

Shakespeare's Tragedies

Edited by Emma Smith

Shakespeare's Tragedies

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Introduction

This Guide to Criticism has two purposes. First, it offers a narrative overview of pre-twentieth-century responses to Shakespeare's tragedies, including generous extracts from major commentators. Part I ends with the influential contribution of A. C. Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy*, first published in 1904. In Part II twentieth-century criticism is divided into thematic sections: 'Genre', 'Character', 'Language', 'Gender and Sexuality', 'History and Politics', 'Texts' and 'Performance'. Each of these sections includes a short overview of criticism in the area, and then reprints in full two significant recent articles or chapters. Thus the Guide stands in itself as a substantial critical history and collection of recent criticism, reprinted in a single volume for ease of reference. Second, through the overview introductions to each section, and through the extensive Further Reading sections, the Guide also offers those readers who have access to further critical reading some suggestions about how to navigate the great sea of secondary literature on Shakespeare, by indicating key debates or interventions in the critical history. It is not, nor could it be, definitive or exhaustive, nor is it intended to canonize those authors and arguments included; rather it is intended to be indicative of the range and vitality of Shakespearean criticism over 400 years, from the earliest sixteenth-century responses to the new playwright up to the end of the twentieth century.

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Part I

Criticism 1590–1904

1

Before Bradley: Criticism 1590–1904

1590–1660: Early Assessments

Contemporary mentions of Shakespeare are thin on the ground. It's striking – and salutary – for an historical account of early Shakespearean criticism to have its originating point in Robert Greene's disparaging remark about the young playwright as 'an upstart Crow, beautified with our feathers' (1592), but perhaps Greene's animosity was prompted by emerging jealousy of the newcomer's literary powers. By the time Shakespeare's narrative poems *Venus and Adonis* (1593) and *The Rape of Lucrece* (1594) had been published, however, their author was routinely included in lists of eminent Elizabethan authors. Francis Meres' commonplace book *Palladis Tamia* (1598) praises Shakespeare's generic versatility:

As *Plautus* and *Seneca* are accounted the best for Comedy and Tragedy among the Latins so Shakespeare among the English is the most excellent in both kinds for the stage; for comedy witness his *Gentlemen of Verona*, his *Errors*, his *Loves Labours Lost*, his *Loves Labours Won*, his *Midsummer Night's Dream* and his *Merchant of Venice*: for tragedy his *Richard the 2*. *Richard the 3*. *Henry the 4*, *King John*, *Titus Andronicus* and his *Romeo and Juliet*. (Meres, 1598, p. 282)

In a jesting preface to his poem *Diaphantus* (1604), Anthony Scolokar identifies the characteristics of good writing:

It should be like the never-too-well read *Arcadia* where the prose and verse, matter and words, are like his Mistress's eyes one still excelling another and without corival: or to come home to the vulgar's element, like friendly Shakespeare's tragedies, where the comedian rides when the tragedian stands on tiptoe: faith, it should please all, like Prince Hamlet. (Scolokar, 1604, sig. A2)

Scolokar's enjoyment of the play's generic mixture identifies and valorizes an aspect which was to be so offensive to neoclassical critics later in the century.

Other scattered references in the period exist, but the first substantial act of memorializing and of shaping Shakespeare's critical reputation was the publication in 1623 of a substantial folio volume collecting together thirty-six plays as *Mr William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories and Tragedies* (often known as the First Folio, or abbreviated to F). The title of the work reveals one of its most significant critical legacies: in dividing the plays into three genres in its catalogue, the First Folio established the critical categories still in use today: 'comedies', 'histories' and 'tragedies'. Thus the plays listed as tragedies in 1623 are, in their order, *The Tragedy of Coriolanus*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Timon of Athens*, *The Life and Death of Julius Caesar*, *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, *The Tragedy of Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Othello*, *The Moore of Venice*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Cymbeline*, *King of Britain*. *Troilus and Cressida* is not listed in the catalogue, although the play does appear in the volume between the last history play, *Henry VIII*, and the first tragedy, *Coriolanus*.

John Heminges and Henry Condell, Shakespeare's fellow-actors and the men responsible for the publishing of his collected plays, addressed their prefatory epistle 'To the Great Variety of Readers':

It had been a thing, we confess, worthy to have been wished, that the Author himself had lived to have set forth, and overseen his own writings; But since it hath been ordained otherwise, and he by death departed from that right, we pray you do not envy his Friends, the office of their care, and pain, to have collected and published them; and so to have published them, as where (before) you were abused with diverse stolen, and surreptitious copies, maimed, and deformed by the frauds and stealths of injurious impostors, that exposed them: even those, are now offered to your view cured, and perfect of their limbs; and all the rest, absolute in their numbers, as he conceived them. Who, as he was a happy imitator of Nature, was a most gentle expresser of it. His mind and hand went together: And what he thought, he uttered with that easiness, that we have scarce received from him a blot in his papers. But it is not our province, who only gather his works, and give them you, to praise him. It is yours that read him. And there we hope, to your diverse capacities, you will find enough, both to draw, and hold you: for his wit can no more lie hid, than it could be lost. Read him, therefore; and again, and again: And if then you do not like him, surely you are in some manifest danger, not to understand him. And so we leave you to other of his Friends, whom if you need, can be your guides: if you need them not, you can lead yourselves, and others. And such Readers we wish him. (Shakespeare, 1623)

