

Review

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these warily. We confess that there are some at which our visualising faculty jibs. Some renaissance of the Colossus seems to be suggested in the following: 'Erasmus the Humanist—who raised his foot and let the tide of the Reformation run away from under, unuplifting—...' The same faculty finds itself also somewhat strained in reading the passage (p. 85) where Douglas, having in one sentence gone down an untrodden track with a candle, proves himself in the next a master mariner on the classic seas (keeping the same candle). We are thus bold to comment on these metaphors because, in our opinion, they do a disservice to the industry, the painstaking research, the genuine appreciation, of which the book is witness. They diminish in frequency as Mr Watt gets to the more detailed portions of his study. A less vivid style in the earlier part would be less provocative of criticism other than stylistic.

GLADYS D. WILLCOCK.

ENGLEFIELD GREEN.

The Problem of 'Hamlet.' By the Rt Hon. J. M. ROBERTSON. London: George Allen and Unwin, Ltd. 1919. 90 pp. 5s.

Hamlet: An Historical and Comparative Study. By ELMER EDGAR STOLL. (Research Publ. of the University of Minnesota. Vol. VIII, No. 5.) 76 pp. \$ 1.00.

Studier over Hamlet-Teksterne. I. Af V. ØSTERBERG. Copenhagen: Gyldendalske Boghandel. 1920. 74 pp.

In the introduction to *The Works of Thomas Kyd* Dr F. S. Boas concludes his section on the old *Hamlet* with the words: '*Hamlet* in its final form holds its unique position less as a play, in the strict sense, than as a marvellous literary creation thrown into dramatic form. Generations of critics have sought to find a completely satisfying interpretation of the work. They have failed to do so—even the greatest of them—and failed inevitably. For the *Hamlet* that we know is not a homogeneous product of genius. It is—unless evidences external and internal combine to mislead us—a fusion, with the intermediate stages in the process still partly recognisable, of the inventive dramatic craftsmanship of Thomas Kyd, and the majestic imagination, penetrating psychology, and rich verbal music of William Shakespeare.' As will appear later, I do not believe this to be the true conclusion to the whole matter; but it is well that the passage should be placed on record at the beginning of this review, since Dr Boas' thesis is precisely that of the first two of the books before us, and, though both Mr Robertson and Dr Stoll make use of Dr Boas' edition of Kyd, neither appears to be aware that their main contention has been anticipated.

After a century of fruitless theorising about the contents of Hamlet's soul, it was inevitable that a reaction should set in. Professor Stoll pronounces 'the history of Hamlet-criticism a blot on the intellectual record of the race'; while Mr Robertson asks whether 'this whole business of understanding Hamlet is not a following of a will-o'-the-

wisp, to be renounced in favour of the task of understanding *Hamlet*. We know that Shakespeare often borrowed his plots from earlier dramas: and there is a high probability that he did so in this instance. It seems further that he was frequently careless in his adaptation and did not sufficiently tone down the elements of the old plot to be in keeping with the new imaginative colouring which he threw over them. Is not *Hamlet* a case of this kind? Are not the obscurities of the play, and, in particular, the seeming inconsistencies in the character of the Prince, simply evidences of imperfect revision of Kyd's original? It is an attractive thesis and ably expounded by our two authors. The upshot is, of course, that there is no Hamlet-mystery, except for readers in the study, for whom Shakespeare did not write; that spectators never see anything wrong on the stage and Shakespeare knew they would not; and that what the modern critic finds amiss is nothing but a general Elizabethan looseness of dramatic construction, complicated by the fact that Shakespeare's original—to use Mr Robertson's words—'embodied a counter-sense which adaptation could not transcend.' And if we ask why Shakespeare did not alter Kyd's plot and so make a proper job of it, the reply we receive is that he could not. 'He was, as usual, adapting an old play for his company, in the way of business. Its main features he had to preserve, else the public would miss what they looked for.... What the company desired, and what the public, which was attached to an old play, would relish, was not new matter but new form—crudities in construction, situation and sentiment softened down, and word and verse wakened to life by the most magical of pens. The story, the telling situations, the essential conception of the characters—these they could not easily surrender.' (Stoll, pp. 3—4.) In a word, the public were accustomed to the *Hamlet Revenge* chamber of horrors; they would tolerate redecoration, but no architectural alterations.

