

A STUDY OF SHAKESPEARE CRITICISM

IN THE

JAHRBUCH 1865-1914

by

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Summary.

This thesis outlines the early history and aims of the Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft and surveys the different types of contributions found in volumes 1-50 of the Shakespeare-Jahrbuch. It also considers a few critical works outside the Jahrbuch. Purely academic scholarship is distinguished from general criticism and special attention is paid to particular aspects of this criticism. Political interpretations of the plays are related to the political situation and beliefs in Germany at that time, and a parallel is drawn between Elizabethan England and 'Isarack' Germany. Similarly it is suggested that the somewhat Humanistic approach to Shakespeare's religious beliefs is influenced by German religious attitudes. The German preoccupation with psychological character studies is shown as sometimes going to unreal extremes, and as symptomatic of German Romanticism. The contrasts drawn between England and Germany are also related to the political background of the times and to German ideas concerning the "Nordic culture", and the German concern with the moral and educational value of Shakespeare is examined. The current theories of literary criticism and scholarship are explained in their historical and philosophical context, and the significance is assessed of the German criticism of this period in the history of Shakespeare criticism in general.

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1: INTRODUCTION.

1: Introduction.

By any account the Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft is a most remarkable institution. Founded in 1864 on the occasion of the tercentenary of Shakespeare's birth it is now over a hundred years old and is thus the oldest society for the study of Shakespeare with an unbroken existence. It was also the first foreign society to be founded for this purpose. Indeed, one of the first problems that confronted the founders of the society was that of justifying its very existence. Wilhelm Oechelhüser found it necessary to argue: "The advertisements for the forthcoming Jubilee are going out - England is preparing for a national festival, and Germany cannot and will not be left behind. For Shakespeare belongs to us too ; the Germans have acquired him through translation and research, he has become a power in our literature. ...The growth of the knowledge of this great apostle of humanity and true wisdom of life is essential for the healthy development not merely of our dramatic literature but of the whole moral and intellectual life of the nation." ¹

There was immediate opposition to Oechelhüser's suggestion, as is shown by Berthold Auerbach's remark on the 16th February, 1864: "If the

¹Ideen zur Gründung einer deutschen Shakespeare-Gesellschaft (1863).

political cynicism of Bismarck and Rechberg succeeds in stirring up a new civil war in Germany or alternatively in sinking us in new humiliation, then our whole culture will be involved." There would be no place for a Shakespeare society or any other cultural activity in the political situation that Auerbach feared was imminent. Indeed there had been earlier attempts to found a society, notably that of Tycho Mommsen in 1857, but they had come to nothing. Nor did the opposition vanish once the society had at last been successfully founded. At the General Meeting of 1865 Ulrich found it necessary to defend the society against those patriots who complained about the political attitude of England towards the great questions of the day. The society, he claimed, did not wish to burn incense to a foreign genius; Shakespeare the Englishman should be also a German poet; it was not a question of uncritical adulation but of scholarly study.² This sort of attitude persisted through the years and reached its climax in an extraordinary speech delivered to the society by Gerhart Hauptmann in 1915.³ In this Hauptmann maintained that Germany was nearer the spirit of Shakespeare than England, and that had Shakespeare been alive then he would have supported Germany in the struggle against England.

²Quoted by Albert Ludwig in "Die Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft. Ein Rückblick anlässlich ihres 50jährigen Bestehens," Jahrbuch, XLIX (1913), 7.

³"Deutschland und Shakespeare. Geleitwort," Jahrbuch, LI (1915), vii-xii.

But despite all opposition the Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft survived and indeed began to flourish. Possibly the major factor at this critical stage was the devoted support of the Grossherzogin Sophie von Sachsen. Sophie was a Princess of the House of Orange, who had brought with her to Weimar her English tutor, James Marshall, who was one of the founders of the society. It was she who persuaded Dingelstedt, the director of the theatre at Weimar, who had earlier refused to be interested in the society, to support the cause.

This explains in part how the home of the society came to be at Weimar. But it cannot have been chance alone which was responsible for Shakespeare becoming associated with the city of Goethe. Together with Lessing⁴ and Schlegel,⁵ Goethe had been responsible for the great interest shown in Shakespeare and for the great esteem in which he was held. But Goethe's Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre⁶ had set the fashion for the exaggerated, sentimental idolatry which later surrounded Shakespeare in certain circles. It was, therefore, appropriate that Germany's greatest poet and the Englishman whom he idolized should be linked together by their joint association with Weimar. This association of Shakespeare with Weimar survived all vicissitudes of war and divisions of Germany until the tragic

⁴ See Hamburgische Dramaturgie (1767-8).

⁵ See A.W. Schlegel, Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur (1809-1811).

⁶ 1795

split of the society in 1863, which resulted in two separate Shakespeare societies, one with its seat at Weimar and the other at Bochum.

Since the founding of the Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft other specialised societies devoted to a particular author have been founded on the same model, each with its own Jahrbuch. Among the poets who have been thus honoured are Goethe, Schiller, Grillparzer, Heine and Hölderlin. The Shakespeare-Gesellschaft itself had an early rival: a society was founded at Dresden, but with other ideas. Albert Ludwig tells us that: "The Dresdener Verein had as its aim the promotion of the rights and interests of the dramatic author and composer, the maintenance and enlargement of a worthy, preferably German repertory, the improvement of play-acting and dramaturgy, and finally the introduction of a universal German theatre-law. As the Augsburger Allgemeine Zeitung wisely remarked (1864, Beilage 171) the interests of the two societies were wonderfully complementary, Weimar represented the theoretical side, the cult of the drama in Shakespeare's sense, while Dresden wanted to convert the ideal into reality."⁷ In short Weimar was to study Shakespeare academically, and Dresden would try to put into practice in the German theatre the lessons to be learned from Shakespeare. In the event there was no mutual co-operation and the Dresden society was short-lived.

⁷Ludwig, p.12.

Right from the start the Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft published each year a collection of essays, together with shorter contributions, in what was known as the Jahrbuch der Deutschen Shakespeare-Gesellschaft, but which later was called simply the Shakespeare-Jahrbuch. The Jahrbuch was not originally intended to be a purely scholarly publication; it was hoped that it would also have a wider popular appeal to those who were admirers of Shakespeare but were not themselves specialists. Indeed to this day there is still an appeal in each Jahrbuch inviting contributions from non-academic circles, but we have only to compare the contents of more recent volumes with those of the early years to see that despite all efforts the Jahrbuch has, with a few worthy exceptions, become a specialist publication. Even so, we have only to compare it with a journal like Anglia to see that it has a quite different approach from the latter. The articles in Anglia give the impression that they are intended to be the last word on a given subject, whereas one feels that the Shakespeare-Jahrbuch would rather have the first word and be a platform for discussing controversial issues.

We can see, then, that the Jahrbuch did not appeal to all Shakespeare critics. There were distinguished scholars who never contributed to it, such as Werder, Gervinus and Böttger. There were bitter controversies, often conducted in the most personal terms. Nevertheless it is true to say that the Jahrbuch is fairly representative of German Shakespeare

criticism. At all times a very wide range of subjects has been treated and a variety of approaches employed. If, however, we compare the tables of contents of the early volumes with those of more recent years we cannot help but notice that there have been changes over the course of the years. Robert Fricker draws attention to the fact that in the early years of the Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft there were many articles of an all-embracing nature, covering the whole of Shakespeare's works, whereas today, when we know so much more about Shakespeare, this is no longer possible, and articles are more specialised, dealing with one aspect of, say, the Comedies, the Histories, or the Tragedies.⁸

The Gesamtverzeichnis für die Bände 1-99 des Shakespeare-Jahrbuchs⁹

divides contributions to the Jahrbuch into twelve main sections:

- 1) Bibliographies.
- 2) Editions, anthologies and translations.
- 3) Problems of text, authorship and authenticity.
- 4) Sources and influences.
- 5) Biographical studies.
- 6) Shakespeare and the stage.

⁸ "Hundert Jahre Shakespeare-Jahrbuch," Jahrbuch, C (1964), 51. The whole of this article is valuable as an introductory survey of the first hundred years of the Shakespeare-Jahrbuch.

⁹ Heidelberg, 1964.

- 7) The contemporary and cultural background.
- 8) Shakespeare's contemporaries and their works.
- 9) Critical treatises on Shakespeare's works.
- 10) Language, versification and structure.
- 11) History of Shakespeare criticism.
- 12) History of Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft.

In addition there are obituaries of leading Shakespearian scholars and reviews of most of the important critical works on Shakespeare.

The bibliographies given in the Jahrbuch since the very first volume are of great use to any student of Shakespeare, and while there may be omissions it must be admitted that the Jahrbuch has, from its earliest days, provided the student of Shakespeare with an impressively comprehensive bibliography. We need only note here that to this day the Germans are very thorough in the preparation of their bibliographies and that since students at the universities are specially trained in this field the tradition seems likely to be continued.

It is of course natural that a foreign Shakespeare society should be concerned with the question of translations of Shakespeare's works. In the period under consideration there was no real rival to the Tieck-Schlegel translation. It is probably not too much to say that the Tieck-Schlegel translation is one of the biggest single factors in the popularity of Shakespeare among the ordinary German people, and

despite the fact that a number of more modern translations have been made that by Tieck and Schlegel is still widely read and used on the stage.

One of the main projects of the Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft was the publication of a new edition of the works of Shakespeare. Today, when there are several good editions available, we tend to forget that a hundred years ago there was a real need for a scholarly edition. The story of this venture is described in detail by Albert Ludwig.¹⁰ Originally there were two plans, one to produce an annotated English edition, and the other to publish a good, but popular German translation. In the case of the English edition there were two ideas: Ulrici wanted a *variorum* edition while Elze wanted a critical edition. Ulrici's suggestion was the one adopted, but it was then impossible to find a publisher. The aim of the German edition was explained by Ulrici at the General Meeting in October 1865: "The society has set itself the task, or at least has it seriously in mind, of producing a German translation of Shakespeare's dramas which will reflect their spirit and style with the greatest possible clarity, but at the same time will purge them of everything that causes offence upon the stage, especially unessential accessories which are incomprehensible to the audience. This stage adaptation will then, we hope, reach the people and bring Shakespeare's dramas nearer to the

¹⁰ Ludwig, pp.43-4.

German people than would be possible if they were left completely unaltered."¹¹ There was a long controversy as to whether this translation should be a completely new one or whether it should be based on Tieck-Schlegel. The latter course was finally adopted, but the project was never completed.¹²

Independently of all this N. Delius produced his own edition of Shakespeare,¹³ which was later to be the basis of Furnivall's Leopold edition. There are many smaller contributions, many of them by Delius, in the earlier volumes of the Jahrbuch devoted to textual emendations. While this work is now superseded on account of our modern knowledge of such matters as Elizabethan handwriting and the peculiarities of the individual Elizabethan and Jacobean compositors it is thorough by the standards of the day and shows a concern with the text which is most impressive when we compare it with what many other critics were doing. There were some worthy exceptions to this, notably Alexander Dyce and William Aldis Wright, but they were certainly in a minority.

Closely connected with this was the problem of the authorship of individual plays and parts of plays. On the whole the German critics

¹¹ Quoted by Ludwig, p.50.

¹² All this is very interesting when we consider the outcry that has been caused in Germany, particularly in the ranks of the Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft, by Hans Rothe's "adaptations" of Shakespeare for the modern stage.

¹³ Eiberfeld, 1854 (and subsequent editions).

of the second half of the 19th century attributed more to Shakespeare than some later critics were prepared to do. This in turn led to tortuous attempts to explain away passages that seemed inconsistent with the genius of Shakespeare: Shakespeare, it was felt, could not possibly have written anything that was not excellent, and therefore passages that appeared weak must have some subtle explanation that nobody had hitherto understood. This was also the period when the Baconian theory was enjoying considerable popularity. The Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft firmly refused to countenance such extravagant ideas. F.A. Leo in particular stated the orthodox position authoritatively in this matter.¹⁴

Other articles were devoted to the sources and influences of the plays, and hence too to the problem of dating them. This was all part of the historical approach to Shakespeare and many of the findings are still valid today. There was also considerable research done on Shakespeare's historical and cultural background. But most of these contributions occur in the latter part of the period under consideration; in the earlier volumes the historical approach took the form mainly of biographical studies and of a consideration of Shakespeare's contemporaries and their works. Thus we see that the historical critics began by studying matter external to the plays and only later did they turn their attention to

¹⁴See "Die Baco-Gesellschaft. Nebst einigen Exkursen Über die Baco-Shakespeare-Affäre," Jahrbuch, XX (1885), 190-227, and "Noch einmal die Baco-Frage. Ein Bücher-Referat," Jahrbuch, XXIV (1889), 113-121.

the plays themselves. This biographical approach to Shakespeare is now generally discredited in Germany. Hence the activities of A.L. Rowse have aroused no more interest in Germany than they have elsewhere.

When we look at the list of articles devoted to Shakespeare and the stage it is immediately apparent that the Germans were more concerned with productions on their own stages than on performances in Elizabethan times. This was certainly due to a great extent to the avowed aims of the Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft, but it also reflects the frequency with which Shakespeare was performed on the German stage. It would be difficult to maintain that there was anything like an Elizabethan Renaissance on the 19th century German stage, but mention must be made of the Meiningen players. Duke George II of Saxe-Meiningen, the producer, achieved a remarkable unity of performance through dramaturgic textual criticism, historical accuracy in the settings, and ensemble work.¹⁵ The duke decided the minutest details of scenery, properties, and costumes, and the music and sound-effects also had to be in keeping with the general atmosphere of the play. But the really significant feature of the 19th century German stage is that performances of Shakespeare, even of the lesser known plays, were frequent, not only in the big cultural centres but also in the smaller towns. It is now generally accepted that

¹⁵This last attracted particular attention when the company performed Julius Caesar at the Drury Lane Theatre in 1881.

performances of Shakespeare in modern Germany are more numerous than they are in England: it seems from the statistics given in the early volumes of the Jahrbuch that this is no new phenomenon.

By far the largest proportion of entries in the Shakespeare-Jahrbuch is concerned with the critical appreciation of the works themselves. It is interesting to note which works received the most attention. There were, as we have already remarked, a considerable number of articles that took in the whole of Shakespeare's works. There were also a few that dealt with a particular group, and here we may note that the Histories attracted particular attention. There were also several articles on the poems, and the sonnets especially proved to be a considerable source of interest. Of the individual plays, Hamlet receives far more attention than any other play - 70 articles, while The Merchant of Venice, the next most discussed play, has only 24. This is not really surprising, but the size of Hamlet's lead may be due in part to Goethe's advocacy of the play. Of the other plays some have not been discussed in a major article between 1915 and 1963. To this group belong Coriolanus, Henry V,¹⁶ King John, Love's Labour's Lost, Much Ado About Nothing, Pericles, Timon of Athens, and Twelfth Night. On the other hand Richard II was not given a major article until Vol.LIII.

¹⁶ There is only one article in the whole Jahrbuch devoted specifically to this play.

An interesting and useful feature of the early volumes of the Jahrbuch is the lists of university lectures devoted to Shakespeare. We find that the majority of lectures were concerned with particular plays: a survey of modern lecture lists will show that today many professors prefer to lecture three or four times a week simply on "Shakespeare". The individual plays and particular aspects of Shakespeare are now usually discussed in seminars. Although the space given up to studies of Shakespeare's language, versification and structure is small by modern standards some interesting work was done in this field. The work of W. Hertzberg¹⁷ still receives acknowledgment today. This is the place also to mention Alexander Schmidt's Shakespeare-Lexikon¹⁸ and the work of W. Franz on Shakespeare's spelling, pronunciation and word formation, his principal work being the Shakespeare-Grammatik.¹⁹ But most of the work done was of a general nature. One of the leading contributors to the Jahrbuch in this field was N. Delius,²⁰ who wrote on the epic elements in Shakespeare's dramas,²¹

¹⁷ "Metrisches, Grammatisches, Chronologisches zu Shakespeares Dramen," Jahrbuch, XIII (1878), 248-66

¹⁸ Berlin, 1874-5.

¹⁹ Halle, 1898-1900.

²⁰ Delius was a most prolific writer for the Jahrbuch: he wrote something at least for every one of the first twenty-two volumes.

²¹ "Die epischen Elemente in Shakespeares Dramen," Jahrbuch, XII (1877), 1-28.

the prose,²² the interpolations and ornamentals,²³ and the monologues.²⁴

The Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft was interested not only in earlier Shakespeare criticism in Germany but also in the way he had been received in many other countries. They were also concerned with the relevance of Shakespeare to the contemporary situation in Germany. Some most extraordinary statements were made, as we shall see later, and most of the articles under this heading are more valuable for what they tell us about German critical ideas and methods at this time than for any light they throw on Shakespeare.

~~21. "Die epischen Elemente in Shakespeares Dramen," Jahrbuch, XII (1877), 1-29.~~

22. "Die Prosa in Shakespeares Dramen," Jahrbuch, V(1870), 227-73.

23. "Einlagen und Zutaten in Shakespeares Dramen," Jahrbuch, XXI (1886), 18-42.

24. "Über den Monolog in Shakespeares Dramen," Jahrbuch, XVI (1881), 1-21.

2: POLITICAL INTERPRETATIONS
OF THE PLAYS.

2: Political Interpretations of Shakespeare's Plays.

It was, perhaps, natural that the German critics of this period should be particularly interested in the political aspect of Shakespeare's plays. When the Germany of Bismarck is compared with the England of Elizabeth it can be seen that there are certain marked similarities. For both countries these were periods in which the new consciousness of national identity reached fruition. Elizabethan England saw itself as the champion of Protestantism against Catholic Spain and felt its attitude to be endorsed by the defeat of the Spanish Armada. Germany felt for the first time that its very name meant something: A German nation was being forged out of a multitude of German states. This new Germany was a bulwark with England against France. Prussia had played an important part in the overthrow of Napoleon, and Protestant England was, at least at the beginning, fairly sympathetic towards Lutheran Prussia in the Franco-Prussian War. It is little wonder, then, that Shakespeare was seen as the embodiment of the political aspirations of both nations. It was even claimed that Shakespeare was himself a political writer.¹

The richest field for political interpretations is provided by the

¹ See Albert Ludwig, "Die Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft. Ein Rückblick anlässlich ihres 50jährigen Bestehens," Jahrbuch, XLIX (1913), 20

Histories, in German "Königsdramen".² The Germans were quick to see that these plays must be seen and judged as an integral cycle.³ Wilhelm König even claimed that King John and Henry VIII should also be considered as belonging to this cycle.⁴ His reasons for this claim are significant. He admits that King John in isolation is dramatically unsatisfactory but goes on to say that it is highly suitable as an overture^v to a history cycle because John's reign saw the laying of the foundation of the English constitution and the fusing together of the previously divided peoples who made up the inhabitants of England. The history plays are all concerned with the struggles with France, with the Pope, and with the lords of the Church and the realm. In King John these struggles lead nowhere, but if they are followed through the succeeding plays

2. Wilhelm Oechelbuser draws special attention to the German term in his "Essay über Richard III," Jahrbuch, III (1868), 32

3. The Histories were first produced as a cycle by Dingelstedt at Weimar in 1864. He did not include King John and Henry VIII and made a number of adaptations to the remaining plays, which included the condensing of the three parts of Henry VI into a single play.

4. "Shakespeares Königsdramen, ihr Zusammenhang und ihr Wert für die Bühne," Jahrbuch, XII (1877), 241-4.

their seeming inconclusiveness is seen to develop into something more organic and orderly.⁵

König accepts that The Troublesome Raigne of King John, if not actually written by Shakespeare, at least influenced him, and quotes the lines:

But if my dying heart deceive me not,
From out these loynes shall spring a kingly branch
Whose armes shall reach unto the gates of Rome,
And with his feete treads down the strumpets pride
That sits upon the chaire of Babylon.

