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SHAKESPEARE'S ELIZABETHAN PUBLIC

UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE

SHAKESPEARE'S ELIZABETHAN PUBLIC

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty

Of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

of Master of Arts

Department of English

By

Joseph Anderson Burns

1925

Of all the arts drama is the most democratic. Other forms of artistic and aesthetic expression, literature, music, painting, may be SHAKESPEARE'S ELIZABETHAN PUBLIC is discarded by the public; produced for the public and unless it is approved by the public its doom is certain. Why it is that the drama cannot at any time break away from the habits, prejudices, and ideals of the public for which it was produced, Edward De Meril has clearly stated. But the inspiration of the work (the drama) hasn't at all that egotistical spirit, disdainful of the outside world, which characterized the other forms of art, this is no longer a knowledge of the poet singing to himself for his own pleasure; this author writes by what his drama represents to speak in others the poetical ideas of the poet and are for his readers. The serious end of drama, then, depends upon the ideas of the poet in regard to nature and the destiny of man, and his ideas are intimately bound up with the religion and the philosophy of his time. If a dramatist doesn't wish to employ his gifts in an effort condemned to failure in advance, he must -- and this is one of the first duties of the artist -- so to speak, respect their certainties, and skillfully conform to their ideas and customs."

Knowledge of all this Shakespeare was only possessed but utilized in all his works. In order, then, to appreciate our great

1. Translated and adopted from the INTRODUCTION to "Histoire de la Comedie" Vol. 1. Paris 1895.

16 May 21

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SHAKESPEARE'S ELIZABETHAN PUBLIC

Of all the arts drama is the most democratic. Other forms of artistic and aesthetic expression, literature, music, painting, may be cultivated in solitude. Not so the drama. It is demanded by the public; produced for the public and unless it is approved by the public its doom is certain. Why it is that the drama cannot at any time break away from the tastes, prejudices, and ideals of the public for which it was written, M. Edelstand Du Meril has clearly stated:^{1.} "But the inspiration of the work (the drama) hasn't at all that egotistical spirit, disdainful of the outside world, which characterizes the other forms of art; this is no longer a monologue of the poet singing to himself for his own pleasure; this author tries by what his drama represents to awaken in others the poetical ideas which have inspired him and are for him real....The serious end of drama, then, depends upon the ideas of the poet in regard to nature and the destiny of man, and his ideas are intimately bound up with the religion and the philosophy of his time.....If a dramatist doesn't wish to employ his gifts in an effort condemned to failure in advance, he must -- and this is one of the first duties of the artist -- consider his public, respect their sentiments, and skilfully conform to their ideas and customs."

Knowledge of all this Shakespeare not only possessed but utilized in all his works. In order, then, to appreciate our great Age, we must call what evidence we can bearing on the conditions of

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literary master in all his fullness, we must have an adequate conception of the conditions under which he lived and wrought, and of the public for the satisfaction of whose desires his work of dramatic creation was being done. Rightly to interpret the drama of our own day, which is, after all, only the reflection of our current life and manners, we must grasp the meaning of the most vital elements in the lives of men and women about us. So, also, to appreciate Shakespeare as a dramatist, must we understand the Elizabethans, the public for which he wrote. Then and only then can we attain an adequate conception of what the Elizabethan drama was. A play is what it is because the people for whose amusement and edification it was originally written and presented were what they were. The spectators at any stage presentation bring with them all the prejudices and pre-conceptions natural to their own day and generation, so that no matter whether the scene be laid in remote antiquity or far-away climes, the spirit of the drama must ring a responsive note in the hearts of the people who assemble to behold it.

To grasp the Elizabethan's point of view, to see life at his angle, if that is possible; to realize what manner of man he was; to learn his conceptions of life and death and the unseen world; to discover what his interests really were and what methods he took to bring these purposes to pass; to understand his loves and his hates, his pleasures and his privations -- this, then, is our task. From the mass of material comprising the literary output of the Elizabethan Age, we must cull what evidence we can bearing on the conditions of the day and the characters of the times.

That an audience is a component part of a dramatic presentation is obvious. That a complete understanding of this audience is necessary to a full appreciation of the drama has been proved; that the drama was originally written for this audience and received its approval is to be our present task.

Shakespeare was not one of the large group of artists who fail to receive the approval and approbation of their own age. When his contemporaries who molded the critical opinion of the Elizabethans, referred to him, it was usually as "the sweet, the mellifluous, the honey-tongued Shakespeare; less is said of the sombre, the tragic Shakespeare." ^{1.} This would seem to indicate that "Lucrece," "Adonis" and the "Sonnets" were better known than his plays, or at least his tragedies. However, actual records, such as Henslow's Diary disprove this theory and give ample proof of the popularity of all of Shakespeare's plays. Indeed, it was tragic Hamlet which held first place. The first year of its production, it was played repeatedly and "reprinted four times within eight years of its birth." ^{2.} On the other hand, we know that Shakespeare's first real success came in the skillful compliance with the fondness of the public of 1590-1600 for erotic verse and to this success Mr. Jusserand's quotation undoubtedly refers. The charge often brought against Shakespeare's audience of not appreciating his genius, is due, I think, to the scanty amount of contemporary critical opinion concerning him. Moreover, even this

1. Jusserand, J.J., "A Literary History of the English People", vol.II, page 26.

2. Lee Sidney, "Shakespeare and the Modern Stage", Ch.II.

meagre information is often interpreted incorrectly or mis-applied.

