scope of the subject, it
has become possible with a little patience
and care, to visualise such a play as Hamlet
in its native state . . . . The task may per-
haps need more than a little patience. There
is that bygone stage to consider and its
capacities, the actors and their methods, the
listeners and their understanding--of which
things Shakespeare was a judge, to which, as
a good dramatist, he adjusted the technique
of his work . . . . Until we can confidently
appreciate this technique our judgement of the rest may always go astray.  

In America the chief figures in this school, besides Stoll, are the dramatist-critics Archer, Price, Baker, and Matthews. Writing independently, but yet from a common ground as playwrights, they all treat Shakespeare as a fellow playwright working for an Elizabethan audience. Baker stated the position of this group in the school of realism when he wrote, "We must judge Shakespeare's plays technically by the standards of his own time." Other outstanding American members of the school are Frayne Williams, Lyman Kittredge, Thomas M. Raysor, and Margaret Webster. T. S. Eliot sums up very well the stand of the realists in his remark: "The present tendency of Shakespearean criticism is to face the author squarely rather than dodge him by excursions into philosophy, history or ethics."

The undisputed leader of the whole school is E. E. Stoll. In treating him almost exclusively we can come to know the principles on which the school is based. Stoll is something of an American Cato in scholarly circles. His "Carthago delenda est" is the constant repetition of "Shakespeare wrote to be seen and heard, not to be read and studied." As we have seen, Stoll is quite bold in seeking to do away with what seems to him of

4 Ibid., v-vi.  
5 Baker, 5.  
6 Granville-Barker and Harrison, 303.
little worth in the traditional criticism. He contends that it is important to get back to the earliest Shakespearean critics, such as Collier, Drake and Dennis, who perhaps knew little about psychology, but who were nevertheless nearer in spirit to Shakespeare's art and to the secret of dramatic art in general, since they insisted on the importance of the effect of the whole play rather than on the importance of the leading character. As we also saw, Stoll does not deny the tragic character of Hamlet, but he insists at the same time that his heroic and romantic qualities are more important. He will not accept the morbid Romantic psychology which insists on Hamlet's diseased spirit and limping will.

Stoll maintains that the trouble with Shakespearean criticism up to our time is that it has been prompted and guided by a spirit of literalism. The play has been thought to be a psychological document, not primarily a play, a structure, whose parts mutually support and explain one another. Despite the fact that the word "play" evidently means something to be played, the critics have treated even the best of Shakespeare's plays as studies in character portrayal, without realizing that these characters are meaningless outside the play. As Stoll says:

How much finer it is that the characters should be deftly transported into another world, and

7 Stoll, Hamlet, 64.
8 Ibid., 68.
made subject to the high and all prevailing purpose of a tragic illusion; that the play should not be a transcript of fact, but, as Pater says, of the poet's sense of fact—not a cluster of studies embedded in a story, but a new creation and an individual, unbroken whole.9

Stoll marshals some important names in criticism as he goes on:

In so saying we are heeding the highest critical wisdom of the ages. Longinus is writing in the spirit of Aristotle before him . . . and of Goethe and Sarcey after him, as he declares that 'the effect of genius is not to persuade or convince an audience, but rather to transport them out of themselves,' and that 'the object of poetry is to enthrall.'10

Stoll says that another fundamental error of the traditional criticism is that it has been taking fiction for fact, and cannot believe that the spectator of the play suspends his belief and allows himself to be transported into another world. In the same statement Stoll criticizes the critics and pays high tribute to Shakespeare:

They have been laboriously quibbling and hair-splitting to keep even with him who lightly maneuvered and manipulated. They have been twisting and stretching their psychology to justify him, as he frankly, but authoritatively, adopted an initial postulate for a great dramatic effect. And what effect is that? It is one of accumulation and compression, of simplification and concentration, to which all art, and especially drama, tends. It is a more startling and passionate contrast, an acceleration of movement, a more anxious expectation and more terrible outcome, and a keener

9 Stoll, Art and Artifice in Shakespeare, 48.
10 Ibid., 49.
and more unmingled sympathy with the hero and heroine.\footnote{Ibid., 19.}

Rather than worry about psychology, then, Stoll wants us to consider first of all the physical conditions of the theatre in which Shakespeare worked, the actors for whom he wrote, and the people whom he wanted to entertain. Consequently, to go with Stoll all the way and see how he approaches Shakespeare, we must for a time become Elizabethans, and as Smith says, put on Elizabethan eyes and ears and furnish our heads with Elizabethan brains, that is, their whole outlook on life.

If we were to enter the Globe theatre some afternoon back in 1600 to see a play of Shakespeare's being performed, we would find ourselves in a small place, open to the sky. The stage is thrust far out into the pit. The action is simply shifted from the curtained alcove of the inner stage to the balcony of the upper stage and out onto the projecting forestage, on three sides of which most of the audience stands or sits. The remainder of the audience is in the gallery. There are few props, but the stage has no curtains, and therefore no division of the play into acts and scenes is provided for. The time of the play is usually mid-afternoon. Played in daylight or only crudely lighted, the play is deprived of the illusion produced by modern artificial light. Since the stage projects far out
into the audience, the added illusion of the proscenium arch is impossible. It is so different from our picture stage which is set apart from life and constitutes a world of its own. There is little or no need for make-up; the light of day is a sad revealer of grease paint and powder. Instead of using lighting, the time of day or night was indicated by lines in the play, as for instance in Macbeth, Banqua's references to night.