Mr Robertson characteristically begins his study with a general survey of previous theories of *Hamlet*, which he classifies as 'subjective theories,' 'objective theories' (e.g. Werder), and 'theories of defect in the dramatist.' He then passes on to a consideration of the pre-Shakespearean play and the *Brudermord*, which is followed up by a chapter on 'Kyd's probable construction' which contains much interesting though somewhat hazardous speculation, including the suggestion that the original *Hamlet* may have been a double play like *Hieronimo*. Finally he deals with the Shakespearean adaptation, which he finds to have been mainly an infusion of pessimism into the character of Hamlet by way of justifying the unmotivated delay which was inherited from Kyd:

This implicit pessimism is Shakespeare's personal contribution: his verdict on the situation set out by the play. But the fact remains that he has not merely not been explicit—as he could not be—he has left standing matter which conflicts with the solution of pessimism.... [Hamlet's] displays of vigour, like the killing of Polonius, do not consist with a pessimism so laming as to preclude revenge. And the ultimate fact is that Shakespeare *could not* make a psychologically or otherwise consistent play out of a plot which retained a strictly barbaric action while the hero was transformed into a supersubtle Elizabethan.

Such is Mr Robertson's conclusion, which, it may be noted, differs somewhat from that of Professor Stoll, though they both start from the same premisses. Professor Stoll casts his net wider than does Mr Robertson. He begins by studying *Hamlet* 'in the light of other tragedies.' He finds the delay of the hero a conventional dramatic device, paralleled in *The Spanish Tragedy*, in Greek drama, and in Lope de Vega. The hero's self-reproaches—which are to be interpreted as reassurances to the audience that despite the delay all will be well in the end—have their counterpart in Seneca, and are not intended to discredit Hamlet. 'There is defect in the drama, of course, but it is only as our technique is superimposed upon the drama that it is turned into a tragic defect in the hero, or that by his straightforward and magnanimous complaints and reproaches he is made to take a stand against himself.' Hamlet is, in short, a Shakespearian heroic character, whom we are meant to admire without qualifications. The soliloquies are dismissed as stock devices, dressed up, of course, in Shakespeare's best rhetoric. Hamlet accuses himself of cowardice, but that is absurd, and Shakespeare knows that such accusations will not be taken at their face value by the audience. Moreover they find no support from what the other characters say of him—though as no other character but Horatio, who has very little to say, knows anything of Hamlet's problem, this does not appear to be strong evidence. 'To be or not to be' is a difficulty for Professor Stoll. He meets it by noting its necessity as a stage-device. Hamlet is walking into a trap and must be made to say something which will (a) give the spies time to take cover, and (b) show the audience that he is unconscious of his danger. 'The vagueness and irrelevance of the details' of this speech are to be taken as part of 'the looseness of Elizabethan dramatic structure.' The soliloquy is no symptom of scepticism, and there is not a thought of the Ghost in Hamlet's mind. He is simply doing a 'turn' as philosopher to give Claudius time to get behind the arras. Ibsen would not do these things, no doubt; but Ibsen is a modern, and we have learnt a thing or two about dramatic technique since Shakespeare's day.

It all comes to this, then. Shakespeare was a scene-painter and not a dramatist. He took the plays of other men and dressed them up in magnificent poetry, but he *could* not improve upon their plots, however weak. The pendulum has swung to the other extreme; the reputation of Shakespeare as a dramatic artist is at stake; and we are back again at Greene's death-bed curse upon the Upstart Crow. That Shakespeare's structure is demonstrably ramshackle in certain plays is beside the point. Not all the dramas in the canon are carefully revised, and some were doubtless tossed off in haste to meet a particular occasion. But here we are dealing with *Hamlet*, and here if anywhere Shakespeare would display that infinite capacity for taking pains which Carlyle noted as the mark of genius. 'Not once but twice at least did he rewrite it,' Professor Stoll tells us, and no one who has studied the exquisite Second Quarto text can doubt that its author expended more loving care over this child of his brain than over any other of the thirty-six plays. If

the original plot were crude, was it beyond Shakespeare's powers to improve it—to improve it, moreover, without altering those main incidents which the public would expect to see repeated? It is my confident belief that he both could and did. Criticism has been busy for the last forty years with the sources of Shakespeare's plays. It has now to face the question of his manipulation of these sources. Did he follow them as a compositor 'follows copy,' or did he mix brains with his materials and so produce something which was as like and unlike the original as a stereoscoped picture is like and yet unlike the flat photograph?

Let us grant that the plot of the old *Hamlet* was a wooden thing. Shakespeare's problem was to bring it to life, without destroying it. A consideration of one point may show how he did this. Professor Stoll tells us that Hamlet was not thinking about the Ghost when he talked of

The undiscovered country from whose bourn
No traveller returns.