As Shakespeare was so popular, but was so little mentioned by the critics who represented the cultured class, the inference is that his greatest popularity was with the people -- the groundlings of the Elizabethan theatre. This does not mean that he made no appeal to the educated classes -- far from it. That would speak poorly for the taste of the cultivated Elizabethan. It does mean, however, that Shakespeare wrote principally for the public theatres such as the Globe, and catered to the taste of the greatest numbers.

Though there was no striking difference between the public and the private audience, the latter was more select. Also, the private theatres were very few in number until the end of the reign of Elizabeth. The fees were comparatively high, consequently the seating arrangements were more comfortable and the rabble less in evidence. It is, then, to the varied, motley, democratic audience which frequented the public theatres that we refer as Shakespeare's Public.

The first point to remember about this public is that it was relatively very small. There were, roughly speaking, within the London city walls, a hundred thousand people. In the villages surrounding, Westminster included, there may have been another hundred thousand. Even this number must have fluctuated considerably, as the many inns on or near the High Street of Southwark were full or not. In 1590, though, the regular theaters were few, -- only the Theatre and the Curtain, built near together in Shoreditch in

1576-1577 -- numerous inn-yards provided accommodations for the companies of actors who could not perform at the two theatres. In order to limit undesirable competition, and to improve the quality of playing, Parliament had passed in 1571 an act requiring players to procure from a peer of the realm or "personage of higher degree" a license to pursue their calling; if they had not this permit, they were to be adjudged rogues and vagabonds. Under these conditions, then, were there in 1590 the companies of the Queen's Men, My Lord Strange, the Earl of Sussex, the Earl of Pembroke, and the boy actors of the choir of St. Paul's cathedral. This boys' company probably acted in the yard of the Convocation House. These companies changed their names and compositors frequently, always at the death of their patron, whose patronage, by the way, was mostly nominal. Theatrical life in 1590, unlike that of the next decade, in which it was transferred to the Bankside region, centered either about the inns¹ or in homes of its own just outside the Liberties. It was organized, concentrated and subject to the wishes of a small and definite public.

Rapid and pronounced development, however, was soon to follow. What is said of Augustus in regard to Rome, may well be remarked of Elizabeth and the stage: she found it brick and left it marble. At her accession in 1558, no regular theatre had been established. Players of the period, even in the capital, were compelled to have recourse to the yards of great inns, as the most commodious places they could obtain for the presentation of their pieces. The inns, being surrounded

1. Any region outside the London wall over which the City Fathers had jurisdiction.

by open galleries and providing likewise numerous private apartments and recesses from which the more genteel part of the audience might more comfortably become spectators, while the central space held a temporary stage and a space for the masses, were not ill-calculated for purposes of scenic exhibition. Most undoubtedly the form and construction of the licensed theatres was adopted from them. As early as 1569, in spite of the enmity, opposition and fanaticism of the Puritans, the Queen was frequently entertained in her own chapel-royal by the performance of plays on profane subjects, by children belonging to the establishment. ^{1.}

Toward the end of the reign, professional actors were often called to act before her at the royal theatre in Whitehall, usually at Christmas or Twelfth Night. ^{2.} These occasions were usually at night, that they might not interfere with the public performances which took place in the afternoon. The year 1570 has been fixed upon as the most probable date for the erection of a regular play-house.

The theatre is supposed to have been situated in Blackfriars and was always known as the private theatre -- that is, it was roofed in, had locks on the box or "room" doors, gave its performances by candlelight, and charged comparatively high prices. Such theatres grew from the private and court performances just as the

1. Children of the Chapel Royal, later professional actors, were frequently referred to as Children of Revels.
2. Love's Labour's Lost was performed before the maiden Queen during the Christmas holidays.

public theatre developed from performances in inn-yards. During the period that Shakespeare immortalized the stage, not less than seven theatres were in existence. Four were considered public houses: The Globe on the Bankside, The Curtain in Shoreditch, The Red Bull in St. John's Street, and The Fortune in Whitecross Street; and three were termed private houses, one in Whitefriars, one in Blackfriars and the Cockpit or Phoenix in Drury-Lané.