Lord Chamberlain's company is presenting the play. The man who wrote the play is also a director, actor, manager and part-owner of the company. He is William Shakespeare, and during the performance of the play he is most likely backstage, his eye searching the faces of the audience, his ear cocked to hear the applause or silence after a particular bit of stage business is performed.

Thanks to the modern school of realism, this is the picture we have of Shakespeare and his theatre, and it is according to this picture that Stoll says we must judge him and his plays. Stoll never wants us to forget that Shakespeare was working in theatre conditions for a specific audience which he knew well. He could have written like Jonson or Lyly and turned out etherealized semi-classical drama of which the Neo-classical critics would have approved. But no, he found himself learning his art

12 Burton, 55-6.
in the give-and-take of the theatre workshop, and the result of his work is vastly different. As Granville-Barker says: "What he learned there [in the workshop] was to think directly in terms of the medium in which he worked, in the movement of the scene, in the humanity of the actors and their acting."13

Another important thing that the realists wish emphasized is the fact that Shakespeare wrote for definite actors such as Will Kemp and Richard Burbage. Shakespeare could hear their voices and visualize their features as he wrote. Since he had been and still was an actor himself, he knew the art of acting. To prove this we merely have to recall the rehearsal of Bottom and the others in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, and, of course, Hamlet's famous advice to the players. Brander Matthews says:

> This understanding of the art of acting a playwright must always have or he will fail to get the utmost out of his actors. It is a condition precedent to his success as a writer of stage plays, and it is possessed by every successful dramatist. The playwright must know what can be done with every part in every play he writes, so that he can help the performers to attain this.14

Then, too, Shakespeare the actor would of course encourage Shakespeare the dramatist to help the actor in identifying himself with the character. As Granville-Barker says:

14 Matthews, 175-6.
With the actors forgetting themselves in their characters the spectators more easily forget their own world for the world of the play . . . Shakespeare's theatre does not lend itself to the visual illusion, which, by the aid of realistic scenery and lighting, seems physically to isolate them in that other world. But he can, helped by the ubiquity of his platform stage, preserve the intimacy which this sacrifices. His aim is to keep the actor, now identified with the character, in as close a relation to the spectators—as that by which the Clown, in his own right, exercises sway over them. It is not merely or mainly by being funny that the Clown captures and holds his audience, but by personal appeal, the intimacy set up, the persuading them that what he has to say is his own concern and theirs. 15

In order to insure this intimacy, the playwright must know what sort of material to give to the actors: the nature and also the effective quantity of it. He cannot allow too much initiative, and yet he must not do for the actor what he can do for himself. The true playwright finds it a waste of time to construct a character complete in every detail. A hint will suffice for the good actor. The actor finds it easier to get spontaneity and illusion if he devises the incidentals of a character for himself, i.e., the actor.

The actor cannot be burdened with matter which does not give the character life. Those playwrights who merely regard the actor as a mouthpiece for their poetry and ideas do not

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15 Granville-Barker, 4.
succeed. The dramatist must abnegate himself and provide raw material for acting. This is what Shakespeare did. The play as it left his hands was not a finished product. It was first submitted to the acid test of audience response and changed to suit that. Lines were changed or dropped; whole scenes would be re-worked or else dropped entirely. Why? So that the actor could have the best possible vehicle for giving the audience what they wanted. It has always been the practice of good actors to keep alive their parts by continual little changes and modifications. Shakespeare, in the same spirit, recast and retouched his plays because that was the custom of the workshop.16

Since the interest or effect of a play depends on the emotional force of a great situation, the actors demand this quality in the plays given them. And they demand also a variety of emotional expression, a varying from tension to relief, for instance, out of regard for their own and the audience's mental and physical capacity. And what the Elizabethan actor demanded for the purpose of evoking the audience's interest, emotions and passions, that Shakespeare gave him. As Stoll says:

Nowhere is there fluctuation so high or so various as in Shakespeare—-from the tragic to the pathetic, from the serious to the comic, from action to narration, from dialogue to soliloquy, from fast to slow, from the lofty and rhetorical to the humble and

16 Ibid., 5.
simple, from blank verse to prose or to song. This method of changing tension, indeed, and of changing tempo in the action and the wording is essential to adequate expression of the passions and to an appropriate awakening of the spectator's emotions . . . . In great art the alternation is not so regular or mechanical as even in nature, and limitations are turned to advantage. The changes, the contrasts, are what is noticeable; it is these more than the appropriateness of tension or tempo to the situation that brings the passions home. Art being a matter of effect, high tension is the higher because of the low which it has just supplanted.17

As is evident from the above, Stoll keeps bringing in "effect" as that which is important in drama, or in any art, for that matter. "Effect" is, of course, effect on the audience. And that is why Stoll and the other realists think it is necessary that we also know the Elizabethan people for whom Shakespeare wrote. The effect of the play must be judged from the standpoint of this audience, and not from that of the critics solely for whom Shakespeare did not write.