Mr Robertson, on the other hand, noting the difficulty, declares that the whole soliloquy 'is left misplaced; it should come properly before the Ghost-scenes,' adding in a foot-note that 'it is even conceivable that this speech, in a pre-Shakespearean form, was originally written for another play.' Whichever of these three hypotheses we adopt, Shakespeare is convicted of a piece of exceedingly careless writing. Is it not safer to assume that Shakespeare knew what he was about, and ask ourselves what his intentions were? In this instance they are not difficult to discover. Professor Stoll rightly insists that Hamlet's doubts about the Ghost were both honest and natural, since all enlightened Protestant opinion in Shakespeare's age held the 'doctrine that ghosts were masquerading devils,' and 'if this doctrine had not been taken account of by the dramatist he would simply have been behind the times.' He rightly also blames scholars for continuing to ignore this element in *Hamlet*. Yet he himself fails to see its bearing not only on the 'To be or not to be' soliloquy but also on the evolution of the main plot. The last words that Hamlet utters before this soliloquy give strong expression to his theological doubts about the Ghost (II, ii, 628—633), and he enters in the Nunnery-scene deeply dispondent, as the whole soliloquy shows. Is it not perfectly natural that he should explicitly exclude the Ghost from the category of departed spirits at this moment, and did not Shakespeare deliberately place these words in his mouth to exhibit his state of mind just before the Play-scene, when the Ghost will be proved to have been in very deed an honest one? Surely we may allow *some* subtlety to Elizabethan audiences—and dramatists.

Another point about these theological doubts is that they are undoubtedly Shakespeare's addition to the original *Hamlet*. Professor Stoll says that had Shakespeare not made use of the Protestant doctrine he would have been behind the times; but though there are plenty of ghosts in Elizabethan drama there is no other instance, unless I am

mistaken, of the Protestant doctrine being employed for dramatic reasons. Nor is there a shred of evidence that this element was to be found in the pre-Shakespearian *Hamlet*. The Ghost-scenes in Q1 are Shakespearian; the Ghost in the *Brudermord* is of the Senecan brand, and Hamlet here does not utter a single doubt concerning it; on the contrary, he rebuts Horatio's suggestion that it may be deceiving him with an unmistakable declaration of faith. Why then did Shakespeare make use of theological doubt in his *Hamlet*? *Because it made the transmitted plot work*. He inherited a Ghost and a play-within-the-play, two of Kyd's favourite stage-tricks. But the Ghost does away with the necessity for Hamlet's assumed madness, which Kyd in his turn had inherited from Belleforest, while the message of the Ghost makes the interlude an absurdity, for if Hamlet believes the Ghost what should he be doing with *The Murder of Gonzago*? Yet ghosts and interludes are taking things on the stage, and the groundlings had paid their pennies to see them. Shakespeare had only to make matters right with the 'judicious' (who we may believe took a delight in seeing how he brought his inherited puppets to life) and all would be well. This he did by a very simple device. He made Hamlet a Protestant, whose doubts about the provenance of ghosts would explain (in part) his delay, his assumption of madness, and his recourse to the players for a resolution of his uncertainty. There is more—much more—in the business than this; but enough to have shown that Shakespeare could be renovator as well as paperhanger!

The third book on our list differs from the other two inasmuch as it is concerned with the establishment of facts, the facts in the history of the *Hamlet* text. It is a first instalment, and we look forward with interest to its sequel. I shall here content myself with noting what seem to be the most important conclusions of this careful and illuminating little essay.

(i) Mr Østerberg throws new light upon Nashe's reference to *Hamlet* in 1589, and in my judgment comes nearer than any previous critic to *proving* that Thomas Kyd was the dramatist hinted at. His main argument is as follows. Though Nashe speaks of 'the Kidde in Æsop' he had Spenser's fable clearly in mind, since his words 'enamoured with the Foxes newfangles' is a palpable echo of Spenser's 'enamoured with the newel.' Yet the Spenserian fable, that of a young kid falling a prey to the fox through curiosity, has little obvious reference to the passage as a whole; and Nashe's sentence, 'which makes his [i.e. Seneca's] famisht followers to imitate the Kidde in Æsop, who enamoured with the Foxes newfangles, forsooke all hopes of life to leape into a new occupation,' shows that he found difficulty in dragging the fable in, seeing that the kid of the story was not famished and did not leap into a new occupation, while, on the other hand, Seneca's followers did not forsake all hopes of life. Thus Nashe's use of the fable was not just a chance piece of literary illustration; it was deliberate distortion of the story to suit the purposes of satire. In other words, Nashe could not do without that 'Kidde' because he wanted to hit at Kyd in a punning

reference, just as he hits at Phillip Stubbes when he speaks of 'anatomizing abuses and stubbing vp sin by the rootes.'