The arrangement of the Elizabethan theatre has been too frequently and too fully discussed to need more than summary mention here. Of its intimacy there can be no doubt. Its construction led to a spirit and mode of conduct which resembled a circus far more than a modern theatre. The front stage projected out into the pit, which was occupied by groundlings -- men and boys who stood during the performance. However, anyone having a few extra pence, could purchase a seat and even a cushion to elevate himself so that "he could not only see the play but, what was often more important, be seen..."^{1.} As the theatre was usually uncovered, the people in the pit were exposed to the weather. The balconies and boxes were occupied by the aristocracy or those who had enough wealth to aspire to belong there, for, as Harrison says,^{2.} "Besides the nobles, anyone can call himself a gentleman who can live without work and buy himself a coat of arms." There were a number of women in the galleries, not always of the most respectable class. It became more and more customary, however, for ladies of fashion to attend the theatre.

1. Pye, William Benchley: "England as Seen by Foreigners", London, 1865, p.64.
2. William Harrison: "Elizabethan England"., London, 1877.

Toward the end of the reign, the wearing of masques became quite the vogue for ladies appearing at the theatre.

The young gallants of the day would sometimes occupy seats right on the stage where they did not hesitate to give expression to their feelings regarding the play. Thomas Decker in "The Gul's Hornebooke" (1609) gives this advice in his chapter, On How a Gallant Should Behave Himself in a Play House : "...by sitting on the stage, a conspicuous eminence is gotten by which means the best and most essential parts of a gallant (good clothes, a proportionable leg, white hand, the Persian lock,^{1.} and a tolerable beard) are perfectly revealed." Also, "By sitting on the stage, if you be a knight, you may happily get a mistress; if a mere Fleet Street gent_leman, a wife."^{2.} Or again: "By sitting on the stage, you have signed a patent to engross the whole community to censure; may lawfully presume to be a guider and stand at the helm to steer the passage of the scenes."^{3.} Whether or not we are to interpret this passage as meaning that the gallants amused themselves by shifting scenery, is a matter for speculation. It was, however, considered clever to come in late enough to interrupt the passage of the play by placing one's stool as noisily and as conspicuously as possible.

The critics and coxcombs of the day also must have been rather conspicuous as they carried to the theatre table books made

1. Persian Lock, or lone lock -- a long lock of hair adorned with bows of ribbons, behind one (the left) or both ears. Adorned with roses, etc.
2. loc.cit. p.136.
3. loc. cit. p.139.

Joseph Quincy Adams in his "Shakespearean Magazine"

9.

gives a fine verbal picture of the audience in the form

seen from the stage during the performance of a play. He

of small plates of slate bound together in duodecimo. They

says, "In Middleton and Dekker's 'The Revellers' acted at

took down passages from the play either to retain in the taverns

and inns or to ridicule.

The groundlings formed a motley crowd thronging Shakespeare's

theatre at every performance. "Soldiers just returned from Flanders

and Ireland, adventurers fresh from Virginia or Guinea, grave citi-

zens and lawyers, physicians, flatcap prentices, city dames and

damsels, courtesans, bravados, crooks, male and female -- all distin-

guished by their appearance and each class having for the most part

much more opportunity for individual distinction than at present.." 1.

In the first act of "Cyrano de Bergerac", Rostand draws a picture of the French audience of that day which is also representa-

tive of the Elizabethan. He gives the colorful, the picturesq ue

side -- the flower-girls and fruit vendors, the merry intercourse

between gallants and ladies, the bantering and the quarrelling.

Stephen Gosson presents the more sordid aspect of the scene: 2. "In

our assemblies at plays in London you shall see such heaving and

shoving, such itching and shouldering to sit by women, such care

of their garments, that they be trod on -- such giving them pipins

to pass the time, such playing at foot-saunt without cards, such

tickling, such toying, such winking." Some ate fruit and cracked

nuts. Some smoked.

1. H. P. Traill: "Social England"; London, 1892. p.106. verified by Holinshed's "Chronicles", 1586, Edition of New Shakespeare Society, Series 6, vol.I, London, 1877.

2. Stephen Gosson: "The School of Abuse", 1579, Arber's English Reprints, V, London, 1869.

Joseph Quincy Adams in his "Shakesperian Playhouses" gives a fine verbal picture of the audience in the Fortune seen from the Stage during the performance of a play. He says: "In Middleton and Dekker's The Roaring Girl, acted at the Fortune, Sir Alexander shows to his friends his magnificent house. Advancing to the middle of the stage, and pointing out over the building, he asks them how they like it:

Goshawk. I like the prospect best.
 Laxton. See how't is furnished!
 Sir Davy. A very fair sweet room.
 Sir Alex. Sir Davy Dapper,
 The furniture that doth adorn this room
 Cost many a fair grey great ere it came here;
 But good things are most cheap when they're most dear.
 Nay, when you look into my galleries,
 How bravely they're trimm'd up, you all shall swear
 You're highly pleas'd to see what's set down there:
 Stories of men and women, mix'd together,
 Fair ones with foul, like sunshine in wet weather;
 Within one square a thousand heads are laid,
 So close that all of heads the room seems made;
 As many faces there, fill'd with blithe looks
 Shew like the promising titles of new books
 Writ merrily, the readers being their own eyes,
 Which seem to move and to give plaudites;
 And here and there, whilst with obsequious ears
 Throng'd heaps do listen, a cut-purse thrusts and leers
 With hawk's eyes for his prey; I need not shew him;
 By a hanging, villainous look yourselves may know him,
 The face is drawn so rarely: then, sir, below,
 The very floor, as 't were, waves to and fro,
 And, like a floating island, seems to move
 Upon a sea bound in with shores above.
 All. These sights are excellent!