Well then, what was this Elizabethan like for whom Shakespeare wrote? For one thing, he loved a story. Our concern for character portrayal and analysis, influenced by the traditional Romantic criticism and developed by novel reading, had little interest for him. A child of the Renaissance and of the age of discovery, his daily diet was stories of new explorations and

17 Stoll, Shakespeare and Other Masters, 30.
adventures in distant lands. He loved his plays packed to the utmost with incident and complication. In this he was different from the Athenian playgoer of Sophocles' time. The latter preferred or got, whatever the case may be, a relatively simple play with a single plot and a few characters. That is why a Greek play has been compared to a melody played on a flute; a Shakespeare play, anyone at all, can be compared to a rich, colorful symphony played by a complete orchestra.

To the average Elizabethan, ghosts, bloody daggers in the air, witches, etc., were very real, even though later critics have wondered why Shakespeare put these preternatural creatures into his plays. Freytag put it this way:

The popular tradition was very vivid, and the connection with the world of spirits was universally conceived far differently. The soul processes of a man struggling under a heavy burden were very differently thought of. In the case of intense fear, qualm of conscience, remorse, the power of imagination conjured up before the sufferer the image of the frightful, still as something external; the murderer saw the murdered rise before him as a ghost; clutching into the air, he felt the weapon with which he committed the crime; he heard the voice of the dead ringing in his ear. Shakespeare and his hearers conceived Macbeth's dagger even on the stage, and the ghosts of Banquo, Caesar, the elder Hamlet, and the victims of Richard III far differently from ourselves. To them this was not yet a bold, customary symbolizing of the inward struggle of the heroes, but it was to them the necessary method customary in their land, in which they themselves experienced
The Elizabethan came to the theatre with the attitude, "Tell me a story," and he cared little if he had heard the story before as long as it was told in an interesting way. And because the audience wanted a story, Shakespeare gave it to them. By 1594 he was able to write a complicated story, for example, *Comedy of Errors*. He did not have this ability when he wrote *Love's Labor Lost*, and *Two Gentlemen From Verona*, thus showing that by 1594, after some experience in the theatrical workshop, he understood the chief essentials of dramatic narrative for the Elizabethan audience. 19

Shakespeare's audience had one standard: "Does it interest me?" Shakespeare wrote for the great body of his audience rather than for the court or for the literary critics. Only a few Elizabethans were so well travelled that they could compare his plays with those of other countries. Few knew the classical drama well enough to hold Shakespeare to its methods. The great majority were satisfied if their attention, stimulated at the opening of the play, was held unswervingly to the end. 20 This is what they paid their admission price for, and it was

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19 Baker, 136.
20 Ibid., 20.
their favorable reaction to the play and consequent word-of-mouth advertising of it around town that would bring more people to see the play and thus keep Shakespeare and his company in board and room at least. It is well to speak of high art and the rest, but we must also remember that Shakespeare wrote for a living too.

Because of this dependence on the audience, Shakespeare had to be careful in the rewriting of Hamlet not to drop the old story, the telling situations, the essential conception of the characters, since his audience for the most part had seen the old Hamlet. Rather, as Stoll says:

Shakespeare, in sympathy with his public and their likings and cravings, would himself not desire that they should surrender them. He was not the one to risk disappointing an audience assembled to witness a familiar and favorite performance on the stage and applaud a popular hero. Rather, he would run to meet their prepossessions and predilections. He always followed the tradition of the theatre, he never ignored or defied it.21

And in another place:

Shakespeare was not painting pictures that were never to be seen, not shooting arrows into the air. He was writing plays which plain and common people were expected to like, and in order to like them, of course, must understand them. Remembering Kyd's Hamlet, how differently they understood the play than we do.22

21 Stoll, Hamlet, 3, 4.
22 Ibid., 29.
What then of the obvious difficulties in a play like Hamlet or Othello which the critics have found? Should they not be considered? To this Stoll answers:

The attention of the audience is not drawn to minor inconsistencies, which are discoverable . . . but to the prevailing consistency of the hero's conduct, which is apparent. And what the audience, not what critics, would think and feel is, I must weary the reader with repeating, alone what Shakespeare had in mind and at heart.23

Shakespeare also had a very keen appreciation of just how much the audience contributes to shape the nature of the play. It was to this that he attuned his writing. Shakespeare knew that an audience becomes something else. A sort of sympathy is set up in it; crowd emotions are aroused; personal variations are submerged and the individual does not so much laugh, cry and wonder by himself as in conjunction with others. He becomes a simpler person, and a more plastic, receptive creature than he would be if he were alone. For instance, a man would never laugh as loudly at a speech if it had been offered him detached from the play. There is a magnetic mood in the audience as a whole, and it was this that Shakespeare strove to capture as he wrote his plays. It was his object to set the passions aflame and evoke emotion and keep it glowing during the entire play. Everything in the play must have a psychological reference to

23 Ibid., 62.
the audience, or it would become bored.

That is why Stoll insists that Shakespeare wanted to set the passions aflame and ignored fine points of psychology, since psychology is for the intellect, and anything resembling a riddle or a study on the stage interferes with the direct response needed from the audience to make a play successful. Even today psychology is expected more by the trained critic than by the audience. 24

In this chapter we have seen Shakespeare in relation to his theatre, his actors and his audience, which, according to Stoll, is really the only way to understand him.