He sees this as referring to Henry VIII, and argues that Shakespeare's Henry VIII, despite its admitted weaknesses - the placing together of disconnected events and their unrelated consequences, has many parallels with King John, in which similar happenings are portrayed, the difference being that in Henry VIII the various conflicts are resolved in the kingly authority.⁶

The similarity between this situation and the German position when König was writing is very marked. The validity of Elizabeth's claim to the throne, and indirectly that also of James I, was assured only if it could be proved conclusively that Henry VIII had acted rightly. In the same way the German intellectuals needed to be convinced that Bismarck was acting rightly.

⁵ König, p. 241

⁶ König, pp. 243-4.

König sees the ten Histories as themselves parts of a five-act drama.⁷ This drama begins with an inactive weakling - Richard II - and ends with a tyrant possessed of uncontrolled energy - Richard III. Between, at the climax of the drama, stands Henry V, the ideal ruler, and between him and the two Richards come the long reigns of Henry IV and Henry VI, rulers with contrasting strengths and weaknesses. Henry IV had a keen political mind, was cunning and full of intrigue, and acted vigorously, whereas Henry VI was a weakling, inadequate to the situation in which he found himself, but open and guileless, of a gentle nature and a noble disposition. In the same way King John and Henry VIII are contrasted. Both are egoistic tyrants without any remarkable noble characteristics, but the one is weak and inconsequent, the other conciliatory, the one a suitable opening to this procession of rulers, the other closing it with an encouraging outlook on the future.⁸

It is always interesting to note where Shakespeare deviates from his sources, and König charges him with being biassed in his presentation of the facts.⁹ Despite Richard II's usurpation of the throne the

7. Cf. Eugen Kilian, "Die Königsdramen auf der Karlsruher Bühne. Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Einrichtungen von Heinrich V. und Heinrich VI.," Jahrbuch, XXVIII (1893), 111-3

8. König pp 244-5.

9. König p. 248.

struggle for the succession is not really stressed until Henry VI
(sic)
Part 2. König argues that Shakespeare is not really concerned with the legitimacy or otherwise of the various claims. He cites as evidence Shakespeare's taking over from the chronicles of Bolingbroke's declaration that he stands next in succession to Richard II, although this is untrue. Perhaps this is done to show Bolingbroke in a better light than if there were other claimants. But Shakespeare's inconsistency is shown in the following play, where Bolingbroke, knowing that Mortimer is the true claimant, has him imprisoned.¹⁰

This argument shows how far König went in his belief that the Histories not only naturally formed ^a cycle but ought to be consistent as such down to the smallest detail. He himself supplies a more plausible reason for this inconsistency when he draws attention to the fact that immediately after Richard's abdication Aufmerle and his friends start plotting the overthrow of Bolingbroke, and suggests that the conspiracy would be more clearly justified if the true claimant were named and thus a definite aim indicated. But, says König, Shakespeare's aim was evidently to contrast Richard and Bolingbroke in similar situations.¹¹

10. König, pp. 248-9

11.
König, pp 249-50

This seems very likely. If Schiller could distort history for purely dramatic reasons, why should not Shakespeare have done likewise? König says later in the same article that a History has to be related to the facts, and is therefore not subject to the rules governing other types of play,¹² but it ought to be asked just how far this is true and what kind of a relationship König had in mind. At times he seems to be arguing that the plays must be considered from the dramatic point of view, that Shakespeare altered historical facts to suit poetic justice; at others he seems to be complaining that the plays are not strictly accurate in every historical detail. Really he has found the answer to his own objection.

Richard III has attracted more attention so far as political interpretation is concerned than any other play in the cycle.¹³ On the other hand it is interesting to note that in the period under consideration there are no articles on Richard II. One is tempted to ask whether the critics were more interested in villainy than in weakness or mere incompetence, or whether there was some other explanation for this neglect of Richard II.

12. König, pp. 252-3

13. See the list of articles in the Gesamtverzeichnis für die Jahre 1-99 des Shakespeare-Jahrbuchs (Heidelberg, 1964).

Wilhelm Oechelhüser's essay on Richard III¹⁴ is on a bigger scale than any other. It is intended partly as a counter-blast to Rümelin, who had attacked the Histories.¹⁵ Oechelhüser makes the point that Shakespeare never intended to write plays with a political purpose, and that the significance of the Wars of the Roses so far as the development of the English citizen was concerned could not be clearly understood at a time when the consequential new elements in political life were still evolving. Shakespeare is concerned with the destinies of princes and people and their interplay. For him the principles of humanity and piety come before that of legitimacy. The viewpoint of the History-cycle is that of the eternal rule of justice. Richmond's final speech celebrates not the victory of the principle of legitimacy but the restoration of peace and justice.¹⁶

Oechelhüser argues that Shakespeare shows the common man as the real sufferer in the Wars of the Roses, although, since the ordinary people played very little part in public life in the 15th century, they do not appear to any great extent in the plays. These can deal only with the king and the barons. Shakespeare himself pleads the people's cause in that he judges usurper and rightful king alike by their

¹⁴"Essay über Richard III," Jahrbuch, III (1868), 27-149

¹⁵See Gustav Rümelin, Shakespearestudien (Stuttgart, 1866) pp. 97-107.

¹⁶Oechelhüser, p. 32

fulfilment or otherwise of their duties towards the people and makes this the criterion of their worthiness or unworthiness, their right or lack of it to the office of ruler.¹⁷

Rümelin¹⁸ and Vischer¹⁹ had maintained that Shakespeare's Histories were "anti-people"; and at first it seems rather strange that this question should ever have arisen. But the fact should not be overlooked that German writers, including Lessing, Goethe, and Schiller, had been particularly concerned with "ordinary" people, and that Schiller's Kabale und Liebe was not the only "bürgerliches Trauerspiel".

This moral and social approach to political matters is found also in Karl Elze, who tells us that the outstanding gesture of Shakespeare's attitude towards the State in his objectivity. Shakespeare certainly saw that the State is an indispensable and irreplaceable means for guiding human society and human individuals along the road of knowledge and morality, and that any form of State, if rightly used, can further this end, just as any form of State can degenerate into something diametrically opposed to it. Elze maintains that theoretically

17. Oechelhäuser, pp. 33-4.

18. Rümelin, pp. 98-100.

19. F. T. Vischer, Kritische Gänge, Neue Folge, Heft 2 (Stuttgart, 1861), p.42.

Shakespeare was not biased towards either monarchy or republicanism, and that all he demanded was that law, order, truth, faithfulness, justice and mercy should prevail; for these were for him the corner-stones of both Church and State and were the foundations of any moral society.²⁰

Developing this theme further, Elze argues that Shakespeare was also concerned with the proper maintenance of social classes and stations, and suggests that this is hardly surprising when we remember that Shakespeare's society had only just emerged from feudalism and that it was based upon public opinion rather than on the monarchy. He cites Ulysses' famous speech in Troilus and Cressida in support of this, and goes on to claim that although Shakespeare accepted what already existed very largely because it existed, he was prepared to accept a republic as well as a monarchy.²¹ He could also at times condemn social prejudices, as in the King's rebuke to Bertram in All's Well that Ends Well. Elze concludes this section of his argument by remarking that Shakespeare had no use for constitutions that were not based on the foundations of a properly ordered state and life.²²

20. Shakespeares Charakter, seine Welt- und Lebensanschauung," Jahrbuch, X (1875), 116-7

21. Here Elze cites Menenius and the fable of the belly and the limbs. (Coriolanus, I, 1).

22. Elze, pp. 117-8.

Thus it is only those characters who are lacking in some way these essential moral qualities that are of dramatic interest, and Oechelhüser suggests that this is why Shakespeare did not devote a whole drama to the reign of Edward IV;²³ it was too peaceful and uneventful. He is content to stress only the self-indulgence and immorality of this reign, the consequences of the horror of the Wars of the Roses - the "royal lust" of Edward IV forming a natural transition between the weakness of Henry VI and the extreme tyranny of Richard III. Richard's character grows out of the battles, sins and treacheries of the Wars of the Roses, and in his reign the country's sufferings reach their climax, to be followed by the dawn of a better future.²⁴

Oechelhüser admits that all this does not necessarily mean that Shakespeare worked consciously to such an abstract plan, but suggests that in such a matter poetic intuition can lead along the same path as philosophical reflection.²⁵ Oechelhüser's own philosophical reflections are not surprising when one considers that he was writing at a time when Germany was torn asunder by civil war and when the prospect of unification gave promise of a rosier future. Indeed A.F.C. Wilmar,

²³. Rümelin had complained of this - Shakespearestudien, p. 105.

²⁴. Oechelhüser, "Richard III" pp. 50-1.

²⁵. Oechelhüser, p. 51.

writing in 1879, expresses surprise that the events of the past fifteen years in Germany have failed to inspire any historical drama as a consequence.²⁶

The moral approach to politics is taken still further by Julius Cserwinka in an article concerned with the devoutness of the kings in Shakespeare's Histories.²⁷ This might appear to be concerned more with religion than with politics, a subject that belongs to another chapter, and it is worth noting at this point that Cserwinka is particularly interested in the Divine Right of Kings and in the significance of the fact that the King is the Lord's anointed. However, a closer examination will show that a consideration of this article should really be included at this point since it is not really a religious interpretation at all, but a political one confusing Christianity with secular morality marked by political success or failure.

It is interesting to see how Cserwinka judges each King's success by the degree to which he measured up to certain moral canons of

²⁶ Geschichte der deutschen National-Literatur, 19th ed. (Leipzig, 1879), p. 483. Quoted by Hermann Miller in "Grundlegung und Entwicklung des Charakters Richards III. bei Shakespeare," Jahrbuch, XXVI (1891), 158. Miller discusses this absence of German Histories at some length. (pp. 157-9).

²⁷ "Königsfrömmigkeit in Shakespeares Historien," Jahrbuch, XXXIII (1897), 57-84.

kingship. Chief among these is the idea of true justice. Cserwinka sees throughout Shakespeare's works a veneration of divine justice, which is swift to punish men's wrong-doings. Thus, in Measure for Measure, after Isabella's prayer to the angels to reveal Angelo's wickedness, the latter is immediately caught in his own trap; Hamlet prays for assistance to God's messengers and angels, and this is granted him. It is heaven that sets in motion the machinery that leads to the downfall of Macbeth; and Shylock receives a justice quite different from that which he had expected.²⁸

This eternal judge, argues Cserwinka, reigns over the destinies of the characters in all Shakespeare's tragedies, rewarding the innocent, comforting the suffering and tormenting the guilty. This is true of all classes from the highest to the lowest, but it is particularly clearly shown in the case of the kings as they are shown in the Histories. Shakespeare shows the varied development of the knowledge of God in these, his anointed representatives. From this knowledge springs true morality, true piety. In a king all virtues are united in the highest - justice. Shakespeare points to examples from among the great figures of the past, to the curse of injustice and of neglect of duty: factions walk the open country and soak the crops with blood, civil wars fill the

²⁸. Cserwinka, p. 58.

streets as in Breughel's pictures of hell, assassins slink through the palace, the kingdom becomes an unclutivated field of nettles, and in the tyrant's bosom can be found only thorns. But he eloquently commends justice on the throne, which pours blessings on the land and the people.²⁹

Cserwinka then examines each of Shakespeare's kings individually.³⁰ In Richard II there is shown a legitimate successor to the throne. History tells us of his imprudence, the illegality of his laws and demands; arbitrariness and self-indulgence combined with a highly developed artistic taste are the main characteristics of this king. Shakespeare shows us Richard's hypocrisy in the early part of the play. Only when he is in the Tower does he truly understand the duties of a king and the meaning of the word justice. Then he is blinded by penitential tears. Shakespeare marks this change of heart by his great use of biblical imagery.³¹

Henry IV, on the other hand, knows that his soul is answerable to God and believes in the power of intercessory prayer and in the victory

²⁹. Cserwinka, pp. 58-9. As an example of this, Cserwinka quotes from Cranmer's prophecy concerning Elizabeth at the end of Henry VIII.

³⁰. King John and Henry VIII are omitted from his consideration.

³¹. Cserwinka, pp. 59-63.

of right. But the aspiration after the crown fills him irresistibly with that passion which is most pronounced in Richard III; all other feelings and considerations are repressed by this one, which lends him the will to commit a terrible sacrilege to gain the throne; it gives him the insolence to ascend the throne "in the name of God". Henry sees the civil dissensions as the consequence of his crime and believes himself to be punished in having Prince Hal as his son. His tears are no secret in the land. To the torments of his conscience are added distrust and fear; he fears that the crown that he has stolen may be stolen in turn from him by his son, in whose mind he imagines a thousand daggers are hidden. His great ambition is to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, for this was a war-like age which found great glory in the Crusades. Medieval Christendom found in the undertaking of a Crusade an infinitely deserving task well suited to earn forgiveness for serious crimes, and thus Henry IV seeks peace of mind and soul, if necessary, by death in the Holy Land. At his death he asks God's forgiveness for the way in which he won the crown.³²

Henry V was England's national hero and darling. When he becomes king we witness an abrupt change from the wildness of his youth. Genuine majesty and engaging simplicity adorn the crown, and the

³². Cserwinka, pp. 64-8.

laurels of Agincourt the helm of "the mirror of all Christian kings". He is the first English monarch to try constantly to live up to his title "Dei gratia" through his spotless behaviour and pious morality. Shakespeare glosses over Henry's religious fanaticism in order to make him a more sympathetic character: he was in fact a bitter persecutor of the Lollards. The poet has shielded the shining picture of his hero-king from this shadow and depicted only a noble prince, full of piety and trust in God, wise and ^ucorageous before men but humble before God. The wildness of his youth is seen merely as a joke. Shakespeare causes the Prince himself to say that despite everything he is fully conscious of his high calling. On the throne he is adorned with justice and piety. When he was Prince he was no ambitious Bolingbroke, and as king he is no unjust and irresponsible Richard; from the fate of his predecessors he has learnt the wisdom and importance of justice in earthly kings. He realises that all kings are subservient to God and takes an active part in Church life. He is most careful to discover whether his claim to France is just, and when he finds it is he pursues his goal relentlessly. The cares of this world never cause him to forget God. God's name occurs frequently in the play, and a climax is reached in the famous speech before Agincourt. Afterwards he remembers to give thanks to God for the victory. His life is the embodiment of justice. In him is seen the fulfilment of the highest religious demand: devotion to

God together with a perfectly moral life.³³

In Henry VI we have a model of a highly religious king. Cserwinka draws many parallels between his words and passages in the Bible. And yet the fate of this pious man is a tragic one: tragic through his own fault. In him a peaceable disposition is not a virtue but a weakness. Perseverance in weakness is injustice in Cserwinka's sense of the term. He goes on to explain this by examples. Henry's sin is neglect: he neglects to use the will-power which exists in everyone; he neglects the true cultivation of his character. One cannot face the real world with pious words alone; one cannot be truly pious or just unless one realises that only when prayer is combined with untiring fulfilment of duty can it receive a happy answer. But persistent endeavour demands miraculous powers, success, and daily blessings. A person who does not use common-sense and energy to determine his own life creatively is a human failure and sinks in self-incurred misery: such is the fate of the saintly Henry. He faces a test which challenges his abilities, a means to rouse his energies to the strengthening of his inner life. But it is all in vain. His hand remains the weak hand of a child. Instead of acting with determination and keeping to his place, where the role of world leader has placed him, or on the other hand abdicating a

³³. Cserwinka, pp. 68-72

position that he perceives has been acquired wickedly, he allows the faint-hearted Lancaster to be pushed around without resistance on the throne on whose account he first became involved in murder. In the midst of the horror of war he does nothing - a pawn in the hands of everyone. It is for this reason that he suffers, is mocked by his enemies, abandoned by his friends, hunted and despised by all. His downfall is compared by Cserwinka to that of Clavigo.³⁴

Of what Shakespeare shows us of Edward IV Cserwinka remarks only that he believed in luck and fortune rather than God, that he spent too much time on women to have time for God and that he remembered God only in his last hour.³⁵

Richard III is interpreted as the story of a man who wanted to cheat God. Richard sees the world and its glory from a high mountain and does not resist Satan. He uses hypocrisy and hypocritical styles of speech to further his ends. He uses the language of a priest to deceive those around him and that of a hangman when he is alone. He shines conspicuously and exaggeratedly in his soliloquies with his mockery of all human and divine laws, so that we tend not to perceive the natural utterance of a coarse nature in this hangman's speech, but rather the unusual mode of expression of a criminal who tries to stifle all his doubts by mad

³⁴. Cserwinka, pp. 72-6

³⁵. Cserwinka, p. 77.

jokes and to hypnotise himself into a state of complete irresponsibility. He is also a highly superstitious character.³⁶

In a short space Shakespeare contrives at the end of Richard III to show us Henry VII as a shining example of a truly pious prince. The nobly religious nature of the saintly Henry VI re-appears in him, but it is combined with an active will and joyful heart. With the victorious sword of justice in his hand and deep piety in his breast Richmond holds the field, and his opponent's crown adorns his brow. He is thus a true example of one who prays and acts. Shakespeare shows us Henry VII as one in whom grace is seen to be most clearly active.³⁷

Cserwinka concludes that in the Histories Shakespeare shows how a God worthy of honour repays love with love and requites "measure for measure". He believes that the poet's intention is to show, by means of these portraits of kings of varying piety, the nature of true Christianity, to wit the fulfilment of duty, the love of one's fellow men, and trust in God.³⁸

The real interest in this interpretation is its attempt to see the History-cycle as a whole and to find a theme which links the plays

³⁶.Cserwinka, pp. 77-82.

³⁷.Cserwinka, pp. 82-3.

³⁸.Cserwinka, p. 83.

together. But the concept Caserwinka has of Christianity is surely very incomplete, and despite his title he really describes the kings in political terms: the degree of their success is related to their behaviour according to a moral code which is, in the end, very largely secular. Only a king who is prepared to obey the natural laws of justice and honour can hope to win the complete allegiance of his subjects. An unscrupulous tyrant or an inefficient saint will inspire a spirit of rebellion, and most of the evils depicted in Shakespeare's Histories are the result, direct or indirect, of such rebellions.

Tschischwitz was another critic who was interested in the moral and religious significance of kingship.³⁹ He thought that Richard II, Henry IV, and Henry V represented Shakespeare's maturest thoughts on Church and State. He drew the conclusion that Shakespeare saw the relationship between King and people not as a legal but a moral one. Kingship is a moral and therefore, in its eternal significance, a religious idea. The relationship between nobility and people is grounded on reverence; the breach of this reverence is revolution, as punishable when it is breached by the nobility (as in Richard II) as when it is caused by the people. This book was favourably reviewed by

³⁹. Shakespeares Staat und Königtum, Nachgewiesen an der Lancaster-Tetralogie (Halle, 1866).

Friedrich Bodenstedt in the Shakespeare-Jahrbuch.⁴⁰

Shakespeare's Histories are, as Oechelhäuser emphasizes, plays about kings, and the German critics are themselves particularly interested in the nature of kingship and the qualities required of a leader. Of political questions in the modern sense there is very little in Shakespeare; England had only just emerged from the Middle Ages, and although a new "middle class" was in the process of formation it did not yet have decisive political significance. In the same way 19th century German states passed straight from a quasi-feudal system to the united Germany of Bismarck. In England there was a gap of some three centuries between the end of the feudal system and the beginning of the industrial revolution; in Germany there was, to all intents and purposes, none.⁴¹ Hence the German critics of the latter half of the 19th century were particularly interested in Shakespeare's treatment of the Middle Ages. So far as they were concerned, it formed a very close parallel to their own recent history.