A closer view of this audience -- "men and women, mix'd together, fair ones with foul" -- is furnished by one of the letters of Orazio Busino, ¹ the chaplain of the Venetian Embassy,

1. "Diaries and Despatches of the Venetian Embassy at the Court of King James I, in the Years 1617, 1618. Translated by Rawdon Brown." (The Quarterly Review CII, 416.) It is true that the notice of this letter in The Calendar of State Papers, Venetian, XV, 67, makes no mention of the Fortune; but the writer in The Quarterly Review, states positively that the Fortune was the playhouse visited.

who visited the Fortune playhouse shortly after his arrival in London in 1617:

The other day, therefore, they determined on taking me to one of the many theatres where plays are performed, and we saw a tragedy, which diverted me very little, especially as I cannot understand word of English, though some little amusement may be derived from gazing at the very costly dresses of the actors, and from the various interludes of instrumental music and dancing and singing; but the best treat was to see such a crowd of nobility so very well arrayed that they looked like so many princes, listening as silently and soberly as possible. These theatres are frequented by a number of respectable and handsome ladies, who come freely and seat themselves among the men without the slightest hesitation. On the evening in question his Excellency (the Venetian Ambassador) and the Secretary were pleased to play me a trick by placing me amongst a bevy of young women. Scarcely was I seated ere a very elegant dame, but in a mask, came and placed herself beside me ... She asked me for my address, both in French and English; and on my turning a deaf ear, she determined to honour me by showing me some fine diamonds on her fingers, repeatedly taking off no fewer than three gloves, which were worn one over the other ... This lady's bodice was of yellow satin richly embroidered, her petticoat of gold tissue with stripes, her robe of red velvet with a raised pile, lined with yellow muslin, with broad stripes of pure gold. She wore an apron of point lace of various patterns; her head-tire was highly perfumed, and the collar of white satin beneath the delicately-wrought ruff struck me as extremely pretty."

Some smoked during the performance:

"It chaunc'd me gazing at the Theater
 To spie a Dock-Tobacco chevalier
 Clouding the loathing air with boggie-fume
 Of Dock-Tobacco;
 I wisht the Roman lawes severity:
 Who smoke selleth with smoke be done to dy." 2.

Those who were able so to do, also read at the theatre. At any rate, new publications were hawked there. William Fennor opens an address to the public, prefixed to a production of his entitled "Descriptions" and published in 1616: 3. "To the gentlemen readers, worthy gentlemen, of what degree soever, I suppose this pamphlet will hap into your hands, before a play begin, with the importunate clamour, of 'Buy a New Booke' by some needy companion, that will be glad to furnish you with worke for a turned teaser." Shakespeare himself comments very aptly upon his audience: "The youths thunder at a play-house and fight for bitter apples." 4. Again, in the first scene of "Julius Caesar": "If the rag-tag people did not clap him and kiss him, according as he pleased and displeased them, as they used to do the players in the theatre, I am no true man." Such was Shakespeare's Elizabethan Public.

While waiting for the curtain to rise, there was laughing, shouting and much merriment. Jokes were bandied back and forth; venders of sweetmeats tried to sell their wares, for the audience

2. "Dyet's Dry Dinner" by Henry Buttes, Maister of Artes and Fellowe of C. C. C. in C. London, 1599, Small 8 vo.
3. Fennor's Description of "A True Relation of Certaine and Divers Speeches Spoken Before the King and Queene's Most Excellent Majestie,

ate and drank during intermission and even while the play was in progress on the stage. In the balconies, there was visiting, flirting, merry jest and light conversation. All the while everyone evaded more or less successfully the crooks who infested the place. Sometimes, however, the most tragic part of a play might be interrupted by the cry "Pickpocket caught!" The play would then be stopped while the luckless "cut purse" was hustled from the building.

When the third bugle had blown and the curtain had been raised, usually about three o'clock in the afternoon -- and Sunday was the popular day -- Shakespeare's company was in the presence of this audience, alive to every impression, eager for new experiences and sensations, susceptible to beauty and pathos, yet delighting ⁱⁿ cruelty and savage spectacles of blood and torture. They loved striking contrasts; the gigs which followed a gruesome tragedy did not seem at all inconsistent to them. After murder and death, they demanded gaiety and mirth. Above all else, they must have variety. After "Midsummer Night's Dream" they would prefer next day to see "Macbeth" rather than "The Tempest", or if they enjoyed "Twelfth Night" one afternoon, on the next day they would relish one of the chronicle plays more than "Much Ado About Nothing". To us, their tastes seem neither conservative nor

3. (page before) the Prince His Highness and the Lady Elizabeth's grace", by William Fennor, His Majesties' Servant, London, 1616.