24 Stoll, Shakespeare and Other Masters, 55-6.
CHAPTER IV
THE REALISTS’ EMPHASIS ON MOVEMENT

The realists tell us that to hold an audience, a play must have a certain special ingredient. Ordinarily the spectators at a play are not conscious in a direct manner of this ingredient, nor can they define it technically, but its presence or absence spells success or failure for the play. If the drama has this ingredient, the audience is thrilled, aroused emotionally, and satisfied that it has had its money’s worth of enjoyment. If the drama lacks it, the audience grows restless, becomes conscious of the passage of time and of itself. When this dramatic spell is not present, the audience may either begin to leave, or they will suffer patiently until the end of the play.

This ingredient is called movement. For the present it can be defined as the "heightening of dramatic effect." It is that in the play which keeps the audience engrossed, and which sweeps it along in ever growing excitement. It is that which transports the audience into the world of the play and makes them live in and with the characters. In order to do this, the dramatist must constantly heighten his effects from the beginning to the end of the play, since the spectator is not the same in every part of the play. At the play’s inception the spectator is ready for anything and is not very demanding. But as soon as
the writer has shown his dramatic power by some very striking bit of stage business, the spectator is more inclined to yield himself with confidence to the lead of the dramatist. He gradually becomes more exacting because his ability to receive what is new is lessened. With the greater number of impressions received, weariness becomes greater also. So the writer must arrange the action of the play in such a manner that it becomes gradually greater and more impressive, if he wants the audience interest to remain undiminished.

Therefore, as the play develops, the audience interest must not only be maintained, but it must be increased. The spectator must be led on from scene to scene, wholly absorbed in the action and eager for more. A play that can do this has movement, and is able by this means to fulfill what Baker calls the aim of the drama, namely, "To give rise within the space of no more than five acts to the greatest amount of emotional effect, be it laughter, tears, or the intermediate stages."¹

Many definitions are given for movement, including the one put down at the beginning of this chapter. From the standpoint of the realists, however, the best definition is the one given by Baker. He calls movement "the straining forward of increasing

¹ Baker, 147.
Movement depends on clarity, emphasis and suspense. By clarity is meant merely that the spectators should know at every moment just where the plot is leading, and not be distracted from the action by having to stop and ask themselves what is going on. Clarity is the intellectual basis for the enjoyment of drama.

To get emphasis, the playwright must so arrange the scenes as to have the play hold the rapt and sympathetic attention of the audience while at the same time drawing from it the largest possible emotional return. The writer stresses what is important without calling attention to it. The high points thus brought out serve to stimulate added interest and maintain the dramatic illusion.

The most important element in movement, however, is suspense, which is the principal method used to arouse emotional effect in the audience. There are two types of suspense: that of plot and that of form. Suspense of plot has to do with the disclosure of a fact; suspense of form regards the establishment and development of the emotional illusion, and not the answer to a puzzle. Stoll says of this:

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Suspense of form is the excited expectation of the answer to a puzzle, or of the disclosure of a mystery, but, under the spell of illusion, of the rounding out of a harmony like the rime to come at the end of a verse or the rest tone at the end of a song. It is the expectation of the way that Othello will receive the slander and afterwards the truth. 3

Suspense accounts for the dramatic texture of Shakespeare's plays, but rarely does he try to keep a secret from the audience. This is of course partially due to the artificial and arbitrary conventions of his stage, such as disguise or mistaken identity, which makes a surprise ending for the audience rather difficult to achieve. But the main reason is that Shakespeare treats the audience as if they were gods looking down on the action from some Olympian height and knowing what will happen. He knows that this is what the audience prefers. Therefore he uses old familiar stories, tells the story from its beginning and shows what the characters are right from the play's inception. Most of the time he prefers anticipation to surprise. 4

Shakespeare makes up for the lack of surprise endings and of suspense in our sense of the word by the framework and impact of his plays, but mainly by the way in which he makes the audience live the play. In fact, to know what is coming beforehand and then to see how the hero will react to it gives a kind of

3 Stoll, Shakespeare and Other Masters, 13.
4 Ibid., 11, 12.
anticipation which aids suspense very much. The audience prefers this to an ending which is a surprise both to the hero and to themselves because it gives them a sense of superiority, but also because it increases their pity and fear. Knowing what will happen to the hero long before he actually reaches the catastrophe is a very artistic kind of suspense.

To illustrate this type of suspense and its effect on the audience, Stoll relates the story about a lady who was seeing Othello on the stage. During the scene in which Othello finds the handkerchief planted by Iago and begins to be suspicious, the woman stood up at her seat in the balcony and shouted out in anguish, "O, you big black fool! Can't you see? Can't you see?"5 This is what the dramatist aims at. It may be disturbing to have this happen, but that woman certainly expressed what was in the minds and hearts of the whole audience. The dramatic illusion set up by the movement had enmeshed her completely. We have no record of this sort of thing happening, but it is not too hard to imagine that Shakespeare may have heard reactions like this from his more uninhibited Elizabethan audience. How happy they must have made him!