But it is not in the Histories alone that the German critics find political significance. Macbeth, Hamlet and Lear are all seen as being,

⁴⁰. II (1867), 388

⁴¹. See Ralf Dahrendorf, "The New Germanies," Encounter (April 1964), 50, and W.O. Henderson in E.J. Passant, A Short History of Germany 1815-1945 (Cambridge, 1959), pp. 83-4.

among other things, political characters.⁴² H. A. Werner argues that it is a mistake to imagine that Hamlet determines and conditions his own world and surroundings. He may influence his age, but the age, with all its sympathies and aversions, virtues and vices, hopes and anxieties, influences him and leads him astray.⁴³

Werner sees a double catastrophe in Hamlet; both State and Society are falling apart. The one is epitomized by Claudius's administration, in which Hamlet is the victim, the other by Polonius's family, where it is Ophelia who suffers.⁴⁴ For Werner the family is a microcosm of the nation; the same weaknesses are exhibited at two different levels. Claudius could not rule successfully if the whole state were not morally corrupt. In Polonius's family morality exists only for the sake of appearances. All Claudius's supporters ask what the world will think of them, how will their actions be judged. Respectability is the ideal of this society, rather than wisdom or power. Every word and action is governed by considerations of rank, name and honour, rather than fear of

42. It is interesting to note how infrequent are the references to Othello as compared with the other great tragedies.

43. "Über das Dunkel in der Hamlet-Tragedie," Jahrbuch, V (1870), 40-13

44. Werner, p. 46.

God.⁴⁵

The concept of morality is never really absent in Werner's essay. It is understandable why the critics of this time should be so concerned with morality when one considers that orthodox religious beliefs were already being called in question and even rejected entirely by many intellectuals. It was essential that the Christian basis of the accepted code of behaviour should be replaced by a humanist, secular morality.

But Werner is not content with this. He goes on to argue that Claudius is most unkingly in his behaviour. He cannot even rule properly. He commands neither the love nor the fear of his subjects. He is "common" and "low" in his behaviour with his courtiers.⁴⁶ He is a king with a most unstable nature. He won the crown by cowardly, cunning methods, and this is the only way he can keep it. With Claudius on the throne the whole structure of State and Society is poisoned.⁴⁷

Hamlet himself, says Werner, has a deep sense of justice, honour

⁴⁵. Werner, pp. 46-7

⁴⁶. This must have struck 19th century Germans as particularly reprehensible.

⁴⁷. Werner, pp. 52-3

and truth.⁴⁸ He is a hero living in a world of pygmies.⁴⁹ He is, in part at least, mythical, and Werner concludes his essay by describing the play as a sinister nocturne into which Shakespeare poured everything that was dark in his soul. Hence come the sombre colours of the play, the northern sky, the lonely sea, the sluggish brook fringed with willows, and the sandy grave. Hence, too, come the ghost, and Hamlet's madness, both real and feigned. Over the murky waste of the stagnant state lies hyperborean night and all its dank horrors. Only on the other side of the grave can the glimmer of a new dawn be seen.⁵⁰

Werner also associates Lear with these ideas, but the modern reader might well be forgiven if he imagined this to be a description, not of King Lear or Hamlet, but of some Wagnerian opera. Werner compares Hamlet to Faust,⁵¹ but only cannot help feeling that Siegfried might have been a better parallel.

This idea of Hamlet as some kind of nordic folk-hero is surely the basis too of Karl Werder's interpretation of the play.⁵² Although

48. Werner, pp. 63-5.

49. Werner, p. 69.

50. Werner, p. 81.

51. Werner, p. 38.

52. Vorlesungen über Shakespeares Hamlet, gehalten an der Universität zu Berlin (Berlin, 1875).

Werder did not actually contribute to the Shakespeare-Jahrbuch he cannot be left out of consideration here since he obviously created a great impact among his contemporaries.⁵³ Werder had such an idealised concept of Hamlet that he could not refrain from attacking most virulently any critic who dared to find a weakness in Hamlet's character. Robert Pröls suggests that while Werder attacks those who point out the weaknesses in Hamlet's character, he would himself attack Hamlet if the latter did not embody his own ideas about theosophy.⁵⁴ Basically Werder's approach seems to have been psychological rather than political. He is concerned almost entirely with Shakespeare's characterization rather than with the ideas that lie behind the tragedies. He does not consider Hamlet's position as a political character, the potential King of Denmark.

Pröls himself does see some political significance in the play. He disagrees with Werder - and also with Werner - and denies that the entire cast is corrupt. He argues that because Claudius tries to hide his crime and uses cunning stealth instead of open force he must fear the judgment of the world, which cannot therefore be as evil as Werder tries to make out. Claudius hates Hamlet more than he fears him but

53. There are several reviews of his writings in the Jahrbuch.

54. "Werders Hamlet-Vorlesungen," Jahrbuch, XIV (1879), 117

he does fear the people's love for Hamlet.⁵⁵ Hamlet, who is dependent on his claim to the throne and on the love of the people is powerless. He needs some justification of his act, although nobody would dare to challenge him; indeed nobody does so when he finally stabs Claudius.⁵⁶

Some critics are convinced that, sometimes at least, Shakespeare wrote with a political purpose. In an article on Henry VIII Elze attempts to discover when the play was written and on what occasion it was first performed.⁵⁷ He notes that Henry is not an important historical character in the play, although Shakespeare could easily have made him so, and that there is in fact no one central figure. He argues that this was not due to the obstinacy of the subject of the incapacity of Shakespeare, and that hence it was intentional.⁵⁸

Henry is dealt with very leniently in the play; he is in the hands of Wolsey. Shakespeare tries to show that Henry had his good points, and Elze argues that the fact that Buckingham, Wolsey and Katherine all pray for Henry is evidence of this. Elze further points out that Henry did not pardon Buckingham because of the latter's prediction that

55. Pröls, pp. 123-4.

56. Pröls, pp. 124-5

57. "Zu Heinrich VIII," Jahrbuch, IX (1874), 55-86

58. Elze, p. 65.

he would die childless and that he, Buckingham, would become king. It is Wolsey who is to blame for Buckingham's fate, and Elze cites other examples of his duplicity and his evil influence on the King. Henry allows Wolsey's taxation and exactions until Katherine pleads for redress. He then intervenes, but Wolsey pretends "this revokement and pardon" came through his intercession.⁵⁹

Shakespeare passes over Henry's excessive sensuality and finds the motives for the divorce from Katherine in Wolsey's intrigues and Henry's scruples of conscience.⁶⁰ In regard to Henry's relationship with Anne, Shakespeare deviates from history to the advantage of both. Their first meeting is followed quickly by Anne's promotion as Marchioness of Pembroke and by their secret marriage before the final separation from Katherine. In Shakespeare's play Anne undertakes nothing against Katherine, but respects and pities her. This we know to be unhistorical. Everyone in the play praises her beauty and virtue. She is even given the credit for aiding in Wolsey's overthrow. Wolsey's fall is essential to the dramatic structure. Elze argues that in him and in Katherine we see the downfall of Catholicism, in Cranmer and Anne Boleyn the approaching dawn of Protestantism.⁶¹

⁵⁹. Elze, p. 67.

⁶⁰. Elze, pp. 67-9.

⁶¹. Elze, p.71.

To show Cranmer in a favourable light his trial is antedated by ten years. The King intervenes to save him from the Tower and he becomes one of Elizabeth's baptismal sponsors.⁶²

Shakespeare insists that the divorce from Katherine preceded Anne's public wedding and coronation. He also maintains that the divorce is not urged by the King, but forced upon him by the two Cardinals. In the play Katherine dies before Elizabeth's birth, and Elze argues that the real reason for this is to remove any doubt about Elizabeth's legitimacy. There were three main grounds for such doubts: first, Henry's marriage with Katherine was not dissolved by the Pope; second, Anne was said to have precontracted; third, Henry had previously kept up an illicit intercourse with Anne's elder sister, Mary. Anne's marriage was declared null and void before her execution - by Cranmer. Thus Elizabeth's illegitimacy was publicly proclaimed by order of her father. Hence Shakespeare was concerned to prove her legitimacy and to show her birth as the most important and joyous event of her father's reign.⁶³

⁶². Elze, pp. 71-3.

⁶³. Elze, pp. 74-6.

Elze therefore concludes that the play was not only written in Elizabeth's reign, but expressly for her to commemorate some festive event towards the end of her reign. But there is an objection to this in Wotton's statement that in 1613 it was a new play. There is also a contradiction in the glorification of Katherine side by side with that of Anne and Elizabeth.⁶⁴

Elze's ingenious solution is that Henry VIII was originally intended for the 70th anniversary of Anne Boleyn's public wedding on April 12th, 1603, with possible repeat performances on June 1st (the 70th anniversary of Anne's coronation) and on September 7th (Elizabeth's 70th birthday). But Elizabeth died on March 24th and the play was laid aside. The play published in 1604 under the title of Henry VIII was probably by Rowley. A second edition of this appeared in 1613 and reminded the Globe Theatre that they possessed Shakespeare's play. Some revision was necessary, and the prophetic eulogy of Elizabeth was transferred to James. The second part of the prophecy is an awkward interpolation. The allusion to Elizabeth's age and death was inserted at the same time. Similarly, the scene between Katherine and the two Cardinals and her death-scene were inserted or altered in order to disguise the original object of

⁶⁴. Elze, pp. 77-9.

the play.⁶⁵

Elze finds confirmation of this idea in the epilogue, which suggests that although any praise the play will earn is because of the way it depicts Katherine, at the time of its composition it would have earned different praise. Katherine now has the most sympathetic part, despite the way Shakespeare has shown Anne. Elze thinks that the writer of the prologue and the reviser of Katherine's part are the same person.⁶⁶

Elze has some very unusual ideas on the dating of Shakespeare's plays.⁶⁷ There are very few critics who would follow him all the way in his argument here. What is interesting, however, is the way he makes his own political interpretation of the play, and his assumption that Shakespeare himself had a deliberate political intention in writing it, the basis of his argument for the dating of Henry VIII.

Werner suggests that there is also a political intention behind Hamlet. He claims that Shakespeare wanted to arouse in his contemporaries not hate but sorrow, not anger but knowledge of the truth. Shakespeare sees Hamlet's problems as those of his own time and

⁶⁵. Elze, pp. 79-81.

⁶⁶. Elze, pp. 81-2.

⁶⁷. In particular, see "Die Abfassungszeit des Sturms," Jahrbuch, VII (1872), 29-47, which estimates 1604 as the date of composition of The Tempest.

and environment, indeed of all times and places. The play deals with the nature of the idealistic prince and its destructive opposite, the empty world of form and appearance as against the fullness of Hamlet's spirituality and morality, the crumbling age that relies on the past as against the youthful ideas to which the future belongs.⁶⁸

Werner then goes on to claim that Shakespeare did not want to provoke strife but to open the audience's eyes to truth, that truth which cannot be extinguished but eventually transforms the world. This was a wise course. Shakespeare's public was neither politically nor ecclesiastically enlightened and mature. Britain was divided into camps which threatened the end of all art and beauty; the parties were soon to come to blows and to fight each other to bloody annihilation both in Parliament and on the battlefield. Shakespeare's play was a warning to such people. For the stupid and vulgar anything more explicit would have been not a star of light but a signal for rebellion. It must be remembered that Shakespeare was also an actor and a theatre owner: he could not afford a public uproar.⁶⁹

Historians may look back and see the seeds of the Civil War already at the end of Elizabeth's reign, but it is surely demanding too much of

⁶⁸. Werner, "Hamlet," p. 78.

⁶⁹. Werner, *op. cit.* pp. 78-9.

the reader to ask him to believe that Shakespeare could see into the future and that he therefore wrote Hamlet as a warning to his audience.

This last instance may seem to be an extreme example of a critic reading a political significance into a play, but Elze can even find a political background to A Midsummer Night's Dream.⁷⁰ In a discussion of Oberon's vision he cites A.J. Halpin's argument that the allegory refers to the so-called Princely Pleasure of Kenilworth, where the Earl of Leicester made a last attempt to win Elizabeth's hand in marriage. This took place in 1575, twenty-three years before the Earl of Southampton's wedding and when he was only two.⁷¹ It had nothing to do with Southampton, but would have been of great interest to the Essex family. The strange love intrigues of A Midsummer Night's Dream mirrored the love affairs of the aristocracy, hence the importance of the love affairs at Kenilworth. This was a turning-point in the fortunes of the Essex family. But Shakespeare introduces the subject to pay a compliment to the Queen and thus dispose her favourably towards Essex's marriage.⁷²

⁷⁰.Karl Elze, "Zum Sommernachtstraum," Jahrbuch", III (1868), 150-74

⁷¹.Elze argues that A Midsummer Night's Dream was written for the wedding of the Earl of Essex in 1590 and not for that of the Earl of Southampton in 1598, as was suggested by Tieck, Ulrich, and Gerald Massey.

⁷².Elze, pp. 164-7.

But what about the painful allusions to the guilty life of the bridegroom's mother? She was supposed to have had an adulterous relationship with the Earl of Leicester while her first husband was still alive. The latter died suddenly in Dublin, and Leicester was believed to have poisoned him. His widow then married Leicester, who also died suddenly twelve years later; it was said that he too had been poisoned. But it is now known that Walter Essex died of dysentery; and it seems most unlikely that his wife had an irregular relationship with Leicester. Her only fault was that she was perhaps over-hasty in her second marriage. Hence Shakespeare's allusion to the 'little western flower' could give no offence. She responded only to the call of love. If blame was to fall on anyone, it was upon the Earl of Leicester, who was dead at the time of Essex's marriage, and therefore did not require any particular delicacy at the poet's hands. Shakespeare represents all these intricacies of love as the dreams and visions of an oppressive midsummer's night. Essex's marriage is the joyful awakening and the happy ending.⁷³

Greater freedom was allowed to the Elizabethan stage than we often imagine. Nevertheless, Puck begs for pardon in the concluding speech of the play. These lines would be without meaning except at Essex's wedding. Pardon was certainly granted since the aim was to put in a

⁷³. Elze, pp. 167-9.

good word for those involved with the Queen.⁷⁴ This example shows how even a scholar like Elze could sometimes be led by preconceived ideas to confuse interpretation with speculation. It further shows how it is possible to read a political significance into almost any of Shakespeare's plays if one wants to do so.

⁷⁴. Elze, pp. 169-70.

3: RELIGIOUS QUESTIONS

3: Religious Questions.

The problem of Shakespeare's religion is one which has interested students of his works at all times, but few can have been so deeply concerned with this question as the German critics of the latter half of the 19th century. Many German writers and philosophers were freeing themselves from the limitations of the accepted orthodoxies, whether Catholic or Protestant, and some tried to read into Shakespeare their own points of view. Thus, as early as the first volume of the Shakespeare-Jahrbuch, Michael Bernays denies that he wishes to show Shakespeare as a conscious pioneer of Protestantism and rejects absolutely every attempt to limit the view of the poet and his all-embracing works.¹ But he then goes on: "Imbued with the eternal and saving truths of Christianity, Shakespeare received a rich share of the blessings which Protestantism brought to the Teutonic peoples. Just as Protestantism begins the history of modern times so Shakespeare opens to succeeding generations a new poetic world. But although he points to the future he also belongs quite definitely to the past; the entire heritage of medieval poetry devolved upon Shakespeare. Thus he unites divergent ages, and his great figure stands at the turning point of the ages."²

¹"Shakespeare ein katholischer Dichter," Jahrbuch, I (1865), 299

² Bernays, p. 299.

Shakespeare's attitude to religious questions was also of great interest to Karl Elze.³ He surveys what previous writers have had to say on the subject and in particular he attacks the German theologians for denying that Shakespeare was a Christian simply because he did not conform to their own particular "superstitious confessionism".⁴ It seems obvious from this that Elze, like many of his contemporaries, was a disciple of the new "liberalism" in theological matters. He accepts that the Bible and Christianity have been an inseparable part of our civilisation for centuries. They have affected our whole lives, state constitutions, education, literature and art. Anyone, therefore, who, like Shakespeare, wants to depict the people of his time must show also their relationship to the Bible and Christianity. Hence Shakespeare is dramatically objective, as Scott is epically objective,⁵ in his attitude to revealed religion.⁶

³"Shakespeares Charakter, seine Welt- und Lebensanschauung,"
Jahrbuch, X (1875), 91-116.

⁴Elze, p.95.

⁵Elsewhere Elze again compares Shakespeare to Scott, as well as to Byron.

⁶Elze, pp 95-6.

Many would agree with Elze when he points out that Shakespeare did not see Christianity merely as a factor to be reckoned with in depicting mankind. It was for him personally an element of culture, from which he could not free himself anymore than anyone else could. He grew up and was educated in Christianity. Hence we cannot know when his allusions are conscious, nor what he really believes.⁷

Elze lays great stress on Shakespeare's objectivity, which, he claims, excludes the possibility of his being an ardent adherent of any confession. Shakespeare views religion and morals from a human, not a Protestant or Catholic viewpoint.⁸ "He knows that our life is a mixture of good and evil and that even the best men take shape out of their weaknesses. We thus have a duty of moral purification through the taming of the passions and the achievement of a proper balance in all human affairs. He repeatedly condemns excess, both explicitly and implicitly, and insists that the blood, i.e. passion and desire, should be restrained by the judgment, i.e. reason."⁹ True penitence and atonement is for Shakespeare the conversion and renewal of life. All his characters have perfect free-will and are fully responsible for their own actions.¹⁰

⁷ Elze, p. 96

⁸ It should be noted here that a similar claim might be made for Goethe

⁹ Elze, pp. 101-2

¹⁰ Elze, p. 102



All this is fairly conventional, but Elze then reveals his own philosophy by claiming that Shakespeare sees the world as a moral organism, of which the individual is a member. Nobody has a special existence, but exists through and for the whole. The individual can only achieve that moral fulfilment which is the aim of life through the organism of the whole; he cannot set his own aim. This world-organism is the judge and the rewarder of good and evil. We cannot know what happens after death, and Shakespeare is not led astray by mysticism or superstition; but at the same time he does not see the problem as solved by revealed belief. Nor has philosophy solved this problem, but the suspicion is aroused that Shakespeare had greater hopes in philosophy than in faith.¹¹

Elze then argues that Shakespeare has turned from revealed religion to humanism,¹² and is a Christian poet only in so far as true Christianity and true humanism coincide. Unlike Milton, Dante, Calderon and Klopstock, Shakespeare saw revealed religion as a historical phenomenon, and it is because of his humanist ideals that all confessions see themselves in him and bow to that moral greatness which even the narrowest dogmatist cannot

¹¹Elze, pp. 102-3

¹²"humanism" is used generally, but not exclusively, in its 16th century sense. At other times it might well be replaced by "humanitarianism", or even "humanity". See below, pp. 56-7.

deny. Thus it was that the German classical writers, Lessing, Schiller and Goethe felt themselves drawn to Shakespeare as a kindred spirit, even as "flesh of his flesh".¹³

This comparison of Shakespeare with Lessing, Schiller and Goethe is bound to strike the modern English reader as very strange. Goethe, for example, was a philosopher almost as much as a writer. He often expressed his philosophical ideas formally and explicitly and then demonstrated them in his poetry and plays. This certainly cannot be said of Shakespeare. Elze demonstrates clearly the tendency of certain 19th century German critics to see Shakespeare in their own terms and to read into him their own ideas and preconceptions.

Elze over-simplifies the forces behind the English Reformation. It was, he says, overwhelmingly political in character; the Puritans were the first to give it a religious and ecclesiastical content, and they went too far. The Reformation in England originated in the government, or rather the unbridled whim of the monarch, not, as in Germany, among the people. Its birth-place was not the conscience of the people, as in Germany, but rather dynastic politics.¹⁴ This assessment is echoed by Oechlhauser when he remarks that the English Reformation was political in origin and that the Established Church is still political in motivation, whereas

¹³Elze, pp. 104-5

¹⁴Elze, p. 105

The German Reformation was a spiritual one, based on the demand for spiritual freedom.¹⁵ From a country where religion was largely determined by the Peace of Augsburg and where even at the time of writing it was an important factor in Bismarck's "Kulturkampf", these seem rather strange criticisms. It is easy, however, to understand why the German intellectuals were so interested in the Protestant versus Catholic question at a time when the recently achieved German unity must have been suffering considerable stress just because of this problem.