4. (page before) "Henry VIII," Act 5, Scene 3.

standardized. They were neither romanticists nor realists, and had no fixed criteria.

Between this public of Shakespeare's and our own, there are fundamental differences of large significance. The Elizabethan theatre-goer, first of all, came to the theatre with a motive, purpose, and mental set, and background different from that of the present day playgoer. Shakespeare's audience came to the theatre, even if primarily for amusement and sensation, yet also somewhat for information. Indeed, only in the theatre could the Elizabethan gain much of the information without which today we find it impossible to exist. Though the press was already beginning to pour out our cheap books, the public had by no means acquired the reading habit. Consequently, as has been frequently pointed out, the theatre ^{not} filled/only the place it occupies now, but also the place of "the magazine, illustrated history, biography, books of travel and even of the yellow journal."¹ The chronicle histories as well as the innumerable plays based upon current murders, myths, superstitions, beliefs and discoveries, more than prove this assertion.

The Elizabethan, then, came to the theater with a receptive mind. This receptivity of mind in Shakespeare's auditors was an alert receptivity, for they came to the theatre not at the end of an arduous and deadening day of business, or after an elaborate dinner, ending only just before the performance, but in the clear

1. "The Development of Shakespeare as a Dramatist-"
George Pierce Baker, N. Y., 1914. p.15.

light of early afternoon, and in an open air theatre. Other less superficial causes too, no doubt, stimulated this alertness. Not only did motive and time differ from that of the present day, but so did price, though not so markedly. All that can be said with safety as to prices at the theatres is that they were not uniform at all theatres, were raised for the first night and tended upward. Admission to the pit ran from a penny to a sixpence.^{1.} If one hired a stool for use on the stage, one paid from sixpence to a shilling. The contract for building the "Fortune" calls for "gentlemens roomes" and Twoo-pennie-roomes". According to the date and the theatre, prices varied up to half a crown, this highest charge being probably for such seats as those in the "gentlemens roomes" mentioned in the "Fortune" contract.

In his expression of attitude at the theatre, the Elizabethan felt much freer than we do to-day. Decker mentions two methods of disapprobation: one by leaving the house with as many in your train as you can collect or cajole, or, "if either company, indisposition or weather bind you sit it out; -- mew at the passionate speeches, bare at the merry, find fault with the music, whew at the childrens action and whistle at the songs."^{2.}

A difference far more striking, however, is that of interest, content, and point of view of the spectator. Whatever the reason, the Elizabethans were not in the least exacting where

1. "The groundlings gallery commoner buying his sport by the Penney"...
Thomas Decker, Gulls Hornebocke p.136. Notts Reprint.
2. loc. cit. p.147-149.

our audiences today are most exacting, namely, in the matter of plot. So popular in Shakespeare's day were made-over plays and plays from well-known pamphlets, ballads and tales, that one wonders whether the audience did not find it hard to follow the extremely condensed exposition of the play unless they already knew something of the story. At any rate, the mood of the Shakespearean playgoer was delightfully childlike. He came to the theatre to be told a story and he cared not at all, provided the story was interestingly told, if he had heard another tell it before. To-day we sneer unless the playwright gives us what we call a "new" plot, or else so disguises an old story under new conditions and environment that we do not recognize it. On the contrary, what interested the Elizabethan in a play was the story. We emphasize primarily characterization, trained as we are, not so much in seeing plays as in reading novels. Elizabethan Yet, comparing the plays with the wooden figures and frigid dialogue of the day, the advance in characterization is startling. Too often in judging the Elizabethan dramatists, we blame them for a lack of climax at the end of acts. We forget that the modern curtain and the waits between acts are largely responsible for heavy stressing of final movements of scenes and acts. For the Elizabethan scene melted swiftly into scene. Moreover, as has just been mentioned, he was primarily interested, not in character, but in story; he was content if the act closed at a point interesting acquainted with legal terms since they were so freely used by the

enough to leave him eager for more. In brief, the absence of a persistent climax in the modern sense among these early Elizabethans is due, not to ineptitude, but to their conception of the nature of dramatic narrative for the stage. Always the public was considered. The early playwrights' use of humor shows clearly that they were keenly sensitive to the moods and interests of their coarse-minded, story-loving audiences. The Elizabethan public, eager for information as well as amusement, unprovided with information by many of the purveyors of news of the present day, came to the theatre, then, day after day, asking only to hear a story, new or renewed, interestingly told.