We see, therefore, that this preknowledge is exciting. The audience is aware of the outcome, and this helps them to identify

5 Stoll, Art and Artifice in Shakespeare, 47.
themselves with the hero and to live mainly in the moment, noticing only what the dramatist is actually presenting to them at that instant. The audience is particularly affected by joyful expectations which they know in their hearts to be fallacious. 6

Pre-knowledge of this type brings with it greater sympathy, pity and fear, because to sympathize one must know the facts. Not knowing the facts makes the audience's interest of another kind—that of excited curiosity merely, as in Ibsen and other moderns. The modern dramatist disdains fatal or villainous influences and derives the action more from the hero, thus diminishing our pity when he finally does commit the "deed of horror." Stoll says that we are more inclined to pity the hero if we see him, at least partially, as the victim of outside forces. The sympathy that comes from a completely psychological and sociological motivation, as is done in modern plays, is less wholehearted than pity for innocence. Crimes like embezzlement or forgery arouse little emotion in the spectator. Thus the modern dramatist makes less demand on our emotions and more upon our intelligence and puts curiosity in sympathy's place, which is certainly to the detriment of the play as far as the audience is concerned. 7

6 Stoll, Shakespeare and Other Masters, 12.
7 Ibid., 14.
In Shakespeare and the ancients we find always an anxious sympathy, and this is more likely to arouse real emotion and interest than excited curiosity. This shows again how well Shakespeare knew his audience. Stoll thinks that because the anxious sympathy contains a moral element, the emotion in the audience is more intense and ample than in these modern days of naturalism when Fate is heredity or environment which relieves the bad of blame and the good of credit.\(^8\)

Again reverting to the relation of the audience to the play Stoll says:

> When the moral judgements of the audience fail wholly to agree with those of the character concerned, and still more with those of the dramatist, the emotion is directly interfered with. That is the weakness in modern problem plays. Even in novels or the short story... only when the moral beliefs of the reader tally exactly with those on which it is based will the reader have the whole of the emotion which it is potentially able to produce in him. How much truer this is of the drama, which depends on immediate and unanimous response. And hence it is that in moral judgements there is such explicit or implicit conformity with the prevailing and absolute standards on the part of the Elizabethans. This intensity helps to hold the tragedy together.\(^9\)

From our standpoint as moderns it may seem that the anxious sympathy and anticipation have their drawbacks. After all, we

\(^8\) Ibid., 27.
\(^9\) Ibid., 28.
do like surprise endings because of our training in short-story reading. But Shakespeare got the fullest amount of suspense out of the method of anticipation. He took advantage of the convention of self-description to impress the issues of the play on the audience. He developed and varied the emotions of the characters to arouse the emotions of the audience.¹⁰

In his best plays Shakespeare certainly had a command of movement. He knew how to keep audience interest at a high pitch. He could seize upon this interest right from the beginning, as we see in the breath-taking opening of Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, and Romeo and Juliet. He knew what the audience wanted. To quote Stoll:

He observes not so much the probabilities of the action or the psychology of the character, as the psychology of the audience for whom both action and character are framed. Writing hastily, but impetuously, to be played, not read, he seizes upon almost every means of imitation and opportunity for excitement which this large liberty affords. He would give us not only life as we know it, but drama as we would have it to be, yet remembers that the attention of his audience has limits. Like all dramatists, he must have a situation; like all the greater ones, an intense one . . . . He has had, for consistency of effect, to continue more audaciously and variously and to make such amends as he could. He evades and hedges, he manoeuvres and manipulates, he suppresses and obscures . . . Shakespeare is the greatest of dramatists because the illusion he

¹⁰ Ibid., 51-2.
offers is the widest and highest; the emotion he arouses the most irresistible and overwhelming.  

But Shakespeare did not always have this command of movement. His early plays lack it. They contain beautiful poetry, deep philosophy and striking character portrayal, but little movement. Because of this the early plays, such as Two Gentlemen of Verona, though still read, are rarely acted. The reason for this is that when Shakespeare wrote these early plays, he was only beginning to develop his dramaturgical techniques. After the trial-and-error period in the theatre workshop, during which he closely observed the reactions of the audience, he gradually achieved the perfection of movement which is found in theatrically compact plays such as Macbeth, Othello, and the other "greats."

The chronicle plays, except for Richard III and Henry V, also rarely acted today because they lack movement. Richard II, for instance, lacks action and is barren in striking situations; events merely happen and are not brought about by deliberate intent. The movement is sluggish. The chronicles for the most part, representing as they do an early period in Shakespeare's development as a play-builder, lack the unification of material which carries a spectator with increasing interest from

11 Stoll, Art and Artifice in Shakespeare, 168.
12 Matthews, 92.
scene to scene. The public never cares permanently for story telling on the stage which does not leave a clear, final impression.

*Henry IV, Part I* is acted today only because it is held together in some way by the buffoonery of a great comic character, Falstaff. Outside of him and fine poetry in the play, *Henry IV* has little stage value. The reason? Lack of movement. The scenes seem to be merely stuck together, and the action consequently gets nowhere. Because of this the play has little effect in arousing the interest or emotions of the audience.

It is common theatre practice for directors to cut down or cut out any sections of the play which retard the movement, even if these sections have fine lines or interesting characters or ideas. This is done because these slow places cause the play to sag and make the audience lose interest and get restless. This slowness, of course, is fatal to the success of a play.

In his early days as a playwright then, Shakespeare had poetic power, moral insight and ability to create characters. But it was not until he had written plays for some time that dramatic vigor and movement appeared in his plays. Up until that time they had been weak dramaturgically, and consequently, from the standpoint of the actors and the audience, far from interesting. But in the "greats" movement is found in its perfection. All dramatists have envied the inimitable dramatic
vigor and swiftness of movement found in *Macbeth*, for instance. It was only after the experience of the workshop in writing for his Elizabethan audiences that Shakespeare achieved the secret of command over the emotions of his audience through his mastery of the technique of movement.
CHAPTER V

MOVEMENT AND PLOT STRUCTURE

Stoll and the realists will admit that movement is the end product of good dialogue, fine character portrayal and several other dramatic elements, in addition to those mentioned in the last chapter. But they insist that the most important factor in good movement is a well built plot. They hold that the better the plot structure, the better the movement will be.