Elze suggests¹⁶ that it was because the Church and religion were so entangled with politics that they had practically lost their independent existence, their aim and their purpose. Hence Shakespeare, and many of his contemporaries, turned from dogmatic religion to humanist ideals. Relatively few people were interested in the Protestant-Catholic issue; the majority were indifferent.¹⁷ Otherwise repeated changes of religion would not have been possible. There was no popular movement behind the changes and so people became indifferent to ecclesiastical and religious life. The outer observances were compelled by law, but there was an inner aversion. Therefore the leading spirits of the age sought

¹⁵ "Die Würdigung Shakespeares in England und Deutschland," Jahrbuch, XX (1885), 65.

¹⁶ Elze, p.105

¹⁷ Here Elze cites Macaulay, "Burleigh and his Times," in Edinburgh Review (April, 1832), in his support.

consolation in another field. The Renaissance of literature and scholarship which flowered in England in the 16th century offered poets and writers a substitute, and humanism began to take the place of church religion. This process was especially marked in new literatures, particularly French and Italian. The scepticism of Montaigne, for example, had a considerable influence on English authors. Elze maintains that Macaulay was mistaken in not recognising humanism as the foundation of the Elizabethan dramatists. They spoke respectfully of the teachings of Christianity, but not as Catholics or Protestants. They took fragments of both and kept a middle path. Elze concludes that Shakespeare was nominally a Protestant, although he had a predilection for certain Catholic rites and beliefs,¹⁸ and, like the Romantics, found a picturesque element in Catholicism which made it more interesting poetically than Protestantism.¹⁹

It is already clear that the term "religion" must be understood in this context in its broadest sense. We find that it is by no means confined to orthodox Christianity, but extends to philosophical attitudes, to "Weltanschauung". In particular it is necessary to know something of what the 19th century Germans understood by "humanism"²⁰ and

¹⁸ Elze, pp. 105-113.

¹⁹ As many German Protestants do today.

²⁰ Humanismus.

"humanitarianism".²¹ "Humanism" can be defined as "a reflected man-centredness which proceeds from human consciousness and has as its object the establishment of human worth, excluding what is foreign to it either because it subordinates man to supernatural powers and truths or because it uses man for sub-human purposes".²² There was a renewed interest in Germany in antiquity at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries - the so-called Neo-humanism - in which the leading figures were Wilhelm von Humboldt, Lessing, Herder, Goethe and Schiller. The appearance of von Humboldt's name in this list is particularly significant in that he was very largely responsible for what was then an entirely new concept of the purpose and function of a university.²³ Hence the scholars considered here could hardly avoid being influenced by von Humboldt's ideas to a greater or lesser extent.

This Neo-humanism was the foundation and formative factor of "humanitarianism". For Kant humanitarianism is "the apprehension of good in society with others; on the one hand the general feeling of participation, on the other the ability to communicate most intimately and universally, the combination of which qualities constitutes the proper sociability of mankind, whereby we are differentiated from the

²¹ Humanität.

²² This definition has been taken from Heinrich Schmidt, Philosophisches Wörterbuch, 17th ed. (Stuttgart, 1965), which has also been used for the definitions of certain other technical terms.

²³ This concept is still accepted almost universally in Germany.

restrictions of the merely animal". For Herder humanitarianism is in itself the goal of human development, while Goethe says of it: "It gives a soul to enjoyment, a spirit to necessity, grace to power, and a heart to authority".²⁴

These ideas are a product of German Romanticism and it is surely postulating too much to suggest that we can find them all in Shakespeare. Generally speaking there seems to have been very little understanding of the religious atmosphere and problems of Shakespeare's time, an almost complete ignorance of the implications of the Elizabethan Settlement and of the niceties of theological thought in the 16th century England.

Apart from their concern with specific religious problems the German scholars of this period frequently allowed moral and religious considerations to intrude when they were discussing other questions. Thus Benno Tschischwitz, in discussing the language of Venus and Adonis,²⁵ remarks that Shakespeare's amorous language is fully justified by the situation and serves a moral purpose.²⁶ He complains that the Puritans failed to appreciate "Venus and Adonis" and argues that it is easy to

24. Schmidt.

²⁵ "Über die Stellung der epischen Dichtungen Shakespeares in der englischen Literatur," Jahrbuch, VIII (1873), 36-42.

²⁶ Tschischwitz, p. 39.

miss the morality at the core of the poem unless you are looking for it.²⁷

It seems that here Tschischwitz unconsciously reveals a particular prejudice among many of the German critics of his time. They were so convinced that Shakespeare was not only the greatest writer of all times but also perfect in every respect²⁸ that they could not imagine that his work was ever lacking in moral content.²⁹ They were quite sure that there was a moral point to everything, if only they could find it. There were others, notably Gustav Rümelin,³⁰ who tried to correct this tendency, but their views found very little support among contributors to the Jahrbuch. Tschischwitz himself tells us that in Venus and Adonis Shakespeare shows us a youth resisting sexual temptation, whereas in The Rape of Lucrece we see a woman who maintains her matrimonial fidelity and purity even after she has been raped. Adonis, Lucrece, Isabella, and Imogen all show the heroism of innocence and moral purity.³¹ This interpretation is highly contentious: they are an odd set of

27. Tschischwitz, p. 42.

28. This attitude probably owes much to Goethe's Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre (1795).

29. Tschischwitz himself takes this line in Shakespeares Staat und Königtum. Nachgewiesen an der Landaster-Tetralogie (Halle, 1866), and Shakespeares Hamlet vorzugsweise nach historischen Gesichtspunkten erläutert (Halle, 1867).

30. See Shakespeare-Studien (Stuttgart, 1866).

31. Tschischwitz, op. cit. (Above, note 25), p. 42.

characters to put together, and even if Tschischwitz has some justification for his argument it is still very much over-simplified.

A similar concern with religion is shown by H. A. Werner in his article "Über das Dunkel in der Hamlet-Tragödie".³² But Werner at least recognises the complexity of the problem. He sees the play as showing the empty world of form and appearance as against the fullness of Hamlet's spirituality and morality. The political and social differences between Hamlet and Claudius' court go back to a deeper problem of religion and belief: an enormous, in the circumstances insoluble, problem.³³

Werner recognises the danger of everyone trying to claim Shakespeare for his own party. "Those ill-humoured pessimists who see in Hamlet a weakling, someone sick and demoralised, always ascribe his condition to the school of Wittenberg. They have then an indictment of Protestantism, of which we may regret only that it stands in contradiction to the pure, moral and artistic thought of the poet, who tries always to reconcile rather than divide. Others would find a connection between the character and behaviour of Claudius and his entourage and Catholic orthodoxy, and thus they arrive at an equally un-Shakespearian indictment of

32. Jahrbuch, V (1870), 37-81.

33. Werner, pp. 44 ff.

popery".³⁴ Werner takes a safe course when he claims that it was neither in Shakespeare's nature, nor was it his aim, to reach such a conclusion. It would be very sad for both parties if he could not find better examples. It is a far greater achievement of Shakespeare that he nowhere takes sides but expresses a general religious attitude and, as in the character of Hamlet, shows himself as a priest of human ideas. The religion Shakespeare was born into was irrelevant, as it was in the case of Goethe and Schiller. He could find satisfaction only in a religion that comprehends all denominational differences. For a person who has arrived at the higher truth all lower forms of truth are a matter for regard and consideration. For him the only godlessness is fanaticism. It is an impiety to attempt to extract his faith from his works and to try to force one on him. The same is true of Schiller.³⁵

Here it seems certain that Werner too sees Shakespeare in the light of recent German experience. Once again Shakespeare is compared to Schiller and Goethe. Just as the rigid creeds of Catholicism and Protestantism were inadequate for the German poets, so it is argued, they were for Shakespeare. This argument could lead ultimately to the conclusion that what Shakespeare was really seeking was the new

³⁴. Werner, p. 79.

³⁵. Werner, pp. 79-80.

"liberalism" as it had developed in 19th century Germany, and this is rather suggested by Werner himself when he claims: "Only sophistry can find a moral necessity for Hamlet's downfall; if the poet had lived in our times Hamlet would have escaped the final intrigue of his uncle, and we should see him over the body of his antagonist, on the blamelessly won throne, promising a new era of justice and truth."³⁶

Here there may be noticed another common trait of 19th century German Shakespeare criticism. Time and time again these writers are distracted from the study of the plays to speculate about Shakespeare himself. There are close on fifty articles of biographical nature in the first fifty volumes of the Shakespeare-Jahrbuch, but if all those articles which touch at some point on Shakespeare the man were included very few indeed would be found which did not fall into this category. This again can be largely explained by the circumstances of the times. There was at that time what may be called the "fallacy of intention". When a critic arrived at a particular interpretation of a literary work he was liable to claim that this interpretation constituted the author's intention. In particular the great concern shown in Shakespeare's philosophy of life may derive from Goethe, who claimed that every word he wrote was a confession. Where it is quite impossible to draw any

³⁶. Werner, p. 81.

conclusions about the poet's conscious intention there is nevertheless a tendency to ascribe moral attitudes to "poetic intuition".³⁷ It is possible that this idea may be some kind of hang-over from German Romanticism.

These attitudes are sometimes responsible for very distorted interpretations of Shakespeare. Thus Karl Werder goes to extremes in his interpretation of Hamlet³⁸ - an interpretation, it must be added which has much positive value. Robert Pröls describes the weakness of Werder's view very clearly.³⁹ All criticism, he says, is ultimately subjective - even Werder's. There are two main prejudices in Werder. "The first is...a belief in the spotlessly ethical idealism and innocence of the tragic hero; the other, a certain theosophical view of heavenly justice, which must therefore condition the pathos of both Shakespeare and his hero."⁴⁰ This leads to a curious inconsistency in Werder's argument. He tells us that

37. Werner's Hamlet article falls into this category.

38. Vorlesungen über Shakespeares "Hamlet", gehalten an der Universität zu Berlin (Berlin, 1875)

39. "Werders Hamlet-Vorlesungen," Jahrbuch, XIV (1879), 115-155.

40. Pröls, p. X117

Behind the task laid upon him by the ghost he (Hamlet) sees that of someone higher, who wishes to see divine justice carried out in complete purity through him in this particular outrage; which is only possible if the guilt, and therefore the justification for the punishment, is made incontrovertibly clear in the eyes of the world. For tragic vengeance involves punishment, punishment involves justice and justice involves convincing the world. This last places Hamlet in an insoluble difficulty. Necessity drives him ever onward to carry out something beyond not only his own but all human power. His hesitation is never weakness but rather self-control.⁴¹

Now if this is so then it is a very curious kind of divine justice; for, as PrÜss points out, it never reveals itself but depends in the end on Horatio for its explanation.⁴² That this is no isolated example can be shown by turning for a moment to what Werder has to say about Macbeth.

¶To be forced to want what will destroy him and to know and feel at every step, at every act of his will, both before and after, that it will destroy him; to be able to escape from this path to hell - not by heavenly decree in the crude fatalistic sense, but rather because of an innate passion, because of his innermost self, because of a will and a desire that cannot be reached or penetrated by the divine, and immeasurably wretched because on account of this endless misery they need heaven to have mercy on them; that is Shakespeare's Macbeth. This enigma of human nature is the essence of the play.⁴³

This is verging on a psychological interpretation of Macbeth's character, which properly belongs to another chapter, but at the same time it also shows Werder fitting - we may feel forcing - Shakespeare into his own peculiar theological ideas.

41. PrÜss, pp. 119-120.

42. PrÜss, p. 155.

43. Vorlesungen über Shakespeares "Macbeth", gehalten an der Universität zu Berlin (Berlin, 1885) pp. 110-111.

The moral and religious significance of the Histories has already been discussed in the course of the chapter on "Political Interpretations of Shakespeare's Plays". Here it is necessary only to draw attention again to Tschischwitz's "Shakespeares Staat und Königtum", where he talks about the concept of kingship as a moral and religious idea. English scholars have long recognised the Elizabethan idea of kingship as essentially religious, and there is no doubt that Shakespeare himself shows quite clearly what was involved in being the Lord's anointed and what was meant by the Divine Right of Kings. It is interesting, however, to note how concerned the German critics were with this question. It should be remembered that the whole of Germany became very much involved in the problem of the relationship between Church and State during the "Kulturkampf". Although the problem in Shakespeare's time was fundamentally different it was sufficiently similar superficially to attract attention at this time. In both situations the Roman Catholic Church was regarded by the State as a threat to its own security; in both cases the State tolerated a non-Roman type of Catholicism, in the one case elements within Anglicanism, in the other case the Old Catholics; in both cases the priests and religious orders were persecuted. Bismarck and the National-Liberals were greatly antagonised by the promulgation of the doctrine of Papal Infallibility on the very day that France declared war on Prussia. In Elizabethan England the belief in the

Divine Right of Kings was opposed to the Pope's claim to be able to depose kings; a claim which, it was feared at the time, might alienate Elizabeth's subjects and cause them to ally themselves with Catholic Spain.

To what extent politics, religion and art were all entangled with each other is hinted at rather amusingly in a story told by Alois Brandl, sometime President of the Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft. In 1910 he was present at the baptism of the heir to the throne of Weimar. Kaiser Wilhelm II, who had invited himself to be a god-father, expressed three wishes concerning his god-son: first, that in the hour of need he would come to his aid with armed cavalry; second, that he would be a faithful son of the Protestant Church; third, that, growing up in the spirit of Weimar, he would be a patron to art and science.⁴⁴ There is surely something typically German about this. It is not really surprising that Brandl tells his anecdote with such pride.

⁴⁴. Zwischen Inn und Themse (Berlin, 1936), p. 264.

4. PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERPRETATIONS
of
CHARACTERS

4: Psychological Interpretations of characters.

A great deal of the criticism under consideration is concerned with Shakespeare's characters and their behaviour. This in itself is really nothing remarkable: a play consists of a number of characters saying certain words and performing certain actions upon the stage. It is natural, therefore, that critics should ask questions about these characters and discuss them as they would a real person. In its extreme form this type of criticism tends to regard Shakespeare's characters as living persons who have an existence quite independent of the plays.

The play which has always specially attracted criticism of this genre is Hamlet. Karl Werder's lectures on Hamlet¹ - like those on Macbeth² - are concerned almost entirely with the characters. Werder is especially concerned with the figure of Hamlet himself. For him Hamlet is not in any way a weak character, but rather the victim of circumstances. Goethe had suggested that all duty was sacred to Hamlet, and that this particular duty of vengeance was too difficult. The impossible is demanded of him; not the inherently impossible, but what is impossible for him. Werder goes further and suggests that Hamlet's

1. Vorlesungen über Shakespeares Hamlet, gehalten an der Universität zu Berlin (Berlin, 1875).

2. Vorlesungen über Shakespeares Macbeth, gehalten an der Universität zu Berlin (Berlin, 1895)

apparent weakness is really his strength: he can kill the king, but not at this precise moment. He is bound by conditions which no human being can overcome.³ Werder is dedicated to saving Hamlet's honour and to the ethical justification of his character.

Of almost equal interest is Robert Prölls' article on Werder's Hamlet lectures.⁴ Prölls prefers the more sober, factual and objective approach of Gervinus, Ulrici and Kreyszig, which he therefore finds more scholarly. He makes the point that all criticism is subjective - even Werder's. This shows itself in Werder's prejudices about Hamlet's character.⁵ Indeed, it is too often forgotten that anyone who attempts to probe into the psychology of another person is himself influenced to a greater or lesser degree by his own psychological make-up.

W. Oehlmann lays great stress on Hamlet's emotions and feelings.⁶ Some scholars are interested only in the fundamental ideas behind a play and ignore the emotional side altogether; others go to the opposite extreme and deny that fundamental ideas have any place in the drama. The task of the dramatist is to equip his characters with individual

³. See especially Werder, Hamlet, pp. 36-8

⁴. "Werders Hamlet-Vorlesungen," Jahrbuch, XIV (1879), 115-55

⁵. Prölls, pp. 116-7.

⁶. "Die Gemütsseite des Hamlet-Charakters," Jahrbuch, III (1868) 205-28.

emotions and passions.⁷

Oehlmann argues that Hamlet possesses inner truth and conscientiousness, a feeling for what is seemly and just.⁸ Why then does he not immediately avenge the murder of his father? Some critics have said that it is because of his intelligence, but Oehlmann rejects this view, maintaining that high intelligence does not lead to temporization. It is simply that in some characters suspiciousness prevents them from ever making a decision, and this trait is quite independent of intelligence.⁹ This suspiciousness is the second main ingredient in Hamlet's character. He wants to be just but fails to realize that sometimes this can only be achieved by partial justice. Thus he himself paralyses the realization of justice.¹⁰

Oehlmann admits that he himself found Hamlet's complete failure to plan very difficult to believe. But there are other traits in Hamlet's character that help to explain this: his tendency to secretiveness and his gift of dissimulation, together with his sense of honour. These are all combined with an astonishing understanding which allows him to

7. Oehlmann, pp. 205-7.

8. Oehlmann, p. 209.

9. Oehlmann, pp. 209-10. It can, however, be argued against Oehlmann that Hamlet's suspiciousness is simply the caution of the scholar; in which case it would be directly connected with his intelligence.

10. Oehlmann, p. 211.

see through everything and to judge everything correctly, except himself and his insuperable tendency to procrastinate."¹¹

Oehlmann sees his interpretation of Hamlet's character as confirmed by the characters of his companions. The court circle is completely indifferent to right and justice, to thoroughness and carefulness. Polonius is a time-serving hypocrite; Rosenkranz and Guildenstern are fickle, and Oeric is empty. The queen is debauched and sensual and stands closer to the murderer than any courtier. The king is the most unscrupulous character of all. It is little wonder, says Oehlmann, that Hamlet does not take to heart the fortunes of such people. Ophelia is seen as too weak to resist the general lack of principle and the general levity. She shows her weakness already in the scene with Laertes and Polonius, and after the loss of her beloved she becomes despondent; and she is completely broken by the death of her father. Even such characters as the gravediggers, with their disbelief in right and justice, and the hard-hearted priest, who did not really wish to bury the demented suicide in consecrated ground, are used to throw Hamlet's character into sharper relief.¹²

Hamlet's hesitation is contrasted with the actions of Laertes and

11. Oehlmann, pp. 213-4.

12. Oehlmann, pp. 214-6.

Fortinbras. Only Horatio is presented as a balanced character, and even he shows a tendency to avoid coming to a definite decision, so that he seems to resemble Hamlet. Thus Shakespeare shows, both in the practical construction of his drama and in his general observations of the human soul, in his analysis of Hamlet's actions and of those of his companions and opponents, that the hero fails not because of his great intelligence but rather in spite of it; he is hindered by the overgrowth of the destructive features of his emotions, his conscientiousness and cautiousness.¹³

The significant feature of this interpretation is its recourse to psychology: a matter of some interest at so early a date. Oehlmann attacks Tschischwitz for holding to the traditional idea that Hamlet had too much "judgment" and too little "blood".¹⁴ There is nothing surprising about Oehlmann's interest in Hamlet's character: what is interesting is his attempt to express it in psychological terms and his rejection of Tschischwitz's explanation in physical terms. This is rather unfair on

¹³. Oehlmann, pp. 216-7.

¹⁴. Oehlmann, p. 225. Tschischwitz's Shakespeares Hamlet vorzugsweise nach historischen Gesichtspunkten erläutert (Halle, 1868) appeared in the same year as Oehlmann's essay and broke new ground by showing the connection between Hamlet's philosophy and that of Giordano Bruno.

Tachischwitz, whose explanation seems more plausible, since Shakespeare himself cannot have thought in terms of modern psychology; but Oehlmann shows how Shakespeare's observations of human character are supported by the findings of pre-Freudian psychology.