The mental grasp of the people themselves offers another splendid field for contrast and comparison between sixteenth and twentieth century audiences. The power of concentration of the Elizabethans was, I think, greater than that of the present day public. This was of a necessity the case; since the majority of the people were illiterate, they loved to depend upon the spoken word for most of their information. Again, their cultural background was not extensive. Shakespeare was free to make gross anachronisms as well as errors in foreign language and in geography, without disturbing the majority of his audience. On the other hand, the Elizabethans showed a surprising interest in some topics about which we are lamentably ignorant. First, they must have been well acquainted with legal terms since they were so freely used by the

dramatists of the day. Then, their supreme interest in and knowledge of English History would allow few inaccuracies, and undoubtedly gave birth to the chronicle plays. The various influences of the Reformation and the Renaissance, the disappearance of the Armada, the death of Mary Queen of Scots, must have been prime factors in this growth of national spirit of patriotism.

No less stimulating were the stories of adventure, discovery and conquest told by English voyagers from known and unknown seas. Red Indians and negroes were exhibited in the streets as well as crocodiles, bears and monkeys. Subsequent growth of trade brought new commodities -- tobacco, tea, beer, coal, apricots, hops. All these elements contributed to the emotional intoxications of the time, and led directly to an inordinate love of pleasure, which will be treated later, but to which, it may be added, Elizabeth herself contributed more than her share.

The interests of the Elizabethans were wide, and their beliefs varied, yet Shakespeare included them all in his appeal to his public. Little wonder then that these Elizabethan plays with all their faults from the point of view of dramatic technique, as it is understood today, show lasting -- everlasting qualities.

The chief error of our theatrical public is, here again, the mistaken idea that drama can be judged by fixed, permanent and final standards, although, of course, there are fundamental prin-

principles in all dramatic composition; That we find delight in Shakespeare's plays today, does not alter the fact that had he written for us he could not have written exactly as he did for the Elizabethans. Therefore, to judge his plays technically by other standards than those of the time for which he wrote is illogical. "The art of the drama is not stationary, but progressive. By this I do not mean that it is always improving; what I do mean is that its conditions are always changing, and that every dramatist whose ambition it is to produce live plays is absolutely bound to study carefully, and I may even add respectfully -- at any rate, not contemptuously -- the conditions that hold good for his own age and generation." ^{1.} Today, people frequently hesitate to judge paintings, statuary or even music because they feel their lack of standard. But who hesitates to criticize a play?

Shakespeare's task was simplified because, for the greater part, his audience had only one standard,-- "Does it interest me?" Plays were given at court, but only a few in the audience were so that travelled/they could compare his plays with those of other countries.

Very few knew the classical drama well enough to be able to hold him to its methods. The majority were satisfied if their attention, stimulated quickly at the opening of the play, was held

1. Pinero, Sir Arthur W. "Robert Louis Stevenson as a Dramatist", London, 1914; p.67.

1. In fact, singing was so popular that song-books of the time were printed "double and reverse" that four persons sitting about a table might open the book in center and each read from it his part.

unswervingly to the end. The fact is that the English drama was so much in the making, that even among the dramatists themselves everything was still formative and experimental. They were learning tactics of playwriting by experience, and as they learned, they provided their audiences with higher standards of judgment.

Certain conventions of form and literary expression, however, had been adopted. Blank verse had been gaining in popularity, through increasingly frequent experimentation, since "Gorboduc" in 1562. So popular was it by 1591, that Robert Wilmont, one of the authors of "Tancred and Gismunda", first acted in 1568, when he printed his play, polished the rhymed quatrains, "according to the decorum of these days", into blank verse. It was by 1590 definitely established as the medium for serious dramatic expression.

Long speeches were not written primarily for dramatic effect but because Shakespeare and his audience loved poetry. Here again we find Shakespeare considering his public. All the gentlemen of the day wrote verse; it was part of a gentleman's education, and to be unable to bear a part in singing at sight or to descant, as it was called, was to imperil the genuineness of a man's gentility. Not to know Byrd, Morley, or Campion, the composers, or Dowland the famous lutenist, was to betray oneself ignorant indeed. Even the beggars sang ballads. There was music at the theatres. What with the "bunt-ups" and aubades and the serenades, one might say the Elizabethan sang all day.¹

1. In fact, singing was so popular that song-books of the time were printed "double and reverse" that four persons sitting about a table might open the book in center and each read from it his part.

Another characteristic that marked the Elizabethan public was their implicit belief in the supernatural. Their reaction to these elements in "Midsummer Night's Dream", "The Tempest", "Macbeth", was due not so much to their imagination as to their belief in fairies, ghosts and spirits. Indeed, it is quite possible that Shakespeare himself shared in this belief. The Queen frequently consulted astrologers for predictions of storms and other evil omens. In "Julius Caesar" a storm is the omen of the tragedy to follow. Indeed, the superstition of the age is far too big a subject to be treated superficially here.