With this initial postulate as a chief principle of their creed of dramatic criticism, the realists enter the age-old battle about the relative importance of plot and character and their bias is on the side of the former. Their insistence on viewing Shakespeare as a dramatist rather than as a poet or philosopher precludes their taking the opposite viewpoint. In fact, as we have seen, it was against the doctrines of Coleridge and the Romantics, with their stress on character study in Shakespeare divorced from his stage and his time, that this modern school arose.

Stoll says that the importance of plot for emotional effect has been constantly stressed from the earliest days of the drama. He remarks in one place, "Of character . . . how little the
ancient or the Renaissance critics have to say.\textsuperscript{1} Turning to Shakespeare, Stoll points out that in the tragedies, especially, there is much story. The conflict is largely external, against Fate, persons or circumstances.\textsuperscript{2}

Many plays fail on Broadway today because of their poor plots. The play contains an assortment of characters who stand around and discuss ideas, but who do little. If they do act, it is purposeless action they perform. The modern emphasis on character study and psychoanalysis makes for poor "stage."

Stoll follows Aristotle when he insists that drama is an imitation not of persons, but of persons in action, persons doing something interesting. Even the most potentially fascinating character is a failure if he has nothing to do in the play, and is merely an interesting prop. Some years before Stoll began to write, another dramatic critic whom we have already quoted, Gustav Freytag, had this to say on the topic:

The dramatist makes the astonishing discovery that the hearer's suspense is usually not produced by the characters, however interesting they may be, but only through the progress of the action.\textsuperscript{3}

The tendency of the scholars to regard Shakespeare's characters as his greatest glory was due mainly to two causes. The

\textsuperscript{1} Stoll, \textit{Shakespeare and Other Masters}, 57.
\textsuperscript{2} Stoll, \textit{Art and Artifice in Shakespeare}, 145.
\textsuperscript{3} Freytag, 39.
first was the insistence that Shakespeare's great advance beyond the Greek dramatists is the perfection of his character drawing. The second cause was the fact that Shakespeare's plays were studied almost wholly from the aesthetic, not the dramatic, viewpoint.

And yet when the construction of the great dramas is studied objectively, the fact becomes evident that their greatness is due to the plot. The plot is the "modus operandi" by which the artist, out of a chaos of characters, actions and passions evolves order. This order, however, is not that of mechanical regularity. It is deeper and more vital than that; it is the order of a living organism.

Baker defines plot as "A story so proportioned and emphasized as to produce in the number of facts chosen the greatest possible amount of emotional effect." That is what the realists are concerned about—emotional effect on the audience. If the play produces this effect, it is a good play, according to them. Stoll marshals the greatest dramatic critics of all time to support his and the realists' stand on the importance of plot. He quotes Aristotle:

We maintain that the first essential, the life and soul so to speak, of Tragedy is the plot; and that the characters come second. . . We maintain that Tragedy is primarily an

4 Baker, 183.
imitation of action, and that it is mainly for the sake of the action that it imitates the personal agents.\(^5\)

And Longinus:

The effect of genius is not to persuade or convince the audience, but rather to transport them out of themselves; and the object of poetry is to enthrall.\(^6\)

Stoll summarizes these opinions in the following manner:

To these primal and primordial critics, then, as not to the Shakespearean, and to the world-famous dramatists, if not, in such measure, to the modern, the whole is more important than the part, the dramatic and poetic structure than the characters, and emotional illusion than verisimilitude.\(^7\)

In citing Aristotle Stoll may well have added the other significant sections of Chapter 6, Part II of the Poetics:

The most important of the six elements of a tragedy is the combination of the incidents of the story . . . . All human happiness or misery takes the form of action; the end for which we live is a certain kind of activity, not a quality. Character gives us qualities, but it is in our actions--what we do--that we are happy or the reverse. In a play accordingly they do not act in order to portray the Characters; they include the Characters for the sake of the action. So that it is the action in it, i.e. its Fable or Plot,


\(^7\) Stoll, Art and Artifice in Shakespeare, 4.
that is the end and purpose of the tragedy; and the end is everywhere the chief thing. Besides this, a tragedy is impossible without action, but there may be one without Character . . . . And again: one may string together a series of characteristic speeches of the utmost finish as regards Diction and Thought, and yet fail to produce the true tragic effect. . . . And again: the most powerful elements of attraction in Tragedy, the Peripaties and Discoveries, are parts of the plot . . . . We maintain that the characters come second--compare the parallel in painting, where the most beautiful colors laid on without order will not give one the same pleasure as a simple black-and-white sketch of a portrait.8

Because the action is the most important element in a play, a drama in which the action is well presented can be enjoyed by many who cannot read, who cannot hear and who cannot understand the language. This is the reason for the stress on training in pantomime in the schools of acting.