But the most interesting characters dramatically are usually those who suffer from some kind of mental abnormality. Shakespeare's portrayals of mental illness are discussed at some length by C.C. Hense.¹⁵ It is hardly surprising that his chief concern is with the madness of Lear. It had already been pointed out several years earlier that Lear's madness, as depicted by Shakespeare, is remarkably accurate from the clinical standpoint.¹⁶ But as Hense points out, this accuracy does not necessarily by itself constitute art. He quotes Elze as saying that normally we do not want to see any kind of illness on the stage, but that Shakespeare alone has achieved the miracle of elevating mental illness to become a part of poetry, especially in King Lear, an overpowering and almost superhuman tragedy.¹⁷

Hense suggests that Shakespeare's propensity for depicting mental

15. "Die Darstellung der Seelenkrankheiten in Shakespeares Dramen," Jahrbuch, XIII (1878), 212-47.

16. Carl Stark, König Lear. Eine psychiatrische Shakespeare-Studie für das gebildete Publicum (Stuttgart, 1871).

17. Hense, pp. 212-3.

illness was due partly to the extreme passions of his characters. But in Shakespeare such illness always plays a subservient role: it serves the higher purpose of moral truth, and madness is the extreme expression of conscience. In Shakespeare's plays, unlike real life, madness is the result of guilt; it is consciousness of guilt which drives to mental breakdown such characters as Lear, Lady Macbeth, and Ophelia. In the old play King Leir Lear wins back his power, Cordelia lives; there is no madness and no tragedy.¹⁸

Shakespeare's Lear, on the other hand, goes out of his mind because of his extreme passion and temper, which darken the clarity of his thought. The thorn of conscience, kept sharp by the Fool, and the ingratitude of his daughters, together with other factors, serve to drive mad a man who is already mentally disorientated from the start. He does not accept this ingratitude with patience, as he does in the old play, but feels himself to be more sinned against than sinning, and this serves only to increase his madness. The significance of this madness is to show by contrast the beauty of an unbroken and innocent life of the spirit.¹⁹

17. Hense, pp. 212-3.

18. Hense, pp. 213-4.

19. Hense, pp. 214-5

According to Hense, a similar relationship of guilt, conscience and madness is to be found in the character of Lady Macbeth. It is Macbeth, irresolute, suffering from a guilty conscience, and seeing ghosts, whom one might expect to go mad; but the important fact is that he is always active, even though his actions are criminal. Lady Macbeth appears to be the really powerful character in the play. She pours scorn on her husband's visions and acts when he loses his head after the murder of Duncan: she is, in short, cold and calculating. Yet it is she that eventually takes to sleep-walking. This is the great revelation of a guilt-stricken conscience. In the derangement of her mind can be seen the judgment of that moral spirit which she has hitherto flouted. In Macbeth himself the punishment is fulfilled in the torment he suffers through sleeplessness and disturbing dreams. Lady Macbeth can control her conscience while awake, but when asleep she falls a victim to the Furies, to doubt and remorse. She is powerless against the moral spirit that rules over her and that manifests itself in her sleep-walking. She was her husband's accomplice in the murder of the king, his relations, his guest: hence she must share his fate. However she tries in her waking hours to fend off the pursuing Furies, the doubt and the remorse which threaten her solitude, in her sleep they rise up in her sick mind. She is also troubled by the murders of Banquo and of Macduff's family, although she herself had no hand in these. What

she dismisses in Macbeth as sheer fantasy becomes all the more vivid for her in her sleep-walking.²⁰

Shakespeare is sometimes criticised for making Lady Macbeth's madness develop suddenly, in contrast to that of Lear, but there are aesthetic and psychological reasons for this. We do not see Lady Macbeth between III,v and V,i. During this time she is alone, pondering on her past, forced to be alone, when she needs to be able to communicate with others. She is not unlike Richard III, who could control his fears by day but not his dreams by night. Her madness is thus the psychological and moral result of her solitude. She has sinned against Nature, against a woman's nature: she calls on the spirits to "unsex" her, and this unnatural behaviour drives her to madness. This alienation from the truth of nature leads to alienation from her husband, so that when he learns of her death Macbeth has no room for sorrow. The doctor is right when he says she needs a confessor more than a doctor.²¹

For Lear and for Lady Macbeth mental illness is a consequence of guilt, but it is also poetic justice. In Richard II and Hamlet the

²⁰.Hense, pp. 215-8.

²¹.Hense, pp. 218-21. He admits that Dr. Onimus, La psychologie dans les drames de Shakespeare (Paris, 1876), p. 8, thinks differently. Dr. Onimus maintains that Lady Macbeth's madness is in perfect accord with medical science. The difference in points of view here occurred at a time when the relationship between religion and psychology was not seen so clearly as it is today.

the guilty act of one character punishes the guilt of another, as in the Oresteia of Aeschylus.²²

Both Gustav Rümelin²³ and H.T. Rotscher²⁴ suggest that Lear's madness occupies a great deal of the play. Hense points out that in fact it begins only in III, iv and ends in IV, vii. Lear is no more mad at the beginning of the play than is Othello, and his mad utterances are fewer than his sane ones. More than this, even in his madness Lear speaks words of sense; he takes over the role of the Fool and judges the situation objectively as the latter has done. This forms an aesthetically pleasing contrast with the days of his sanity when he failed to recognise truth and fidelity - one thinks here of Kent and Cordelia - and was deceived by pretence and lying hypocrisy. Only when he becomes mad does he obtain a true insight into the nature of man and of genuine human feeling. In this respect Hense compares him to Oedipus.²⁵

In Lear madness is the result of guilt and the recognition of this

22. Hense, p. 221. It is pertinent here to point out that many of the early "Anglisten" were Classical scholars by training and that their methods owe much to contemporary approaches to Classical literature.

23. Shakespeare-Studien (Stuttgart, 1866), p. 94

24. Shakespeare in seinen höchsten Charaktergebilden (Bresden, 1864) p.110.

25. Hense, pp. 222-4.

by his conscience. In Ophelia's case the circumstances are apparently rather different. Yet, argues Hense, even with Ophelia one can discern judgment and condemnation in her madness, though not with the clarity that one finds them in Lear. Although she is not a fallen woman as L. Tieck²⁶ and Freiherr von Friesen²⁷ suggest, Ophelia is not entirely innocent. In mistaken obedience she allows herself to be drawn into an affair which is unworthy of her. The whole atmosphere of Hamlet is poisoned: secrecy, pretence, and hypocrisy prevail, not truth. There is mutual spying and characterless time-serving. Ophelia does not remain unaffected by this pernicious and tragic sickness. She becomes the instrument whereby the king and Polonius spy on Hamlet, who himself refers to her two-facedness. When she becomes mad and distributes flowers she chooses rue for herself, thus revealing her troubled conscience. She suffers a hopeless love, loses her father, whom she had believed in implicitly, and feels herself alone and forsaken. This causes her madness, but because she is, like Lear, more sinned against than sinning, she too becomes a judge in her madness. Like Lear, she appears decked with flowers and weeds. Medical experts tell

²⁶. Dramaturgische Blätter, II (Breslau and Leipzig, 1826), p. 36

²⁷. Briefe über Shakespeares Hamlet (Leipzig, 1869), p. 298 ff.

us that such people do wear flowers, make gifts, and sing, but the important point is that both Lear and Ophelia speak words of warning and judgment in their madness.²⁸

Hense explains how Lear's madness is brought about by the collapse of his family life and of the life of the state. He then goes on to suggest that, as in real life, so in the play madness is connected with extreme physical strain. The strenuous journey in a frightful storm is what causes his final breakdown. Moreover the disorder of the elements is seen as part of the ingratitude of the moral world. Man having rejected moral standards, it is only to be expected that the natural order will collapse. Thus Lear speaks not of the ingratitude of his daughters in particular, but of the ingratitude of the world in general.²⁹

The parallel between Lear and Titus Andronicus is the next point to occupy Hense's attention. Whereas Lear has a guilty conscience about his behaviour towards Cordelia, Titus feels no pangs, although his treatment of Mucius and Tamora is far worse. Titus' reaction to suffering is to seek revenge of the most cruel nature. His madness is generally quite purposeless, and therefore genuine.³⁰ This madness is the only mitigating factor in his awful deeds. Herein lies the differ-

²⁸. Hense, pp. 227-9.

²⁹. Hense, pp. 231-3.

³⁰. Gervinus and Delius maintained that Titus' madness was not genuine but feigned.

ence between Titus and Lear. In Titus Andronicus the apprentice Shakespeare, under the influence of such plays as Thomas Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy,³¹ makes Titus' madness the source and instrument of his brutal revenge; but the master, with his greater knowledge and experience of human nature, makes Lear's madness a process of purification of the human soul. Lear's self-love and egoism are burnt up in his madness and he learns humility. It is his daughters' own wickedness that destroys them. Shakespeare has broken away from the old "revenge tragedy" towards a milder and truer conception of tragedy. Hamlet resembles Lear in that he wishes to perform dreadful deeds, but he does not, and the king suffers a more just punishment. In considering Lear's madness it is important to remember that Lear is a suffering character, whereas Titus is active; in Lear madness is a condition, in Titus a perpetrator of grisly deeds.³²

Hense also considers the cases of feigned madness in Shakespeare, beginning with Edgar in King Lear. Edgar's feigned madness is necessitated by the situation in which he finds himself. Shakespeare's treatment is interesting in that he follows the conventional ideas of madness of his time: Edgar pretends that his madness is caused by an evil

³¹.Hense actually refers to it as "The Spanish Comedy".

³².Hense, pp. 233-7.

spirit and can only be cured by exorcism. In Lear's case Shakespeare shows a knowledge and understanding of man which go far beyond the ideas of his time. The cure of Lear's madness is described by Shakespeare with poetic artistry, in a way that seldom happens in real life. This poetry is connected with the name of Cordelia. In this world of deceit and lies she is truth: in this world empty of love and full of hate she is love. Hense compares her in this to Antigone. Through this love Lear's spirit at last finds peace.³³

Hamlet's feigned madness is of quite a different nature. This is not assumed for reasons of necessity; it is rather the sign and consequence of a sick mind. In Edgar there is no tendency to suicide, nor is he ^{much} ever given to thought: he is physically and morally sound. He is the saviour of his father, and the wickedness of Oswald and Edmund is defeated. Hamlet, called upon to avenge his father's murder and to set the world to rights, falls a victim to mental sickness: he becomes obsessed with thoughts of suicide, and complains that this is forbidden by God. Only fear holds him back. Unlike Edgar he is not a saviour, but rather entangles Ophelia in his own destiny. However, what he does have in common with Edgar is that in his pretended madness he makes moral judgments.³⁴

33. Hense, pp. 237-40.

34. Hense, pp. 240-1.

Hamlet's feigned madness springs from his melancholy. This melancholy is associated with Shakespeare himself. There are plenty of melancholic characters in Shakespeare's plays, for example Aegeon in The Comedy of Errors, Orsino in Twelfth Night, the Merchant of Venice, Posthumus in Cymbeline, Pericles, Don Juan in Much Ado About Nothing, Richard II, and Jacques in As You Like It.³⁵ Jacques' melancholy is the consequence of a wild life. The traits inherent in a morbid melancholy are typically depicted in the character of Jacques. The most prominent of these traits is a pessimistic "Weltanschauung": an isolated instance of a deficient life is exaggerated and made to appear as general; in his bitterness such a person cannot see the graceful, the beautiful and the good in life, but only the repulsive, the ugly and the morally objectionable. Associated with a pessimistic point of view is scorn: a theatrical tendency is a characteristic adjunct. All this is found to an even greater extent in Hamlet. He pretends to be mad and, like the Fool in King Lear, assumes the role of judge. Just as Edgar, in his feigned madness chastises moral transgressions, so in Hamlet his melancholy and

³⁵. This reference to the Comedies is unusual. The Tragedies and the Histories naturally invite a psychological approach, but on the whole the characters in the Comedies did not attract the attentions of the German critics.

and pretended insanity are the dark cloud through which burst the flashes of his condemning wit.³⁶

Rümelin complains that Edgar utters a lot of useless nonsense. This criticism cannot be made of Hamlet. Edgar has to behave as he does in order to remain unrecognised. But Shakespeare sees to it that these dissonances dissolve when we consider Edgar's soliloquies and asides. The same art is shown in the case of Hamlet. All is made subservient to the purpose of his supposed madness - to enable him to act as judge.³⁷

Shakespeare depicts true madness only in the Tragedies, and contrasts it with feigned madness only in Hamlet and King Lear. But pretended or supposed madness is often a feature of the Comedies. In the case of Antipholus in The Comedy of Errors fun is made of the attempt to cure him by exorcism; and in Twelfth Night the same point is carried still further with Malvolio.³⁸

Hense concluded⁵ by giving examples to show how Classical Greek drama saw madness as something supernatural. But, he argues, it was left to Shakespeare to suggest the true nature of mental illness.³⁹

³⁶.Hense, pp. 241-3.

³⁷.Hense, pp. 243-5.

³⁸.Hense, pp. 245-7.

³⁹.Hense, p. 247.

H. Freiherr von Friesen contributed an interesting article on Macbeth.⁴⁰ Like so many other articles its intrinsic value today is slight, but it sheds considerable light on the way critics of this time viewed literature in general and Shakespeare in particular.

Von Friesen begins by remarking on the authentic local atmosphere of the play, which he finds is suggestive of the northern part of the British Isles rather than the south. He then discusses Shakespeare's treatment of Holinshed, which he describes as very free. He is concerned not so much with alterations of detail as with Shakespeare's depictions of the characters of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Macbeth is shown quite differently from the cruel figure of Holinshed, and Lady Macbeth, although she has a great part in the crime by reason of her encouragement of it, is also substantially different from her historical original. The question which this article seeks to answer is whether this play holds "a mirror up to Nature", particularly as regards the character of Lady Macbeth.⁴¹

It may be thought, he continues, that the play has a very strange beginning. But there was a strong belief in witchcraft in Jacobean times, and people feared the influences of demonic agencies in human

40. "Über Shakespeares Macbeth," Jahrbuch, IV (1869), 198-245

41. Von Friesen, pp. 198-200.

affairs.⁴² Therefore, he claims, the play does mirror Nature. It demonstrates the primeval struggle in man's soul between the demonic and divine elements, the conflict between "Weltbewusstsein" and "Gottesbewusstsein".⁴³ Macbeth is not alone in depicting the unremitting conflict between temporal and eternal, "Weltbewusstsein" and "Gottesbewusstsein", as can be seen by considering the ancient classical tragedies; but Shakespeare ^{takes} ~~drags~~ us into the actual world of the demonic.⁴⁴

The supernatural and demonic element is established at the start of Macbeth by the witches' greeting and the raging storm, and these,

42. Von Friesen remarks that such superstitions still existed at the time he was writing.

43. Von Friesen defines these terms as follows: "By 'Weltbewusstsein' I mean the relationship that naturally exists between every spiritual organic life down to its lowest form and the entire organic creation, a relationship that operates the more directly and powerfully the deeper the spiritual life stands, but which must give way to 'Gottesbewusstsein', which forces its way in from above, so to speak, with the growth and cultivation of the spiritual life." (p.202)

44. Von Friesen, pp. 200-3. He recalls that Schlegel considered that in this respect nothing greater had been written since The Eumenides of Aeschylus; von Friesen would like to add to this most of Sophocles.

together with the speed of the action, are reminiscent of The Eumenides. The violence of nature is matched by the speed and violence of the action. The months-long darkening of the sun and the unnatural rage of Duncan's horse are taken from the Chronicle, where, however, they are connected with Duffe's murder and not that of Duncan. The image of the falcon being overcome by a common owl is strongly reminiscent of Kriemhilde's dream in the Nibelung legend.⁴⁵ All are infected by the infernal magic, for after Duncan's murder everyone forgets that Malcolm is the legitimate heir to the throne.⁴⁶

Shakespeare does not depict the errors, passions and delusions of individuals but rather those of mankind in general at a certain point in time. The whole of mankind is sometimes seized by an error or weakness which at other times under different circumstances would be quite unthinkable; but at this time it is not ^{only} possible but inevitable. Von Friesen instances the naturalism in Germany which developed into superstitious necromancy and spiritualism at the end of the 18th century. He goes on to say: "We have in our own literary history a chapter where even the most gifted spirits used this emotional tendency for poetic

⁴⁵. This reference to the Nibelungs suggest that von Friesen sees Macbeth almost as a Teutonic legend instead of in purely Shakespearean terms. The references to Classical tragedy also indicate that he is trying to relate Shakespeare to a much wider tradition.

⁴⁶. Von Friesen, pp. 203-4.

creations. And I believe that it is precisely here that we may the more justly recall this temporary confusion, because it contributes to the evidence of the ineradicable passion in human nature to get in touch with the demonic element, in other words with the 'Weltgeist'.⁴⁷

The climax of magic ecstasy is reached with the murder of Duncan and the following scenes of Act II, and a decline sets in at the beginning of Act III. What follows is the consequence not of demonic influence but of human passion. The Witches, who before spoke unbidden, now have almost to be coerced. There is a change of atmosphere in the scenes set in England, while the scene between Lennox and another Lord (III, vi) shows a return of that composure which earlier might have prevented Macbeth's usurpation. This is not a conscious idea on Shakespeare's part but is implicit in his initial conception of the play.⁴⁸

Only once again in the play does the demonic idea return: in the sleep-walking scene. One might well believe that Shakespeare wrote the whole play with this scene specially in mind, because from the moment that Duncan is murdered in his sleep, sleep becomes a recurrent theme, perhaps as though it were a condition in which the "Weltbewusstsein" was most effective and best able to offer resistance to the "Gottesbe-

⁴⁷. Von Friesen, p. 206.

⁴⁸. Von Friesen, pp 206-6

wusstsein".⁴⁹

Too little attention is paid to the way Shakespeare differentiates between the inherent traits of his characters and what is conditioned by environment and circumstance. A clear distinction is drawn by Aristotle which von Friesen admits is not wholly applicable here. Nevertheless he claims to differentiate between what is original and peculiar (Charakter) and the direction that is given to this (Gesinnung). In tragic characters there is always a conflict between these two elements.⁵⁰

It is important to avoid confusion between these in the consideration of the characters of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. They embody extreme spiritual contrasts. It can be justly maintained that Macbeth is only brave under certain conditions, that fundamentally he is a coward. Certainly he is lacking in political courage, or else he has nothing noble in him and is motivated only by criminal ambition and repulsive egotism. One may reproach Lady Macbeth with cruel hardness of heart and terrible composure in crime; but it must be admitted that all these are not so much qualities of her inner being, but rather the actions of a character which was originally noble but which has been

⁴⁹. Von Friesen, p. 206.

⁵⁰. Von Friesen, p. 207.

changed into its opposite as the result of a fatal pressure.⁵¹

Von Friesen speaks of Macbeth's sensitivity to Nature, especially changes, and quotes examples of Nature imagery from Macbeth's speeches to support his argument. He maintains that Macbeth's words before he has reached the decision to murder Duncan point to a very strong consciousness of God. He agrees with Ulrici that the language of the English dramatists is a dialogue throughout, and that even the soliloquies are a kind of conversation between the speaker and his relationships with the outside world, his situation and circumstances, his plans and intentions. Thus Macbeth's soliloquy in Act II shows the two sides of his soul at war with each other, his "Charakter" and his "Gesinnung". Hence it is quite clear why the Witches' greeting and the partial fulfilment of their prophecy have such an effect on him whereas Banquo is not affected in the same way. The Witches' power over Macbeth is not an absolutely fatalistic one; he is not entirely deprived of free-will. Banquo is an observer of Nature rather than involved in it like Macbeth. This detachment, which causes him to be caught in the wheel of destiny, helps, by the contrast it offers, to explain Macbeth's downfall.⁵²

⁵¹. Von Friesen, pp. 207-8.

⁵². Von Friesen, pp. 208-11.