Such were the interests and beliefs of the Elizabethan for whose pleasure Shakespeare strove; but what of the Elizabethan's physical appearance, what did he look like? What spectator greeted the Shakespearian actor as he faced his Elizabethan public? All foreigners who visited the Elizabethan theatre or any assembly in London, comment on the gorgeous costumes, the color and ornament affected by the people of the day. In fact, this comment was not restricted to foreigners, for contemporary literature is full of allusions (most of them in ridicule) to the dress of the day. Nothing was too elaborate or extravagant for lady or gallant to wear. The poorest classes -- the groundlings -- were not far behind the nobility in this respect. What they could not achieve in elegance and fineness, they made up in brilliance and gaudiness.

They affected the same styles using ^{however} cheaper materials. One reason for this mad display was no doubt the great increase in wealth that came to the England of the sixteenth century. Elated by this sudden prosperity, the vain, pleasure-loving Elizabethan quite naturally followed the instinct of the newly rich -- that of external show. The Queen herself, however, exerted an even greater influence in moulding the tone of the society and manners of her subjects. Elizabeth loved display of color and magnificence. Her costumes were extravagant and infinite in number. Her loyal subjects, therefore, strove to imitate her.

The women's dress was characterized by wide ruffs at the neck, and full skirts -- both were extreme. The ruffs were stiffly starched^{1.} and were a quarter of a yard wide. Huge frames of wire were worn under the dress to maintain its fullness. Tightly laced bodices, projecting downward in a sharp point, were worn. These were cut low at the top if the wearer were married. The farthingales (skirts) were enormous and padded. Stubbs, in the "Anatomy" says, "...the women when they have these goodly robes upon them, seem to be the smallest part of themselves, not natural women, but artificial women, not women of flesh and blood, but rather puppets or marrinets consisting of rags and clothes compact together."^{2.}

The men, too, wore ruffs as well as shirts, doublets and wide

1. Starch, a new commodity in England.

2. Phillip Stubbs, "Anatomie of Abuses in England", London, 1568.

padded hose, stuffed with wool, hair, bran, rags, clothes, and even toilet articles. The practical jokers of the time considered it good sport to slit hose padded with bran, so that its owner not only gradually lost his splendid figure but trailed a stream of golden grain.

In dress, the Elizabethan expressed his characteristic love of change. Today the mode was Spanish; tomorrow, French, German, Italian, or Turkish. "In a word, except it were a dog in a doublet you shall not see anyone so disguised as my countryman in England."¹

So affected were the people by foreign manners that the term "Italianate" was one of ridicule. An old English proverb states, "An Englishman Italianate is a devil incarnate."

Hair dressing was also most elaborate. Dyes and wigs were frequently and frankly used by both men and women. Long hair, long locks, beards and moustaches, often waxed and painted, were the vogue for the men. "Will you be trimmed to look fierce or pleasant?" was the barber's query. In fact, the barber-shop was an institution, quite like a club with gossip the chief pastime. Add to this colorful dress the brilliance of many jewels, the flashing of swords and one has a slight conception of the dazzling picture that greeted the Elizabethan actor.

This external appearance was quite typical of the Elizabethan mind. The stirring times of discovery, adventure and wealth, resulted

1. Holinshed's Chronicles, London, 1577, small 8vo. p.106.

in emotional excess, and developed quite naturally into an intense love of pleasure previously noted. Not all of these amusements were refined in character. The theatre has been mentioned as the only source of intellectual entertainment. Bear bating, cock- and bull-fighting, hunting, hawking, fencing, were the chief sports. Cards, dice and gambling were also most popular. Dancing the "canary", the "antic" the "gallard" and the "pavin" was the popular thing at court, Elizabeth herself being reported an excellent dancer. Practical jokes were common and well liked, as Ben Jonson's plays all testify. Puns, jokes and repartee, flirting and gossiping, all met the Queen's taste at court, and consequently were reflected in the tastes of her subjects. At court, also, in addition to plays, were given elaborate allegorical spectacles and masques -- requiring the co-operation of poet, musician, actor and stage carpenter. Scott's description (based, I find, upon excellent contemporary accounts) of the masque at Kenilworth in honor of Elizabeth, is representative of the beauty and extravagances of these diversions. So much for the pleasant side of Elizabethan pastimes. Another aspect, however, plays such an important part in many of these amusements, that it demands mention -- it is excessive cruelty.

The scenes most enjoyed by the Elizabethans were those most bloody. In this respect they were extreme realists. If a man were to lose his eyes in a play, out they must come on the stage if the Elizabethan was to go away happy. Even the punishments

for crime seem drastically harsh. The death penalty was inflicted for even minor offences. Branding was a common form of punishment. This intolerance was further shown by the people's attitude toward foreigners. It was carried to such an excess that it was almost provincial in character. Shakespeare's treatment of the Spanish Armada in "Love's Labour's Lost" or the Italian Iachimo in "Cymbeline" repeats this contempt for foreigners.

Toward the end of the reign of Elizabeth, certain changes in public attitude quite naturally developed. Class distinctions were no longer so marked. One no longer needed to remain without the hope of advancement in the class to which one was born. The merchant class as a whole had risen, since the middle class had been most affected by the sudden increase in wealth. On the other hand, the paupers and beggars had increased greatly in numbers.