Aristotle was right in his analysis of the essential precepts of playmaking when he said that plot was the soul of tragedy. Matthews, commenting on this passage of Aristotle, says:

There is no lack of diction, of ethical portraiture, of character, in Romeo and Juliet, but there are made effective by the framing of the incidents into a plot which would rivet the attention of the spectators even if the dialogue were but fustian and the characters but puppets.9

8 Aristotle, 6, II.
9 Matthews, 106.
A series of speeches, then, or a string of dialogues broken into scenes and acts, do not constitute a drama, even when these speeches are very clever. The thing that does constitute a drama, more than any other form of literature, is that it possesses masterly structure. It has to be cut, shaped and fashioned, then put together like a fine piece of furniture. This carpentry, for that is what dramaturgy is, demands an artist's best gifts. For it is not enough that a man be a great poet, humorist, have deep insight into character and ability to present it in action, command over dialogue and striking situation. He must be a master mind, an architect, who by his art of construction can combine all of these into a structure that will have to withstand the acid test of the theatre performance. Matthewa says, "To invent a story is one thing; to put that story into the form of a drama is another and very difficult achievement."10

It is important to remember that Stoll and the realists do not minimize character and extol mere scene-building. But they do want to affirm that movement depends primarily on plot structure, and that characters can evince their inner life only as participants in an event or occurrence, the cause of which must be apparent to the spectator. The effect of the drama depends on the way in which the poet guides his characters through this

10 Ibid., 370.
When Shakespeare approached the writing of a play, the realists tell us, he was faced with a great and unique task. That play would have to include all of the literary techniques, and since it was to be presented on the stage, the dramatist would have to go about his work in a special way. He could not, for instance, construct in the easy-going fashion of the novelist. He had to conduct his story from beginning to the middle to the end, as directly as possible. The novelist, since his work is to be read, can begin as far back as he likes and fill his opening pages with a long record of his hero's ancestry, dilating at will on details not strictly essential, and digressing as his spirit moves him. Of course it is true that a novel is better the more it approaches the directness, vigor and swift movement of the drama, but the novelist is not bound to this method.

The dramatist is not so free. Prolixity in a drama would injure its effectiveness greatly, because it would cause the movement to sag. The dramatist's story cannot straggle into bypaths, but it must move forward steadily, irresistibly and swiftly, setting before the spectators the essential scenes of the essential struggle. The elder Dumas once remarked that the secret of success on the stage was to make the first act clear, the last act short, and all the acts interesting. This can be
achieved only by exacting labor something like that which an architect must use in designing a building for a special purpose on a special plot of land.\textsuperscript{11}

If the dramatist expects to succeed he must accept and abide by all of these restrictions. He must select only what is significant and present it in such a way that its meaning will be clear to the audience at first sight, since they will be exposed to the play only once. If they miss its significance, their enjoyment of the play is diminished. The dramatist is forced to hew that straight line which is the shortest distance between two points. He must strictly cut out everything else, no matter how tempting it may be in itself, because he knows that any extraneous matter that does not advance the action will bring on a diminishing of audience interest. Only that material can be used which the audience needs to comprehend the movement of the story.

Also important is the element of time. The playwright must know the endurance of his audience, and this stern limit of time forces him to tell the story with emphasis only on the important points. Only the high-lights of character and event can be shown. Only the more important and strikingly exciting things can be used. This limitation also means that the hidden springs

\textsuperscript{11} Matthews, 176.
of action cannot be shown, as can in a novel, where the reader can reread passages and look for the sources and motives of action himself. In the play these must be revealed in external acts; there is not time for the other.

Despite the limitations, however, the drama is still the best form of literature, for it secures its effects through the very vivid and compelling method of presenting live human beings upon the stage. This method of expression has its advantages, for the dramatist who makes a mistake in gauging the effect of a particular scene upon the audience can cut it out or rewrite it after the first performance. If, during the opening night, he saw that the audience did not respond or that they became restless, he can now slash relentlessly so as to please the next audience.

Shakespeare was a master of the art of pruning unnecessary scenes. Squire says of him:

In authentic mature Shakespeare, as a rule, there are few scenes which are not at once worth their place for their own sake, and indispensable because of their contribution towards the general movement of the plot. In the longer plays the many scattered scenes are, as it were, tributaries pouring all their water into the main stream that races ever more swiftly until it falls over the steep declivity of the catastrophe.12

Shakespeare was certainly a master of plot structure in his later periods and yet, as far as we know, he did not work according to any definite theory of dramaturgy. The realists say that Shakespeare wrote to please his audience—that was his theory of dramaturgy—and that he rose to greatness in the give-and-take of the theatre workshop. Being a great creative mind, he left the formulation of his practice to the scholars who came after him. Even today playwrights do not think much about theories of tragedy. They see or hear something which suggests a plot to them and they start to work on it, moulding it for presentation on a stage they know to a public they understand.