Admittedly Macbeth has an ambitious nature; but enchantment is necessary to drive him to crime. Prior to the action of the play Macbeth is a courageous character; his lack of decision in the play is not due to cowardice but to a magic influence. Had he been able to show his former courage in resisting the Witches, the tragedy would never have occurred. His determination to fulfil the Witches' prophecy is soon overthrown. This determination was formed by Macbeth alone: Lady Macbeth first learns of it by letter. His will fluctuates, and his vision of the dagger is the result of emotional conflict and of demonic influence. But real fear only enters at the beginning of Act III, when he reveals his broken spirit and his insecurity. The cause of this is not inherent cowardice of exclusive egotism but rather the constant consciousness of the curse of damnation, a consciousness that, immediately after the murder, is bound to wrench his spirit from its normal course.⁵³

The confusion of Macbeth's stricken conscience causes him to try the wrong remedies. He claims to be glad at the news of Banquo's death, but in thinking of him he lays himself open to the vision of Banquo's ghost. Like the second appearance of the ghost in Hamlet this is a vision visible to one person only. In each case the audience is intended to

⁵³. Von Friesen, pp. 211-3. This section of the arg^ument is illustrated by references to the text.

share the tragic character's inmost experiences. We are supposed to feel that Macbeth's state of mind is responsible for his actions and utterances, that his "Charakter" has been overpowered by his "Gesinnung". He exhibits a disturbed balance rather than an innate tendency to the demonic. Thus the Witches are not merely a poetic aid but are necessary to the overthrow of Macbeth. Indeed Hecate complains that he is not yet completely won over to Hell.⁵⁴ The climax seems to be reached in IV, 1. As soon as the Witches disappear Macbeth speaks of a whole range of crimes he will commit, all of them quite without point, and Shakespeare concentrates on the senselessness of these atrocities rather than on their cruelty. At the same time he stresses the sufferings of the innocent.⁵⁵

Macbeth's thought becomes progressively more inhuman and his mode of expression trivial and crude. Yet signs of the struggle between the godly and the demonic can be found quite late in the play. It is when he learns of his wife's death that it becomes fully apparent how low he has sunk. Although earlier he had tried to spare her his further atrocities all his love for her is now quite dead.⁵⁶

Von Friesen then turns his attention to Lady Macbeth. The usual

⁵⁴. Von Friesen does not question the authenticity of this scene.

⁵⁵. Von Friesen, pp. 214-7.

⁵⁶. Von Friesen, pp. 217-8.

view of her, he claims, is that she is not human at all. It is maintained that Shakespeare's picture of her cannot arouse any sympathy, although the performance of an actress may.⁵⁷

This position is untenable, argues von Friesen. Shakespeare's original must be capable of arousing sympathy. If it were possible to regard Lady Macbeth as a "nordic Fury" or an "arch-witch", or if "heroic ferocity" could be ascribed to her, and she could be compared to Fredegunde or Brunhilde, then the threads would be lacking that bind the human imagination to this picture in admiration and sympathy, for Shakespeare would have created something violently opposed to his unceasing effort to hold a mirror up to Nature.⁵⁸

The anti-romantic critics, who included Gervinus, Kreyssig, Goethe, Simrock and Hiecke, attacked those who found anything redeeming in Lady Macbeth, possibly because they were influenced by Schiller's arrangement of the play. Von Friesen thinks that both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth are young, and that Lady Macbeth could hardly influence her husband as she does unless she had a softer side to her character.⁵⁹

⁵⁷. Here von Friesen quotes at some length from a description of Madame Nouseul's rendering of the role on 3rd October, 1778, in Berlin.

⁵⁸. Von Friesen, pp. 219-21.

⁵⁹. Von Friesen, pp. 221-5.

The historical Lady Macbeth was the granddaughter of Kenneth IV, who was killed fighting Malcolm II, Duncan's father, in 1003. She therefore acted largely out of vengeance. But Shakespeare is silent about this: he wants to attach a different significance to Lady Macbeth. She is originally a noble character, but she gives way to passion and - like Macbeth - the external influence of the Witches' prophecy. This, von Friesen maintains, is the true significance of her first appearance. Bodenstedt is right in arguing that the decision to murder Duncan comes from Macbeth and not his wife, who is moved by his letter in the same way as he is by the Witches.⁶⁰

Lady Macbeth is completely overwhelmed by the announcement of Duncan's arrival. If she had taken the decision to murder in cold blood there would have been no need to call on the spirits to aid her; this in itself is a sign of demonic influence. The way in which she addresses her husband in the scene where she welcomes Duncan is to be seen as the result of that versatility and tractability which are general qualities in women.⁶¹ Her greeting of Duncan is unnaturally warm: the historical evidence suggests that visits from kings ^{were} ~~are~~ expensive and

⁶⁰. Von Friesen, p. 226.

⁶¹. Von Friesen makes a number of interesting and amusing comments about the general nature of women, most of them without any scientific foundation.

were regarded as a burden rather than a privilege. This behaviour is the result of her nervous state of mind.⁶²

The crucial scene which follows is usually regarded as showing the demonic power which has possessed Lady Macbeth and her premeditated wickedness. This is nothing else than that original female, or perhaps one should say womanish, tenacity with which a woman, far more than a man, insists on the execution of a scheme which she regards as already settled; the delusion of the female reason whereby, once something has been assumed, every doubt, every objection, every contradiction is passionately rejected, and out of which not infrequently, if only the intention is a noble one, a more than manly heroism springs. Lady Macbeth is ~~de~~ determined to fulfil her oath that she says she would even sacrifice her own child, but there is no indication that she is in fact capable of this. There are no grounds in her words for supposing that she is more to blame than her husband. She appeals to his love for her, and this is not surprising so long as we do not doubt that she values his love because she herself has the deepest love for him. She appeals also to his courage: he must not be a coward. Von Friesen looks in vain for any motive other than that she does not wish to see the man of her affections in a light that would appear to her, blinded by her criminal tendencies, as a matter for reproach. There is no reason in this speech

⁶². Von Friesen, pp. 228-30.

to suppose that she is fundamentally wicked, but on the stage it is often delivered as though she were so.⁶³

The details of the plan are an expression of female carelessness in the heat of passion. Macbeth only agrees to the plan because he is already so deeply committed that very little is needed to persuade him completely. There is mutual understanding in the hastily conceived plan. Indeed it is so hasty that it is pointless and thoughtless, since Malcolm, now Prince of Cumberland, stands between Macbeth and the throne. Schiller misunderstood the situation and in his version of the play inserted a reference to the prior claims of Malcolm and Donalbain. Shakespeare, however, intends to show Macbeth and his wife as so bewitched and impassioned that they are not conscious of this obstacle.⁶⁴

It is significant that Lady Macbeth makes the preparations for Duncan's murder while Banquo is still awake and that the deed is carried out at the signal of a bell just before the arrival of Macduff. These are not the actions of a person of perception and composure. The hasty action of the plot shows that Lady Macbeth has a woman's inability to appreciate danger and a woman's determination to carry out her resolution.⁶⁵

⁶³. Von Friesen, pp. 230-1.

⁶⁴. Von Friesen, pp. 232-3.

⁶⁵
~~64~~. Von Friesen, pp. 233-4.

The fact that Lady Macbeth could not murder Duncan with her own hand because in his sleep he resembled her father is evidence that she does not have the strength of will that she claims. She is seized by anxiety and is quite disconcerted when Macbeth appears at the top of the stairs. If she were the Fury that many believe she would have hastened to him to urge him to action instead of uttering the words of fear that she does. Some critics think that she shows cold-blooded composure after the murder, but the broken exchanges between her and her husband prove the contrary. Compared with Macbeth her composure is forced. She forces herself because her feminine instinct makes her do so in the presence of her husband. But she is not very successful: it is some time before she notices the daggers in Macbeth's hands. This shows lack of observation, not a cold cruelty, and is in full accordance with Shakespeare's plan to show a potentially noble creature sink into the depth of wickedness.⁶⁶

Lady Macbeth's weak response to the news of Duncan's murder is further evidence of her lack of composure. From this point on she fades into the background. Some critics, including Gerwinus, who see her as ambitious and cruel, come nearer to the Romantics at this point, but few see that her silence is more eloquent of her disturbed spirit than

⁶⁶. Von Friesen, pp. 234-6.

any words could be. Both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth suffer a guilty conscience in silence; they are unable to communicate with each other. Lady Macbeth is hardly able to greet her husband's guests at the banquet and gives a most unlikel^y explanation of his strange behaviour. When she tries to calm him she mentions the dagger, a thoughtless remark, since it is a source of dreadful memory to them both.⁶⁷

She does not wish to be queen merely out of ambition. If this were so Shakespeare would have made it much clearer, as he does with such characters as Goneril, Regan and Margaret of Anjou, particularly as there is plenty of justification for this view in Holinshed. Her silence is the result of her grief at the unhappy condition of Macbeth - indeed some have accused the Romantics of making of her a martyr to an excessive love of her husband. Yet it does not require very much knowledge of the world and human life to realise that women of a passionate sensitivity in their love for their husbands abandon themselves completely and the slightest wish of the husband becomes a law, so that in their almost instinctive enthusiasm they then, in favourable circumstances, perform the highest and noblest acts, but, under fatal influences, they can plunge into the deepest depravity. It is natural that in such conditions the sense the two individuals have of living together is of paramount importance for the maintenance of the wife's

⁶⁷. Von Friesen, pp. 236-7

mental stability. Lady Macbeth is able to keep going so long as she has the hope that she is of value and importance to Macbeth, the object of her passion. But he moves ever further away from her: his secrecy about the proposed murder of Banquo is no act of kindness but a symptom of neglect. Lady Macbeth loses her self-possession as she loses unity with her husband. It is interesting that she starts to walk in her sleep when the king goes to the wars.⁶⁸

Von Friesen maintains that the sleep-walking scene is the key to the understanding of Lady Macbeth. There is nothing in her character that is untrue to life, and hence she arouses sympathy. "Sleep" is a significant image in the play: Shakespeare shows how important sleep is for ~~the mental health~~ and how passionate delusion is consistent with somnambulism. Lady Macbeth's actions are the consequences of an unusually sensitive spiritual constitution ^{suffering} ~~suggesting~~ from a highly-strung imagination and a passionate love, rather than of someone who is naturally inclined to evil ^{by} temperament. In the sleep-walking scene she lives through the past of which she is afraid, but which she could conceal so long as she could believe in a spiritual companionship with her husband.⁶⁹

⁶⁸. Von Friesen, pp. 237-9.

⁶⁹. Von Friesen, pp. 239-40.

Von Friesen concludes that it is therefore the duty of the actress who plays Lady Macbeth to minimise the horror she arouses. She must not appear as a nordic Fury or a monster, nor must she seem to be a paragon of virtue or a martyr to excessive love of her husband. She should be shown as a woman, capable of the highest achievements, but infected by magic and blindness of passion, which cause moral depravity, who thus, despite the horror of her crime, arouses the inmost sympathy of the audience.⁷⁰

The psychology of Freiherr von Friesen's article may seem primitive by modern standards, particularly as regards its constant preoccupation with demonic influences and with magic. But it is important to remember that not only was Shakespeare writing at a time when such agencies were regarded as very real but von Friesen himself lived in an age that was still greatly under the influence of Goethe's Faust and was permeated by the Romantic magic of the operas of Weber and Marschner and the great nordic myths of Wagner. With the advent of Freud much of Macbeth could be interpreted in quite different terms, and von Friesen's essay is very much the product of his time and the country in which he lived. Yet it is precisely because it is so that it lacks validity today, not because it is in any way deficient in thoroughness or sensitivity of appreciation.

⁷⁰. Von. Friesen, p. 241.

5: CONTRASTS DRAWN BETWEEN ENGLAND
AND GERMANY.

5: Contrasts drawn between England and Germany.

One justification for studying the criticism which one country devotes to an author belonging to another is that it sometimes suggests new methods of approach. It is certainly true that the work of Schlegel and Lessing caused English critics in the 19th century to view Shakespeare in a new light. In one sense, then, it is obvious that a study of the Shakespeare-Jahrbuch will reveal contrasts between England and Germany. The most marked of these have already been discussed in some detail. But these contrasts are those of approach; they are implied rather than openly stated. We must now turn our attention to something quite different: the contrasts which some critics have explicitly drawn between England and Germany.

The Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft felt at the beginning that it had to justify its own existence. It was considered unpatriotic to have a society devoted solely to the study of a foreign author, and it is not hard to understand why. The German language had only comparatively recently become respectable. Frederick the Great had spoken French, maintaining that German was too unrefined for use at Court. It was due largely to the efforts of such writers as Lessing, Schiller and Goethe that German had at last been accepted as a language worthy of Germany. Perhaps even more important, Germany now had the foundations of a great literature, and in Goethe, who had died barely thirty years

before the foundation of the Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft, it had achieved one of the greatest writers of all times. The foundation of the society, therefore, must have appeared rather as a stab in the back for German culture.

The argument for the defence was rather what one might have expected: Shakespeare himself was really a German, at any rate in spirit if not technically. The extreme expression of this idea is, strictly speaking outside the scope of this survey, but it comes as a climax to German nationalism in the period under consideration. In 1915 Gerhart Hauptmann went so far as to suggest that Shakespeare was more German than English, and that had he been living at that time he would have supported Germany in her fight against English imperialism.¹ In fairness to Hauptmann it must be pointed out that this was not his usual tenor of approach, and that until well after 1918 contributors to the Jahrbuch were most bitter in their attitude towards England.

But the philosophy behind this claim was no new one. The founder of the Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft, Wilhelm Oechelhäuser, in his article, "Die Würdigung Shakespeares in England und Deutschland", had claimed that the Germans were more true to the ideas of Shakespeare than his compatriots. The Germans had taken possession of Shakespeare

¹."Deutschland und Shakespeare. Geleitwort," Jahrbuch, LI (1915) vii-xii.

and he had become a German national, an adopted son of the German soul.² The same article contains a vituperative attack on the English "Establishment": Parliament and the Church of England are particular targets for Oechelhüser, who accuses them of bigotry and hypocrisy.³ Germany, he maintains, is quite different. An English Weimar would be quite inconceivable.⁴

He argues that, although till recently there had been less political freedom in Germany than there was in England, Germany had far greater spiritual freedom. The Germans had freed themselves by education and scholarship. Their universities were the bulwarks of spiritual freedom, whereas Cambridge and Oxford were still hotbeds of political and religious superstition.⁵ When political freedom came to Germany it was ready for it, and in education and humanity it was now ahead of England. Similarly, in Germany there existed a true Christianity as against the

2. Jahrbuch, XX (1885), 67.

3. Oechelhüser, pp. 58-62.

4. Oechelhüser, p. 64.

5. Oechelhüser, p. 64. This argument is a gross exaggeration of the true position; but it is true that von Humboldt's reforms had given the German universities a new lease of life and that Oxford and Cambridge were still very conservative.

formal dogmatism of the English.⁶

Oechelhüser then turns his attention to the German theatre and German criticism. He claims that the German theatre was much livelier than its English counterpart.⁷ This seems to be another of Oechelhüser's over-simplifications. It is true that there were more performances of Shakespeare's plays in Germany than in England, but this is largely because there were then, as there are today, more major theatres in Germany; Germany was a union of what had formerly been a large number of separate states, each with its own Court Theatre. So far as originality of production is concerned there seems to be very little remarkable apart from the work of the Saxe-Meiningen players, until the advent of Max Reinhardt in Berlin at the beginning of this century. He speaks also of the advantages of the modern German translations. This is a very odd argument: while it must be admitted that the Germans have often been extremely fortunate in their translations of Shakespeare - that of Schlegel is something of a literary masterpiece in its own right - it surely cannot be maintained that these are superior to the original. Oechelhüser argues that these translations brought

⁶ Oechelhüser, p. 65. The Oxford Movement was hardly likely to attract the approbation of a German Protestant, and indeed Oechelhüser completely ignores it.

⁷ Oechelhüser, p. 65.

Shakespeare to a larger potential audience than he had in England,⁸ but he does not adduce any evidence to support this.

When he deals with the contribution made by the German critics Oechelhäuser is on much safer ground. He points out that such critics as Coleridge and A. Ramsay⁹ had acknowledged their indebtedness to the work of Lessing¹⁰ and Schlegel.¹¹ These had been the first to show a true understanding of Shakespeare's regularity and beauty, whereas the authorities of the previous century, such people as Steevens, Malone and Johnson, had adopted Voltaire's standpoint and criticised Shakespeare for his breaches of taste and sound understanding in those matters where in fact his achievement is at its highest.¹²

⁸. Oechelhäuser, p. 66.

⁹. Arthur Ramsay was the author of an article on "Shakespeare in Germany", which appeared over the initials A.R. in Charles Knight's The Pictorial Edition of the Works of Shakespeare, Vol. 7. (London 1842), 403-24.

¹⁰. G. E. Lessing's most important criticism is contained in his Hamburgische Dramaturgie (1767-8).

¹¹. There is a marked parallel between the criticism of Coleridge and A.W. Schlegel's Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur (1809-1811), but it is impossible to say with certainty exactly how much each owes to the other.

¹². Oechelhäuser, p. 66. This led to the opposite extreme, especially in Germany, and it became unfashionable to suggest that Shakespeare was ever anything but perfect.

Only a few years ^{earlier} ~~later~~ Gervinus had made very similar claims. He too claimed that Shakespeare had become a naturalized subject,¹³ but admitted that he had been a stranger for two centuries.¹⁴

A similar idea is found in Karl Elze's "Shakespeare's Geltung für die Gegenwart".¹⁵ He maintains that Shakespeare is more suited to the German stage of his time than Classical or Medieval drama, since he is more easily understood.¹⁶ Elze argues that he and his contemporaries were living in the same cultural era as Shakespeare, and he goes on to show in detail how Shakespeare's England is like the Germany of his own time.¹⁷

After claiming that Shakespeare is superior to the French drama Elze explains why his plays were seldom performed in England. There was, he argues, a Puritan element in England that was opposed to the theatre on principle. The theatre was visited only by the lower strata of society, the opera being an exception to this rule, and such people preferred sensation and low comedy. Hence dramatists tended to write for the salon rather than the stage, and their works were intended for

13. G.G. Gervinus, Händel und Shakespeare (Leipzig, 1868), p.33.

14. Gervinus, p. 332.

15. Jahrbuch, II (1867), 96-123.

16. Elze, pp. 102-4.

17. Elze, pp. 104-6.

reading rather than acting. Elze also points out that the plays of Goethe and Schiller were seldom performed on the German stage.¹⁸

Shakespeare has become the property of the German people, Elze maintains, through his influence on German writers. Even Goethe and Schiller would not have been what they were without Shakespeare, and this influence will go on asserting itself in German literature in the future. Hence it is important that German dramatists, poets and scholars should study Shakespeare as their model. In a final peroration Elze proclaims: "Others have recognised or at least suspected that Shakespeare was a genius, but the world has the Germans to thank for his recognition as an artist. Our scholarship has discovered the rules of his art."¹⁹

Alois Brandl describes an interesting conversation he had with Kaiser Wilhelm II in 1910.²⁰ The occasion of this meeting is described elsewhere in this survey.²¹ The Kaiser went on to discuss with Brandl Shakespeare's Histories and to express his regret that no German dramatist had ever written thus about German history. Brandl suggested that

18. Elze, pp. 111-4.

19. Elze, p. 121.

20. Zwischen Inn und Thesse (Berlin, 1936), pp. 263-5.

21. See p. 65 above.

Wildenbruch had at least made a start, but the Kaiser brushed this aside with the remark that Wildenbruch had never depicted a woman who was true to life. His parting words to Brandl were that he should use Shakespeare's spirit and humour to influence the students according to his (the Kaiser's) intentions.²² The clear implication of all this is that, although there might be differences between Shakespeare and the German writers, Shakespeare was a better political example for German youth. It is also yet another example of how many Germans allowed their approach to literature to be coloured by considerations that were themselves wholly irrelevant to literature.