(ii) Mr Østerberg shows conclusively that the oft-quoted sentence from Dekker's *Satirromastix* (1602)—'My name's Hamlet reuenge: thou hast been at Parris garden hast not?'—has been misunderstood through being taken out of its context. Tucca addresses the first half of his speech to Asinius and the second to Horace, so that there is no connection between the two remarks. It appears, moreover, from what follows that Paris Garden is referred to as a bear-garden and not as a playhouse. There was therefore no intention whatever of linking *Hamlet* with a performance at Paris Garden, as all previous critics have supposed. The point is one of considerable importance, since it renders the history of the *Hamlet* text a straightforward one from 1594 onwards. In that year the play was acted by Shakespeare's company at Newington Butts; in 1596 Lodge refers to a performance of it at the Theatre, Burbage's playhouse; and now that the question of a performance at Paris Garden has been placed out of court there is no reason for thinking that the play ever left the possession of the Chamberlain's men.

(iii) Mr Østerberg believes that Roberts' entry in the *Stationers' Register* of July 27, 1602, was in respect of Kyd's *Hamlet*, which, he imagines, fell to the printer of playhouse hand-bills as a perquisite, after Shakespeare had put his own version upon the stage; and he suggests that it may actually have been printed, though if so all copies have disappeared. It does not seem very likely that the company would allow the inferior text to get into circulation just when they were putting its recension upon the stage. However Mr Østerberg's belief is based upon the fact that the entry speaks of 'The Revenge of Hamlet,' a likely enough title for Kyd's drama, while that of Shakespeare's version is 'The tragicall historie of Hamlet.' I find it difficult to give much weight to this argument, since 'revenge' was traditionally attached to the *Hamlet* theme, and Roberts would not be careful about such details in making an entry, though it is certainly noteworthy that Q1 employs the Shakespearian title. Moreover, Mr Østerberg ignores the probability that the manuscript of Kyd's *Hamlet* had disappeared in the course of Shakespeare's revision, it being natural that he should work over it sheet by sheet, destroying the rejected material in his progress. Still less can one give credence to the further argument that Roberts must have had a 'book' in his possession when he made his entry, seeing that the censor Pasfield and the warden Waterson would have asked to see it before setting their hands to the authorisation. *Hamlet*, 'as yt was latelie Acted by the Lord Chamberleyne his seruantes,' had presumably been licensed by Tilney or Buc, and might thus be 'taken as read' by Master Pasfield. Mr Pollard's explanation of the entry as a 'precautionary' one still holds the field. On the other hand, the Danish critic has an interesting comment on the puzzling business of the relations between Roberts and Ling, which may be the true solution. He points out that the two men had friendly trade connexions with each other both before and after the *Hamlet* incident, and suggests that, as Roberts had made the entry and Ling had published a

Hamlet book (Q1), it was only natural that they should combine together in the production of Q2 in order to avoid a fuss with the Stationers, to say nothing of the payment of another sixpence. It is Trundell whom he regards as the villain of the Q1 piece, remarking that the alliance between this young stationer and the respectable middle-aged Ling is a strange one, and noting that Trundell is not allowed to have anything to do with Q2.

(iv) The remainder of the book is taken up with the problem of Q1's origin, into which I have not space to enter here. Suffice it to say that, though I do not think Mr Østerberg's main conclusions will find general acceptance, they are based upon acute analysis and considerable learning which should be of great help in the ultimate solution, whatever that may be, and that I personally am not surprised to learn that he can find very little evidence of Kyd's hand in this text.

One must congratulate Mr Østerberg on making a definite advance in the study of the most famous literary masterpiece connected with his country.

J. DOVER WILSON.

LONDON.

The Stonyhurst Pageants. Edited, with introduction, by CARLETON BROWN. (*Hesperia*, Ergänzungsreihe, VII). Göttingen and Baltimore: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht. 1920. 8vo. 30 + 302 pp. 8s. 6d.

Professor Carleton Brown has performed a work of piety in printing for the first time these seventeenth century miracle plays preserved in the library of the Roman Catholic college of Stonyhurst in Lancashire. It is to be hoped that students of the early drama will be duly grateful to him, for it is not to be expected that the pageants, utterly lacking as they are in literary merit, should find much favour with the general reader.

There are peculiarities in the circumstances of publication which probably account for certain imperfections of the edition which cannot fail to strike the attentive reader. Professor Brown's 'transcript of the text' was forwarded to Göttingen in June 1914, and publication has been necessarily delayed by the war, the 'Foreword' being dated 2 Dec. 1919. I notice that the text is printed on very much better paper than the introduction, which suggests that it was machined at an earlier date (German paper was at its worst in 1919), and it is therefore possible, though the editor does not mention the fact, that the proofs never had the advantage of his personal supervision.

MS. A. VI. 33 in the Stonyhurst library contains, with some imperfections, twelve pageants on Old Testament history, written in the first half of the seventeenth century. Folios 1—55 are missing, and the text begins in the sixth pageant dealing with Jacob. A mutilation of five leaves has removed the whole of the thirteenth and the beginning of the fourteenth pageants, while the eighteenth pageant of Naaman is imperfect at the end and wants a leaf in the middle. There remain