As Matthews says of Shakespeare:

A poet he was by the gift of God; a psychologist he became by observation and intuition; a philosopher he had risen to be as the result of insight and of meditation; and a playwright he had made himself by hard work, by the absorption of every available trick of the trade which his predecessors and contemporaries had devised, and also by constant and adroit experimenting of his own. 13

On this subject Stoll merely reiterates his stand that Shakespeare's art was emotional rather than psychological, bringing out again his opposition to the Romantics. He says:

All art is suggestive. It is a question now only of method, of direction or degree. And the Elizabethan suggestiveness is primarily poetical. It is imaginative and

13 Matthews, 220.
emotional rather than inferential, and it has to do not so much with inner nature or mechanism of the character as with the situation or the structure of the play as a whole. Reasons and motives count for less than contrasts and parallels, developments and climaxes, tempo and rhythm, or even the identity of the individual utterance.14

That Shakespeare grew to a mastery of structure is evident when we compare his early and later plays from the standpoint of plot as we did in the last chapter from the standpoint of movement. Though they contain fine elements of poetry, philosophy and character insight, Love's Labor Lost and Two Gentlemen of Verona are weak in plot structure. Their stories are thin and have meagre dramatic interest. It is evident that Shakespeare's power of finding a good story and moulding it into an orderly and effective dramatic narrative was yet to be developed. In Two Gentlemen of Verona we can see that Shakespeare knew the nature of contrast, but it takes him two whole acts (ten scenes) to state the relations of Proteus, Valentine, Silvia and Julia. He could have done this in three scenes, at the most, a few years later.15

One of the reasons for this poor plot structure, besides Shakespeare's inexperience, was that he had as his model in his early periods of writing the loose miracle and morality plays.

14 Stoll, Shakespeare and Other Masters, 25.
15 Baker, 118.
These merely emphasized the historical event with little regard for anything else. Shakespeare and his contemporaries were merely grasping the fundamentals of dramaturgy, especially unification of material and making exits and entrances dramatic in themselves. There was no technique of the drama, strictly speaking.

In the plays mentioned above, Shakespeare seemed to be encumbered by his material, sure neither of its dramatic values nor how to use it for dramatic effect. The chronicles were a little improvement, but only Richard III and Henry V had true dramatic effectiveness. In writing the chronicle plays Shakespeare was restricted by a sense of fact. His next step was to see that the reigns which he was portraying were but the history of a conflict within the individual, between the individual and his environment, or the futile beating by the individual against some great force at work long before he took the reigns of government. 16

By 1595, when Shakespeare wrote Midsummer Night's Dream, he had gained the power of looking at his material from the outside, of selecting and arranging from it, in the light of his previous experience with audiences. 17 And of course in Romeo and Juliet, Othello, Macbeth and the other "greats," Shakespeare achieved

16 Ibid., 179.
17 Ibid., 193.
mastery of plot structure and gave to us some of the greatest
dramas of all time. Though he grew as a poet and philosopher
during this time also, the realists contend that it was the
dramaturgy that made the plays great, and so his chief claim to
fame is as a dramatist. His great plays have withstood the test
of time and are still acted. If he were alive today, he would
probably be our highest paid playwright.

We have seen the chief points in the doctrine of Stoll and
the realists. To many his doctrines seem too radical; others
accept him only partially. For instance, Logan Pearsall Smith,
while admitting that a great part of Shakespeare can be best
understood by the study of the conditions of the stage, etc., of
his time, refuses to give up his Romantic leanings and asks Stoll
to explain this difficulty:

Granted that Shakespeare took the stock characters of the stage and put its stock sentiments
into their mouths, what else did he put there
which endows them with an inalienable reality
and makes them live forever in the imagination?
... And all those realms of passion and felicity ... which he created, do you [Stoll]
mean to say that Shakespeare had no notion of
their immortal fabric, and was actually so stupid that he never saw the meaning of what he
wrote? So defying this and all other Sphinxes,
I persist in reading Shakespeare's plays with
my own intelligence, and in witnessing their
performance in theatre of my own imagination.18

What makes Shakespeare's characters live and the fact that

18 Smith, 157.
he was a genius has been brought out in various selections from Stoll already quoted. But Smith and all the others notwithstanding, Stoll is still the fierce eagle in the literary dovecotes and says:

At the Globe, where Shakespeare's plays were delighted in but not taken to be literature, and the author of them was not hailed as a genius, nor was so esteemed by himself... is where he had worked for a competence. Though he had five years ahead of him he did not take the trouble to see the better half of his plays, still in manuscript, safely into print, or even to correct the garbled versions of the others. In his will he mentions none of them, though he is concerned who should receive money for mourning rings, etc. The plays are for an audience, not for print.

That, whether we like it or not, is Stoll's mind, and is one of the reasons why Smith called him a "wolf in the quiet fold of literary professors." Allardyce Nicoll thinks that the realist approach is too strict, but does admit that "what we need is not less attention to the stage but more." Perhaps in this more moderate opinion of Stoll we can find the key to a criticism of the man and his school. Stoll may be emphasizing the theatrical approach too much. Of course, Shakespeare wrote for the

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19 Cf. supra, 6, 25, 35, 40, 51, 54.  
21 Smith, 25.  
stage, and a true criticism of him must be grounded in knowledge of the theatre and its needs or it is in danger of missing the point. Stoll and his school have the advantage of the researches made into the Elizabethan theatre in recent years. Coleridge and the other Romantics wrote their criticism without the benefit of this kind of knowledge, but that does not mean that their writings do not have value. The truth is that Shakespeare is so rich, so varied, so great a man and writer and that he will not be thoroughly understood until all the aspects of his work are studied in their proper balance. And the best elements of the criticism of both schools will contribute to this balanced picture. Stoll and his school will play a large part in this new criticism. This is undoubtedly what Ralli meant, when, after a survey of almost all of the Shakespearean ever written, he wrote, "Stoll is pointing the way to the best Shakespearean criticism of the future."23

23 Ralli, 258.
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The thesis submitted by Joseph Karol, S.J. 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.

Jan 11, 1950
Date

John B. Comerath, S.J.
Signature of Adviser