A more overtly political comparison of England and Germany - and, in the light of subsequent history, a more dangerous one - was made by W. Franke in the second edition of his Shakespeare-Grammatik.²³

The Englishman derives the conciseness of his philosophy of (Life, his strength of purpose, partly from his success in the colonies. He is a Briton, wherever he may be. He is not accustomed to discard peculiar characteristics in a foreign surrounding, but rather to accentuate them. He is therefore the most

22. Brandl, pp. 264-5. This could only mean that they were to be faithful soldiers, true Protestants, and supporters of art and science.

23. Halle, 1909. The first edition of this appeared in 1898-1900. It went through three editions and was fundamentally revised and rewritten for a fourth, which appeared in 1939 as Die sprache Shakespeares in Vers und Prosa, unter Bertücksichtigung des Amerikanischen, entwicklungsgeschichtlich dargestellt.

successful propagator of his own language. His culture is distinguished by its power, humanity and freedom; it protects and promotes. It brings to those whom it governs and subjects more than it demands from them, and thus it works so magnetically on the Teutons who settle on British soil.

The English owe their position as a world power far more to their political freedom than to their situation on an island. For in the Middle Ages they waged war on land and had no control of the sea. This political freedom was achieved by a long, hard struggle in the 17th century. The courageous individual, eager for action, fought the battles and conquered and colonized the foreign lands. The Teuton gave him the courage, the power and the perseverance, the Puritan the unbending will and the firm principles of duty and justice. The Teutonic character has been regenerated and intensified twice in the British people, for both the Danes and the Normans were Teutons. In the intensification of Teutonism lies the fulness of strength of the individual who has made both people and language.²⁴

Our reaction today to such remarks is greatly conditioned by comparatively recent history, and it is important to realize that Franz wrote against a very different background. This was a period when there was a growing interest in the nature of race and the new science of ethnology, and Franz's argument was by no means revolutionary.

But, significant as these crude political comparisons may be in warning the modern scholar of the emotions that lie behind a great deal of the criticism of this time, there is more interesting material to be found in some of the interpretations of Shakespeare's works. Here there are parallels drawn and comparisons made that are typically German.

²⁴. Franz, pp. 17-18.

In the first place it is not at all uncommon to find references to Goethe, although he has very little in common with Shakespeare except for his undoubted genius and unquestioned reputation. These references are usually to Faust, which, as will be shown later, is a singularly inapposite choice for comparisons. It must be admitted that Faust owes a great deal to Shakespeare, especially to Hamlet, and that Goethe did much towards promoting the cause of Shakespeare in Germany; but care must be taken not to assume that the connection necessarily goes any deeper than this. Goethe and Shakespeare were both great writers, but to suggest that they were basically similar is to do them both a disservice.²⁵

H. A. Werner makes an interesting comparison between Shakespeare, Goethe, and Aeschylus. After remarking that Hamlet is "nordic" in spirit and that much of it takes place at night, he goes on to speak of the hero. There are, he claims two other examples of the same inner character and the same outer circumstances: Prometheus and Faust. As Prometheus is the mystery of heathen antiquity, so is Faust that of the Germanic, Christian world. Both are in conflict, physically and in the realm of ideas, with the world around them, and it is this external conflict which leads to an inner conflict within the soul of the hero.

²⁵• It is interesting to note that the Shakespeare monument erected by the Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft in 1904 is situated opposite Goethe's summer-house in Weimar.

Having said this he admits that while both Faust and Prometheus open their hearts and invite us to look into the depths of their souls, Hamlet behaves quite differently.²⁶ Yet what Werner apparently fails to appreciate is that Faust is fundamentally different from Hamlet in that his conflict is an intellectual one, he is the scholar who is driven to question the whole basis and purpose of his knowledge. As such his problem is rather easier to describe - even though it may require a lengthy explanation - than the more complex emotional, spiritual, and psychological dilemma of Hamlet.

Goethe's most famous Shakespearian criticism is his discussion of Hamlet in Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre.²⁷ This is often highly individual in its approach and it seems to be one major reason why so much energy and attention was devoted to Hamlet by later German critics. For example, according to Karl Werder Goethe did not go far enough, for Hamlet should be seen as a man who is entirely the victim of circumstances, and whose character is without any flaw whatsoever.²⁸

An interesting comparison between Macbeth and Wallenstein is made

26. "Über das Dunkel in der Hamlet-Tragödie." Jahrbuch, V (1870), 37-9

27. 1795.

28. Vorlesungen über Shakespeares Hamlet, gehalten an der Universität zu Berlin (Berlin, 1875), pp. 32-3.

by Walter Bormann. He points out that both plays are tragedies of ambition, but that in Wallenstein even the demonic characters have a friendly light in their eyes, whereas Macbeth is characterized by sheer nocturnal darkness. Referring to the contrast drawn by W. Wetz between Shakespearean Renaissance drama and German Classical drama he argues that this difference is nowhere more striking than in the comparison of Macbeth, quite unconsciously moving from one crime to the next, and Schiller's hero, consciously weighing up the grounds of his actions over a long period.²⁹ Although Bormann illustrates his argument with one or two quotations from Macbeth, this is basically a subjective comparison, with which one may or may not agree: it does not really add anything useful to the reader's understanding of Macbeth.

B. Suphan³⁰ and C.C. Hense³¹ both trace in some detail the influence of Shakespeare on German writers. Suphan deals mainly with Lessing, Wieland, Claudius, Herder, Lenz and Goethe. His article is of interest mainly in the way it shows the development of an uncritical admiration of Shakespeare in such writers as Wieland and how this grew out of a reaction against Gottsched, the advocate of the French theatre, which

29. "Sinnbildliches im 'Macbeth'," Jahrbuch, XLVII (1911), 124-5.

30. "Shakespeare im Anbruch der klassischen Zeit unserer Literatur," Jahrbuch, XXV (1890), 1-20.

31. "Deutsche Dichter in ihrem Verhältniss zu Shakespeare," Jahrbuch V (1870), 107-47, and VI (1871), 83-128.

was initiated by Lessing.

Hense's analysis is more discerning. He argues that the influence of Shakespeare on German writers has varied from one period to another.³² Thus the writers of the "Sturm und Drang"³³ were attracted by the realism of Shakespeare's plays as they understood it and by the exalted passions of his characters.³⁴ Klinger was also fascinated by the revenge-tragedies, and these became the motive behind Schiller's Die Räuber and Kabale und Liebe. Hense compares the character of Franz von Moor in the former to Richard III and Edmund and that of Ferdinand in the latter to Othello. He suggests that there are plenty of other similar examples to be found in the works of Schiller.³⁵

It is claimed that Lessing saw Shakespeare as a nationalist writer, and that, being concerned with Shakespeare as a dramatist, he had a high regard for what was natural and individual in Shakespeare's characters.³⁶

Hense then turns his attention to Goethe. Goethe is interested in the psychological depths of Shakespeare's characters, and this is apparent

32. Hense, "Deutsche Dichter I," p. 107.

33. Hense mentions especially Reinhold Lenz, Maler Müller and Maxim Ellinger.

34. Hense, "Deutsche Dichter I," pp. 112-7.

35. Hense, "Deutsche Dichter I," pp. 110-125.

36. Hense, "Deutsche Dichter I," pp. 127-30.

even in Götz von Berlichingen, an early play of the "Sturm und Drang" period. Goethe's great interest in Hamlet is discussed, and apart from the obvious reference to Wilhelm Meister Hense also mentions the melancholy of Werther and points to certain details in Clayigo. He also points out that Faust, like Hamlet, is tempted to commit suicide, and that Wilhelm Meister is very similar to Hamlet in that he prefers thought to action.³⁷

In the second of his articles Hense returns to Schiller and discusses the different attitudes of Schiller and Shakespeare to history. He draws many comparisons between individual characters and then makes the somewhat surprising statement that Shakespeare was free in his adaptation of historical facts, producing suitably patriotic conclusions to King Lear and Cymbeline and making a more patriotic King John. He also discusses Shakespeare's portrayal of Joan of Arc, which is hardly typical, and draws the conclusion that Shakespeare's objectivity was subservient to his patriotism.³⁸ This seems particularly perverse in a discussion of Schiller, for few dramatists have been as free in their adaptation of history for their own ends as Schiller, who is himself a classic example of a writer who used history as a starting point for dramas that often bore little relation to the facts.

37. Hense, "Deutsche Dichter I," pp. 133-8.

38. Hense, "Deutsche Dichter II," pp. 88-90.

Of the Romantics Hense remarks that they were especially fascinated by the fairy-tale element in Shakespeare. He mentions especially Wieland's predilection ^{for} of A Midsummer Night's Dream and Tieck's interest in the same play and in The Tempest. He also reminds us that the Intermezzo in Faust is entitled "Walpurgisnachtstraum oder Oberon's und Titania's goldne Hochzeit".³⁹

Whatever may be thought of Hense's generalisations, it cannot be denied that he has done his work thoroughly. Yet this is not really a contribution to the understanding of Shakespeare but to the study of German literature.⁴⁰

Karl Elze was a critic who enjoyed a great reputation during his own lifetime.⁴¹ His article "Shakespeare's Charakter, seine Welt- und Lebensanschauung"⁴² is interesting more for what it seeks to do than for what it actually achieves. The key to Elze's attitude is to be found in his conclusion where he claims that Shakespeare is a guide to

³⁹. Hense, "Deutsche Dichter II", pp. 98-103.

⁴⁰. The most thorough discussion of Shakespeare's influence on German writers up to and including Goethe is Friedrich Gundolf's Shakespeare und der deutsche Geist (Berlin, 1911).

⁴¹. See L. Dora Schmitz's preface to her translation of a selection of Elze's essays - Karl Elze, Essays on Shakespeare (London, 1874)

⁴². Jahrbuch, X (1875), 75-126.

living for all men.⁴³ He dismisses the attempts made to characterize Shakespeare as a royalist and as a herald of the so-called Christian-Teutonic state, and argues that he had no more respect for the mantle of a king than for the vestments of a priest. The point is made that Shakespeare liked to mock officials, and that as in the higher ranks absolutism leads to madness, so in the lower it leads to ridiculousness.⁴⁴

Elze answers the accusation that Shakespeare neglected the middle-class and favoured the aristocracy with the argument that in Shakespeare's time the middle-class was not so developed as it was later on.⁴⁵ He also claims for Shakespeare that, although he was extremely patriotic, he was also fair towards other nations, and that there is no biased or unjust one-sidedness in his works nor any nationalist hatred.⁴⁶

All this is very closely bound up with the moral approach to Shakespeare, which, as is shown elsewhere, was characteristic of much of the German Shakespeare criticism of this time. But this concern with Shakespeare's attitude to such questions as government, class and nationalism is a phenomenon which is not surprising when seen against the background of German society at this time. It is difficult not to

⁴³.Elze. p. 126.

⁴⁴.Elze. pp. 118-20.

⁴⁵.Elze. pp. 120-1.

⁴⁶.Elze. pp. 121-3.

believe that Elze was taking an opportunity to comment on the social and political attitudes of his own contemporaries. These are questions which were of less interest to English critics of this period.

There was considerable disagreement as to how the cult of Shakespeare was relevant to Germany, and, as Albert Ludwig explains this led to opposition to the founding of the Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft and even to the setting up of a rival association in Dresden. This latter body aimed to further the interests of dramatic writers and composers and to maintain and enrich a worthy, and predominantly German, theatrical repertory, as well as to improve dramatic art and dramaturgy.⁴⁷ It was an odd programme for such an association, and it is hardly surprising that the more theoretical Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft which was more true to Shakespeare, survived, whereas its rival soon disappeared without trace.

Yet Oechelhäuser himself, the founder of the society, saw Shakespeare as someone politically useful to Germany, a political writer rather than a cosmopolitan idealist, the study of whom would not distract one from the spiritual struggle of the times but rather direct the vision above the turmoil of what was merely transitory.⁴⁸ At the

47. "Die Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft. Ein Rückblick Anlässlich ihres 50jährigen Bestehens," Jahrbuch, XLIX (1913), 12.

48. Ludwig, p. 6.

banquet which followed the first annual general meeting of the Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft the Grossherzog von Sachsen-Weimar claimed that Shakespeare was predominantly a poet of truth and nationalism and urged the society to work according to the same spirit and aims in Germany. From the battlefield of Schleswig-Holstein the German and English correspondents sent greetings to their Shakespearean "comrades", and, as Ludwig relates, the society strove in the following years to unite the sons of the related races under the banner of its hero.⁴⁹

One could dwell on this side of the society's existence for much longer, but enough has been said to show that it is to the credit of the members that, despite this attitude, the Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft was able to make a worthy contribution to the study of Shakespeare. It should perhaps be mentioned here that one has only to read the various documents and speeches connected with the schism which developed between Weimar and Bochum in 1963 in order to realise that the situation today is not so vastly different from what it was a hundred years ago.

The study of Shakespeare was also considered to be educationally desirable. Wilhelm Oehlmann after referring to the subservience of the early German drama to that of France and Italy, reminds his readers that it was freed by Lessing in his Hamburgische Dramaturgie and by Goethe with his Götz von Berlichingen. Some earlier critics had gone so far

⁴⁹.Ludwig, p.14.

as to complain that Goethe's play was written in the "mauvaise manière anglaise". An important feature was Goethe's discovery of Hamlet and Schiller's appreciation of the Histories. Thus Shakespeare became the foundation and starting point of German national literature.⁵⁰ August Koberstein had previously stated substantially the same argument.⁵¹ He too mentions Lessing's defence of Shakespeare and claims that Shakespeare freed German literature from artificiality.⁵² Oehlmann refers to the importance of the realism in Shakespeare's characterization from the German point of view, since the Germans tended towards the fantastic and were inclined to turn their backs on reality.⁵³ Koberstein claims to see the influence of Shakespeare in a number of works, including Minna von Barnhelm, Emilia Galotti, Miss Sara Sampson, Sätz von Berlichingen, and Bürger's Lenore.⁵⁴ Unfortunately he does not expand or explain what he means by this, so that this argument is of little worth.

From this Oehlmann concludes that the study of Shakespeare and the

50. "Shakespeares Wert für unsere nationale Literatur," Jahrbuch, V (1870), 148-50.

51. "Shakespeare in Deutschland," Jahrbuch, I (1865), 1-17.

52. Koberstein, pp. 6-8.

53. Oehlmann, p. 152.

54. Koberstein, p. 16.

English language is of great importance. He attacks what he regards as the undue prominence given to Latin and Greek at the Gymnasia. He believes that this is ultimately harmful, since it leads to a state of mind where other cultures receive no recognition at all.⁵⁵ It is interesting to compare this with an article written many years later by J. D. Jones.⁵⁶ Jones makes detailed references to the syllabuses and examination papers of the Oxford and Cambridge Local Examinations, but his article suggests that the teaching of Shakespeare in English schools was rather rudimentary and in the main only optional.⁵⁷

An amusing account is given of the foundation of a Shakespeare-Verein at Halle by the students there. It appears that this came about quite casually. In the autumn of 1864 a group of five students, all of them interested in the arts, started to meet over tea to discuss matters of common interest. They also wrote poetry and entered their efforts in a book kept for this purpose. This lasted through the winter, and in the spring more members joined. But the fine weather and pleasant surroundings of Halle demanded something more than merely drinking

55. Oehlmann, p. 153.

56. "Shakespeare in English Schools," Jahrbuch, XLII (1906), 113-26.

57. It is salutary to be reminded that: "As yet Shakespeare has no place in the regular Eton curriculum. The Masters occasionally take their pupils through a play, but they do this on their own initiative." (p.125).

together: the "Theekränzchen" became a "Kegelkränzchen"⁵⁸ and met at Trotha, which was reached by a boat trip down the Saale. But when the next winter came and the excursions were curtailed the problem arose as to what the activities of the group should be. Eventually a varied programme was devised, which included readings, discussions, and lectures on Shakespeare, together with fancy dress parties to which people came dressed as characters from the plays.⁵⁹

58. Skittle club.

59. "Ein studentischer Shakespeare-Verein," Jahrbuch, XXV (1890), 273-80.

6: CONCLUSIONS

6: Conclusions.

When we try to reach a conclusion, to arrive at some judgment of the wealth of material to be found in the first fifty volumes of the Shakespeare-Jahrbuch, one result is almost self-evident: that we have here a remarkably clear picture of the spirit and mind of these critics which is of considerable interest, regardless of the value of their criticism as such. We may indeed feel that most of the Shakespeare criticism of this time is outdated; few things in the field of thought go out of fashion quite so quickly as literary criticism. But the mere fact that so much of the criticism of this time has been superseded does not mean that it is valueless. The German Shakespeare critics were often pioneers, and they deserve the credit for this. L. Dora Schmitz, in the preface to her translation of a selection of Karl Elze's essays,¹ claims that "they bring before the student the opinions and theories of the foremost living Shakespeare scholars in Germany; opinions which must surely be of special interest to Englishmen, when it is considered that Germany, and not his own country, first rightly understood and valued Shakespeare's noble works".

This claim may appear exaggerated, but it has some foundation in fact. The work of Lessing and Schlegel is still largely valid today.

¹. Essays on Shakespeare (London, 1874).

Goethe was in some ways less discriminating in his criticism but his comments in Wilhelm Meister were the inspiration of much of the critical work that came after him. It was against this background that Wordsworth found himself able to claim in his Essay, supplementary to the Preface to the 'Poems' of 1815: "The Germans only, of foreign nations, are approaching towards a knowledge and feeling of what he (Shakespeare) is. In some respects they have acquired a superiority over the fellow-countrymen of the Poet: for among us it is current, I might say, an established opinion, that Shakespeare is justly praised when he is pronounced to be 'a wild irregular genius, in whom great faults are compensated by great beauties'."

A notable example of the way in which the Germans were often years ahead of their English colleagues can be seen from their treatment of History plays. The 1964 Stratford production of the plays as a complete cycle, edited where practical considerations made this necessary, was anticipated by Dingelstedt at Weimar in 1864. This was followed by Wilhelm König's article, "Shakespeares Königsdramen, ihr Zusammenhang und ihr Wert für die Bühne"² Although this went a good farther than most critics would be prepared to go today its general approach is now universally accepted.

². Jahrbuch, XII (1877), 228-60.

Perhaps the most important achievement, however, was the establishment of the idea that literary scholarship, the scientific analysis of literature, was just as important as literary criticism, the scientific evaluation of literature. In the field of literary scholarship the Germans led the field, and the fact that most of this scholarship has been superseded is no ground for withholding recognition of what they did. But strangely enough literary criticism was often totally divorced from literary scholarship. This seems to stem from the fact that the scholars themselves were generally not interested in criticism. The reason for this is probably Wilhelm von Humboldt's doctrine of "Zweckfreie Wissenschaft" (pure scholarship, which is not concerned with what purpose it may serve). But we may feel that in fact this idea became distorted and that "Zweckfreie Wissenschaft" degenerated only too often into "Zwecklose Wissenschaft". There is a vast difference between von Humboldt's resistance to the demand that all scholarship should be capable of being applied to practical ends and the refusal to draw conclusions from scholarship and to see their implications. What was originally an affirmation of the principle of academic freedom became an excuse for collecting miscellaneous facts, such as textual emendations and biographical details, without making any attempt to see if this new knowledge would itself lead to a new understanding of Shakespeare and his works.

→ As a result of this separation of scholarship from criticism the material in the Shakespeare-Jahrbuch covers a wider range of topics and is more diverse in its approach than is usually the case with specialist publications. It contains such items as articles on Shakespeare's deathmask, speculations as to whether he ever visited Italy, discussions of his philosophy and religion, reviews of new productions on the stage, statistical information about performances of the plays, enormous numbers of shorter contributions concerning textual emendations, studies of sources and influences, as well as a variety of interpretations of the individual plays. Yet these varied contributions are rarely related to each other; it sometimes seems as though the various contributors to the Jahrbuch were working in complete isolation and were totally unaware of what their colleagues were doing in the same and parallel fields.