Many others were unemployed since the economic system, so favorable to the merchant class, had been constantly changing the methods of holding land from 1350 to 1550, and thus leaving many without means of sustenance. However, these paupers still composed a vast number of the groundlings at the theatre. Antolycus, in the "Winter's Tale", had all the rogue's tricks and is a good example of the class. Ben Jonson, in "The Alchemist", amusingly demonstrates the cleverness of the "Coney-catchers" -- thieves who specialized in robbing foreigners. Their chief field of action

was the theatre. Here also the courtesan plied her trade. The theatre was truly a representative gathering of the people of the time, -- no worse nor no better than any other public assembly. Even if, morally lax then, the Elizabethans were becoming more and more influential. When Queen Elizabeth ascended the throne, the commercial center of the world was at Antwerp; when she died it was at London.

In sketching this outline of the manners, characteristics and appearance of the Elizabethan Public, I have attempted to touch only those phases of life which were applicable to the people as a whole during the height of Shakespeare's career. Constantly bearing in mind my main theme, "Shakespeare's Elizabethan Public", I have not only endeavored to picture this public accurately, but I have also endeavored to show throughout Shakespeare's cognizance of this public and his unceasing efforts to please it, to comply with its wishes. In conclusion, perhaps a few specific instances of these efforts from the plays themselves, might not prove amiss.

"The Merchant of Venice" seems to be a fair example for first analysis. Such deft plotting is a result of the dramatist's keen insight into the wants of his public. He undoubtedly added to the story because he knew his public liked a crowded plot, and also because the plot in its simplest form demanded beguiling motivation. He gave his last act to a climactic presentation of the rings because he felt his audience would find its keenest pleasure there. Moreover, again following the popular taste, he

permeated the original production with the salacious, now painstakingly excluded. The conclusion of the play bears further evidence of Shakespeare's knowledge of, and interest in, his public. Here the Elizabethans' love of both story and contrast is satisfied. The shock is keen that comes with Portia's famous speech:

"Tarry a little; there is something else,
 This bond doth give thee here no jot of blood;
 The words expressly are, a pound of flesh;
 Take th_en thy bond, take thou thy pound of flesh;
 But, in the cutting it, if thou dost shed
 One drop of Christian blood, thy lands and goods
 Are by the laws of Venice confiscate
 Unto the state of Venice."

But even here, Shakespeare does not allow the scene to end. In perfect contrast to the way in which the net was drawn tighter and tighter about Antonio in the earlier part of the scene, so step by step it is now drawn about Shylock to his and the Elizabethans' surprise. The Jew is not allowed to take Bassanio's offer of money instead of the pound of flesh. In addition he finds he has incurred the law for his design upon Antonio. He leaves the courtroom baffled, broken in spirit and fortune. Then in swift contrast, Shakespeare sets his audience laughing over the exchange of rings because they can foresee the awkward situation Bassanio is preparing for himself. True, it is that for

the modern reader, the climax comes with the exit of Shylock, but for an audience which found its prime interest in the story and in the contrasts between the serious or tragic and the comic or grotesque, interest was doubtlessly sustained until the end. Throughout the play, then, Shakespeare catered to the public taste.

"The Tempest" is another fine example of Shakespeare's pleasing his public. In the first place, it was written to take advantage of a necessarily ephemeral interest in the shipwreck of certain Britishers on the Bermuda Isles. Knowing again his public's beliefs and interests, Shakespeare made particular use of the rumor that the islands were haunted by spirits and devils. Considering carefully the dramatic groups which make the story, one sees no single group developed to its full extent, but rather the different groups contrasted for variety. Just the type of story play the Elizabethans would and did adore. Shakespeare seems to have had a genius for meeting the interests of his public.

for

To reiterate, then, that Shakespeare wrote public production; is well known, but that the satisfaction of his public's tastes and interests was his prime motive in writing, it has been the aim of this paper to prove. Shakespeare's Elizabethan Public is perhaps not a new topic. However, I trust I have, in some slight way, added to the store of knowledge on the subject, if not by

directly increasing original information, at least ~~by~~ correcting, however slightly, some of the more or less inaccurate existing beliefs. If the study to which this paper claims to be but the merest introduction, shall make the meaning of the sixteenth century more intelligible to their descendants of the twentieth, if a more perfect understanding of the ideals which swayed the contemporaries of Shakespeare shall have been established and if a substantial basis shall have been laid for the theory that Shakespeare wrote for his public, and if, thereby, it shall help us to interpret more fully him who was the consummation of the literary race, then the object of this study shall have been accomplished. The spirit of the Shakespearian audience was indeed boisterous and even crude, but it expressed the heart of a people, vibrant with emotion and enthusiasm. There radiated an atmosphere of pure joy in life, a glory in existence, and an inspiration to productive genius that was uniquely Elizabethan.

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