Another idea that had become common (largely through von Humboldt, J.G. Fichte, and F.W. Schelling) was that of the purpose of a university as being the moral education of man. Exactly what this meant and what it involved was a matter for differing opinion, but it does account for the preoccupation of the literary critics with moral problems, their attempts to discover Shakespeare's moral attitudes and to find moral interpretations of the plays and especially of the characters in the plays. Literary scholarship needed little justification; it was "zweckfrei". It was sufficient to point out that it demanded objectivity,

thoroughness and integrity: qualities that were essential to the truly moral man. Literary criticism, on the other hand, could only justify itself by showing that it led to a greater understanding of man, that it was itself a moral exercise.³

These underlying ideas lent themselves to excesses. It was only too easy for scholarly opinion to become dogma; scholarship became a kind of religion, of which the university professors, who were far fewer than they are today, and who enjoyed a splendid isolation, were the high-priests. When two such authorities held differing opinions they sometimes forgot their dignity and indulged in vituperative invective rather than reasoned argument.

For many critics Shakespeare became an idol who could do no wrong. They would try to explain away weak writing either by tortuous interpretations or by attempting to prove that the passage in question was not written by Shakespeare at all. The flowery praise given to Shakespeare is sometimes almost nauseating, as at the opening of Julius Cserwinka's "Königsfrömmigkeit in Shakespeare's Historien".⁴ This is partly due to the current evaluation of Shakespeare; it was the

³. There is a certain parallel here with the theories of Matthew Arnold.

⁴. Jahrbuch, XXXIII (1897), 57.

fashion to see Shakespeare as perfect at this time, but it also follows in the tradition of Goethe's extravagancies in Wilhelm Meister. This, unfortunately, was one of the dangers of German Romantic scholarship; by setting Shakespeare on a pedestal it tended to start from false premises and hence arrive at faulty conclusions.

One consequence of this attitude to Shakespeare was that he was treated as a great philosopher rather than as a popular playwright. The great German dramatist, Goethe (Schiller's reputation has always been rather uncertain in Germany), was first and foremost a philosopher. His greatest work, Faust, has always presented the producer with particular difficulties, and the second part especially is almost impossible to stage: even in Germany a performance is a great occasion. Since Faust is primarily an expression of philosophical ideas, any critical appreciation of it will consider it primarily from the viewpoint of the thinker, the intellectual, the philosopher; it would be quite wrong to start thinking of it as a popular work for the stage. The German critics of the 19th century found it only too easy to think of Shakespeare in the same way. Of course the thought in the plays is often profound; great thinkers since Shakespeare have not infrequently found that he crystallizes their own ideas to perfection. But this is only one side of the picture: Shakespeare composed his plays (one almost hesitates to say "wrote" here) for the theatre, and the popular theatre

at that. He was himself a man of the theatre, in a way that Marlowe, who was in some respects a far more intellectual writer, was not.

This side of Shakespeare's art seems to have been largely forgotten by the contributors to the Shakespeare-Jahrbuch. Yet this was not intentional, at any rate originally, for the Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft was intended by its founder, Wilhelm Oechelhäuser, to be something rather different than in fact it eventually became. The theatre was to be the ends and means of the society's works: by studying the theatre it hoped to further the understanding of Shakespeare, and by studying Shakespeare to promote the cause of the theatre.⁵ But this aim was never realised. The contributions from actors and producers did not materialise, although four years after the society was founded one tenth of its members belonged to the world of the theatre.⁶ An early attempt to offer a prize for a new production of Cymbeline, the first performance to be on Shakespeare's birthday in 1867, failed through insufficient funds and the inability to find any judges.⁷ Under its first editor, Friedrich Bodenstedt, the Jahrbuch became scholarly in

⁵ See Albert Ludwig, "Die Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft. Ein Rückblick anlässlich ihres 50jährigen Bestehens," Jahrbuch, XLIX (1913), 5.

⁶ Ludwig, p. 66.

⁷ Ludwig, p. 65.

character. It was particularly concerned with problems to do with the authenticity of Shakespeare's text and with its interpretation, together with individual productions.⁸ When Karl Elze succeeded Bodenstedt as editor in 1868 the Jahrbuch became a specialist journal for the individual researcher and its scope became limited. There were complaints that the practical and theatrical side was being neglected, and when F. A. Leo succeeded Elze in 1880 he tried to appeal also to the non-scholar. He revived interest in the theatrical side and made the Jahrbuch more topical by dealing with such problems as the Baconian theory. Yet despite these efforts one cannot help feeling that the society never really solved its own problems: "A Shakespeare who was only read would not be the whole poet - the society has always recognised this and since its beginnings has tried to keep in touch with the theatre."⁹

Because philosophical fashions are continually changing and are superseded by new methods philosophers can be extremely narrow in their outlook, sometimes failing utterly to understand or appreciate the work of their predecessors. Thus we find the German Shakespeare critics often interpret Shakespeare in terms of their own age, their own environment, their own background.

⁸. But only factual reviews were given; there was very little thought given to Shakespeare's stage art as such.

⁹. Ludwig, p. 65.

Of the trends in German philosophy at this time one of the most influential was that of Positivism. This is based upon what is given, upon facts, certainties, what is without doubt; it limits research and exposition to these facts and sees metaphysical suggestions as theoretically impossible and practically useless. A question to which there is only one answer, which cannot be checked by experience, is only apparently a true question; every hypothesis must be verifiable. What exactly is a "fact" is disputed by the Positivists among themselves, but they are agreed that Positivism must be as closely allied as possible to the picture of the world as we experience it and to the methods of the natural sciences.¹⁰

It is easy to see how this doctrine was adopted by literary scholarship. The Shakespeare-Jahrbuch has many articles concerned with biographical details, statistical analyses - of performances of the plays and of the metrical features, historical facts, and background studies of the Elizabethan age. These were questions which, even if no one knew the answers to them, were verifiable within the strict definitions of Positivism. The reason they could not be answered was that nobody possessed the requisite information; but this was quite accidental: if such information ever became available then the questions asked by these scholars could be answered. On the other hand we do not on the

¹⁰. See Heinrich Schmidt, Philosophisches Wörterbuch, 17th ed. (Stuttgart, 1965).

whole find contributions which show a subjective, albeit scientific, judgment. Semantics, for example, is a comparatively new science, but it is easy to see that it could not have flourished among the Positivists. the meaning of a word or of a text is something which cannot be "verified". Similarly there is a failure to evaluate Shakespeare, to claim this passage as good and that one as poor. This would require an aesthetic judgment, a subjective quality which is, by German standards, "unscientific". It is true that the plays were interpreted and that these interpretations were, as they must always be, subjective, but this was literary criticism, not scholarship.

Closely associated with this attitude was the great interest shown in historical matters and in historical methods. There developed what may be called the "scientific historian".¹¹ The German critics adopted the idea of "Geistesgeschichte", a scientific method which saw cultural history as the history of the spirit which produced that culture. It is partly the history of ideas and of "Weltanschauung", together with cultural history, partly investigation of the "Zeitgeist" (that spirit which is present in all the manifestations of a particular age) and of

¹¹ According to H. Kruse this is actually an American term, and as such may have a rather different meaning from what is being described here; but it seems the best expression for what the writer has in mind at this point.

its changes by means of taking a cross-section of the period.¹²

This in turn leads to the concept of "Historismus", that historical consciousness which recognizes that everything we apprehend has become what it is, evenⁿ, that which exists purely spiritually.¹³ The leading figures here were Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and above all Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911). At its worst, which we sometimes see in the Jahrbuch, "Historismus" was a retreat from the present into the past, so that the value of the truth of the given facts was affected and their significance became a relative matter.¹⁴ Because it tried to understand all institutions and phenomena of cultural life in terms of historical conditions it saw them as unique and individual, so that it came into conflict with all those philosophies whose aim is the universal. In the eyes of its detractors it appeared as relativism and the word "Historismus" acquired a derogatory connotation.¹⁵

We can see this idea at work very clearly in the Shakespeare-Jahrbuch. Not only are there numerous articles and smaller contributions

12. Schmidt. This is very largely the method employed here to assess the various contributions to the Jahrbuch.

13. Schmidt.

14. Schmidt.

15. See the article on "Historismus" in Grosse Brockhaus, 16th ed. (Wiesbaden, 1954).

dealing with the historical details of Shakespeare's time, but the historical approach dominates many other non-historical articles. H. A. Werner, in his article "Über das Dunkel in der Hamlet-Tragedie",¹⁶ suggests that what Shakespeare wrote was conditioned by the spirit of his age, the political situation, and the conditions in the theatre. Karl Elze in "Shakespeare's Charakter, seine Welt- und Lebensanschauung",¹⁷ immediately compares Shakespeare with his contemporaries. Wilhelm Oechelbäuser, in "Die Würdigung Shakespeare's in England und Deutschland",¹⁸ tries, most unconvincingly, to show that the Germany of his time had come closer to the ideal of Shakespeare than England had. W. Hertzberg, in "Die Quellen der Troilus-Sage in ihrem Verhältniss zu Shakespeare's 'Troilus und Cressida'",¹⁹ shows how much Shakespeare owed to what went before and to contemporary feeling about the legend. These and many other examples typify the 19th century German approach to literature, not only in the subjects they discuss but in the way they discuss them.

In the sphere of religion the most important trend was probably

¹⁶. Jahrbuch, V (1870) 37-81.

¹⁷. Jahrbuch, X (1875), 75-126.

¹⁸. Jahrbuch, XX (1885), 54-68.

¹⁹. Jahrbuch, VI (1871), 169-225.

that of Liberalism. Although some critics tried to adduce evidence that Shakespeare was either Catholic or Protestant, there was a growing feeling that whatever his nominal allegiance might have been he was in practice an objective thinker who had very little use for narrow dogmatism and ecclesiasticism of any sort. This idea developed to a point where religion was equated with morality. The supernatural element was entirely excluded and instead of what is normally understood by religion, which is centred on God, there arose a type of Humanism, of which the centre was Man. Shakespeare was seen as a poet who was primarily interested in Man (and therefore men), his weaknesses and his strengths. This in turn led to detailed studies of Shakespeare's characters, a school of criticism which for us is epitomised by Bradley. What is remarkable is that many of these studies, which often concerned themselves with the psychology of Shakespeare's characters, preceded both Bradley and Freud.

We have already discussed the political interpretations of Shakespeare's plays. These were particularly influenced by the political conditions and ideas of the time. Some of the parallels between Elizabeth's England and Bismarck's Germany have already been pointed out. But there are other features of the German "Zeitgeist" in the 19th century which explain the pre-occupations of some of the critics. The position of the common man in Shakespeare was disputed by Oechelhäuser on the one hand and Rfmelin and Vischer on the other. Oechelhäuser

maintains that we cannot ask that this picture of the Wars of the Roses should have a specific significance in the development of the English bourgeoisie when the new elements which had entered into the life of the State were still in process of developing.²⁰ He goes on to explain that the common man was the sufferer in this civil war, but that since the common people played very little part in public life in the 15th century they do not appear to any great extent in Shakespeare. The plays can only deal with the king and the barons. He might have gone on to add that although Elizabeth's reign saw the rise of a new merchant class this was simply an extension of privilege: the barons might have enjoyed less power than heretofore, but the common people were not affected. We find a significant echo of this in a contribution by W.O. Henderson to E.J. Passant's A Short History of Germany 1315-1945.²¹

In their relations to the 'hands', who flowed into industry from the countryside to 'better themselves', the entrepreneurs were ready to adopt the authoritarian principles of the landowners towards their labourers, whilst the 'hands' themselves, many of them only a generation removed from serfdom and none of them accustomed to a free society, were ill qualified to struggle either for social or political rights. The fact that the industrial revolution, with the organization of large units which it involves, came to the German people whilst they were still so largely influenced by feudal institutions and ideas

20. "Essay über Richard III," Jahrbuch, III (1868), 32-33

21. Cambridge, 1959.

and before they ever tasted civil, still less political liberty, is of great importance in their later development.²²

There was a growing demand from the workers for these liberties, and the situation which existed under Bismarck could not last for ever. What appeared on the surface to be a stable situation was in fact transitory. It was to lead through the First World War to the abortive 1918 Revolution. In the same way Elizabethan England could not last. Elizabeth was followed by James and eventually by Charles and the Civil War. But in each case those living through the times could not foresee the changes that were coming. In each case there was a marked increase in material prosperity, a period of peace at home, the rise of new merchant class, and a corresponding invigoration in culture and the arts.²³

An important question that must be considered here is whether the German criticism under discussion was an isolated phenomenon or whether it had an influence on Shakespeare criticism outside Germany. It is certainly true that the German critics of an earlier generation, Lessing

²²Henderson, p. 84.

²³But on the whole the German stage does not seem to have shared in this revival. Unlike its Elizabethan counterpart it lacked inspiration, and, with a few notable exceptions, such as the Meiningen performances previously referred to, the productions of this time seem to have been remarkably conventional.

and Schlegel in particular, did exert a marked influence on those who came after them, both in Germany and in England. How far Coleridge was indebted to Schlegel is a point that will continue to be argued, but it is fair to say that Coleridge's contact with Schlegel must have played an important part in the formulation of the former's ideas.

The German criticism of the later 19th century has not lasted so well. It is true that occasional references are to be found in modern books and articles, but the same might be said of the English criticism of this period. But in their time some of these German critics were highly regarded. There is explicit evidence of this in Dowden's Shakespeare, a critical study of his mind and art.²⁴ His references to his German contemporaries are too many to enumerate here, and it must suffice to draw attention to some of his more interesting comments and to try and see how far he was himself influenced by German criticism.

Dowden frequently refers to Kreyssig²⁵ with approval, but since Kreyssig was not a contributor to the Shakespeare-Jahrbuch this need not concern us here. Similarly, there are adverse comments on Gervinus²⁶

²⁴. London, 1875.

²⁵. Kreyssig's most important work is contained in his Vorlesungen über Shakespeare, seine Zeit und sein Werke, 3 Bde. (Berlin, 1858-60).

²⁶. See G. G. Gervinus, Shakespeare 4 Teile (Leipzig, 1849-50). This was later translated into English - Shakespeare Commentaries, trans. F. E. Bunnètt (London, 1863).

and Rümelin,²⁷ neither of whom wrote for the Jahrbuch, but both critics of repute. Dowden cannot accept Gervinus' interpretation of Romeo and Juliet. It provokes him to remark: "It is somewhat hard upon Shakespeare to suppose that he secreted in each of his dramas a central idea for a German critic to discover."²⁸ He is particularly dissatisfied with Gervinus' comments on the Friar and on Mercutio. Dowden's reaction to the latter is brief and caustic: "The German Professor sometimes does not quite keep pace with Shakespeare, and is heard stumbling heavily behind him."²⁹ Gervinus' interpretation of Hamlet receives similar treatment.³⁰ Dowden describes the criticism of Rümelin as "clever and superficial".³¹ Rümelin claimed to be a realist, but Dowden remarks that realist criticism buttresses up its case with mere conjectures.³²

On the more positive side Dowden claims to be indebted to Werner

27. See Gustav Rümelin, Shakespeare-Studien (Stuttgart, 1866)

28. Dowden, p. 122.

29. Dowden, p. 117, n.

30. Dowden, p. 137, n.

31. Dowden, p. 111, n.

32. Dowden, p. 212, n.

for his study of Hamlet.³³ He adopts Werner's idea of Hamlet as a moral character trying to live in an immoral society and failing. His interpretations of the other characters also owe much to Werner. But he also argues that we must not neglect the emotional side of Hamlet's character, and this idea, as he acknowledges,³⁴ he derives from Oehlmann.

It can be seen that Dowden owed much to German criticism, but that he was discriminating in his use of it. But he is also influenced by the Germans in his general approach. Thus in dealing with the Histories he attempts to make generalizations about Shakespeare's attitudes and beliefs. Although he is cautious compared to some of the German critics, nevertheless there is a certain tendency to approach Shakespeare from a biographical point of view.

The other great English critic who owes something to the Germans is Bradley. It is impossible to do justice to him in a few words, but it is not unfair to say that he epitomises the approach to Shakespearian tragedy through the characters themselves. This approach closely parallels that of his German predecessors and contemporaries, and some of his references, such as those to Werder's lectures on Hamlet and Macbeth, suggest that he was aware of this. There is other evidence of German influence. When discussing Hamlet he remarks that "in the great

33. Dowden, p. 160, n.

34. Dowden, p. 132, n.

ideal movement which began towards the close of the eighteenth century, this tragedy acquired a position unique among Shakespeare's dramas, and shared only by Goethe's Faust."³⁵ It seems unlikely that this comparison is purely fortuitous, particularly since this is not the only reference to Goethe.

Bradley was more cautious than many of the German critics, with their wild speculations. Yet even he sometimes appears to consider Shakespeare's characters outside their context in the play. An extreme example of this is his comparison of Othello and Hamlet: "The heroes of the two plays are doubtless extremely unlike, so unlike that each could have dealt without much difficulty with the situation which proved fatal to the other."³⁶ It is important to realise that a statement like this was not really breaking new ground but that Bradley was merely following a line of thought which can be traced back through the German critics of the 19th century and perhaps has its origin in Goethe's treatment of Hamlet.

Finally, it is interesting to notice that German critical methods had an effect not only in England but elsewhere - even in a country like France, where one might least expect it. H.A. Taine opened his

³⁵. A. C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy (London, 1904), pp. 127-8.

³⁶. Bradley, p. 175.

Histoire de la Littérature Anglaise³⁷ with a description of the relationship between history and literature, as then seen in France and Germany, which could hardly be improved upon as an introduction to "Historismus". This, then, is an extreme example of the historical approach to literature. In the early pages Taine describes not only the history of the invasions of Britain, but also the geography and culture of the lands from which the invaders came. England itself he describes as "a rude and foggy land", and its inhabitants are seen as wild and primitive. The argument is illustrated by frequent references to the chronicles of the time. All this is very close in spirit to much of the criticism in the Shakespeare-Jahrbuch.

Taine's treatment of Shakespeare is also basically historical and biographical. From the start he shows quite plainly that his mind is set on Shakespeare himself, though he recognizes that the man can only be approached through his works.

I am about to describe an extraordinary species of mind, perplexing to all the French modes of analysis and reasoning, all-powerful, excessive, equally master of the sublime and the base; the most creative that ever engaged in the exact copy of the details of actual existence, in the dazzling caprice of fancy, in the profound complications of super-human passions; a nature poetical, immoral, inspired, superior to reason by the sudden revelations of his seer's

³⁷ Paris, 1863-4.

Madness; so extreme in joy and pain, so abrupt of gait, so stormy and impetuous in his transports, that this great age alone could have cradled such a child.³⁸

It seems here that, rather than Shakespeare defying "the French modes of analysis and reasoning", Taine is abandoning these same methods and adopting an approach that owes more to German Romanticism than he explicitly admits.

There is a danger that too much importance may be attached to the German criticism of the period that has been considered. It cannot seriously be maintained that much of it has a lasting value, and much of the scholarship is now superseded. On the positive side, however, two points stand out. First, although the modern reader may learn very little new about Shakespeare from these writings, he may discover a great deal about the methods of criticism and scholarship that evolved in Germany at this time and thus be in a better position to evaluate what is being written at the present time. Second, nobody who wishes to study the history of literary criticism in general and the criticism of Shakespeare in particular can afford to ignore the German contributions of this period; without them developments might have been very different, for they provoked other critics in other places and at later dates to examine Shakespeare in quite a new light.

³⁸ H.A. Taine, History of English Literature, trans. H. van Laun (London, 1887), p. 296.

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1. ten Brink was technically a Dutchman, but he left Holland as a child and spent the rest of his life in Germany. Since he is always regarded as a German, it seemed right to include him here.
2. Isaac later changed his name to Conrad.

Notes on Bibliography.

German titles are normally given in modern German spelling.

Section III omits a number of relatively minor contributions by English and American authors, such as unsigned newspaper articles.

Section IV includes only such works as are likely to have had a fairly wide circulation and may have reached the attention of English critics. It does not include articles in school prospectuses or doctoral dissertations, which must inevitably have had a limited readership.

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