The playwright Ben Jonson contributed an elegy:

Thou art a monument, without a tomb,
And art alive still, while thy book doth live,
And we have wits to read, and praise to give.
That I not mix thee so, my brain excuses;
I mean with great, but disproportioned Muses:
For, if I thought my judgement were of years,
I should commit thee surely with thy peers,
And tell, how far thou didst our Lyly out-shine,
Or sporting Kyd, or Marlowe's mighty line.
And though thou hadst small Latin, and less Greek,
From thence to honour thee, I would not seek
For names; but call forth thundering Æschylus,
Euripides, and Sophocles to us,
Paccuvius, Accius, him of Cordova dead,
To life again, to hear thy buskin tread,
And shake a stage: Or, when thy socks were on,
Leave thee alone, for the comparison
Of all, that insolent Greece, or haughty Rome
Sent forth, or since did from their ashes come.
Triumph, my Britain, thou hast one to show,
To whom all Scenes of Europe homage owe.
He was not of an age, but for all time!
And all the Muses still were in their prime,
When like Apollo he came forth to warm
Our ears, or like a Mercury to charm!
Nature herself was proud of his designs,
And joyed to wear the dressing of his lines!

In his *Timber, or Discoveries*, first published in 1640, Jonson again addressed Shakespeare's reputation, referring back to Heminge and Condell's 'To the Great Variety of Readers':

I remember the players have often mentioned it as an honour to Shakespeare, that in his writing, whatsoever to be penned, he never blotted out line. My answer hath been, 'Would he had blotted a thousand'; which they thought a malevolent speech. I had not told posterity this but for their ignorance, who choose that circumstance to commend their friend by wherein he most faulted; and to justify mine own candour: for I loved the man, and do honour his memory, on this side idolatry, as much as any. He was, indeed, honest, and of an open and free nature; had an excellent fantasy, brave notions, and gentle expressions; wherein he flowed with that facility that sometime it was necessary he should be stopped. '*sufflaminandus erat*' ['Sometimes he needed the brake'], as Augustus said of Haterius. His wit was in his own power, would the rule of it had been so too. Many times he fell into those things, could not escape laughter: as when he said in the person of Caesar, one speaking to him, 'Caesar, thou dost me

wrong'; he replied 'Caesar did never wrong, but with just cause'; and such like: which were ridiculous. But he redeemed his vices with his virtues. There was ever more in him to be praised than to be pardoned. (Donaldson, 1985, pp. 539–40)

1660–1720: Texts in Print and on Stage

It is to post-Restoration culture that we need to look to see the establishment of many now-familiar preoccupations and approaches to Shakespeare. As Michael Dobson notes, in his study of the 'extensive cultural work that went into the installation of Shakespeare as England's National Poet' between 1660 and 1769:

so many of the conceptions of Shakespeare we inherit date not from the Renaissance but from the Enlightenment. It was this period, after all, which initiated many of the practices which modern spectators and readers of Shakespeare would generally regard as normal or even natural: the performance of his female roles by women instead of men (instigated at a revival of *Othello* in 1660); the reproduction of his works in scholarly editions, with critical apparatus (pioneered by Rowe's edition of 1709 and the volume of commentary appended to it by Charles Gildon the following year); the publication of critical monographs devoted entirely to the analysis of his works (an industry founded by John Dennis's *An Essay upon the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare*, 1712); the promulgation of the plays in secondary education (the earliest known instance of which is the production of *Julius Caesar* mounted in 1728 'by the young Noblemen of the Westminster School'), and in higher education (first carried out in the lectures on Shakespeare given by William Hawkins at Oxford in the early 1750s); the erection of monuments to Shakespeare in nationally symbolic public places (initiated by Peter Sheemaker's statue in Poets' Corner, Westminster Abbey, unveiled in 1741); and the promotion of Stratford-upon-Avon as a site of secular pilgrimage (ratified at Garrick's jubilee in 1769). (Dobson, 1992, p. 3)

Ben Jonson's half-praise, half-sneer in his epitaph about Shakespeare's classical knowledge – 'small latin and less greek' – was an early suggestion of one of the obstacles to Shakespeare appreciation in post-Restoration culture. The Restoration aesthetics of neoclassicism favoured poetry as imitation of Classical, especially Roman, authors, and the idea of the writer as educated craftsman following ancient generic rules. Thus Thomas Fuller identifies Shakespeare among *The Worthies of England* in 1662, but is preoccupied with his subject's education, or lack of it:

Plautus, who was an exact Comædian, yet never any Scholar, as our Shakespeare (if alive) would confess himselfe. Adde to all these, that though his Genius gen-

erally was *jocular*, and inclining him to *festivity*, yet he could, (when so disposed), be *solemn* and *serious*, as appears by his Tragedies, so that *Heraclitus* himself (I mean if secret and unseen) might afford to smile at his Comedies, they were so *merry*, and *Democritus* scarce forbear to sigh at his Tragedies they were so *mournfull*. He was an eminent instance of the truth of that Rule, *Poeta no fit, sed nascitur*, one is not *made* but *born* a Poet. Indeed his Learning was very little, so that as *Cornish diamonds* are not polished by any Lapidary, but are pointed and smoothed even as they are taken out of the Earth, so *nature* it self was all the *art* that was used upon him. (Fuller, 1662, p. 126)

The introduction of nature as a term of cultural valorization to balance against art is key to the recuperation of Shakespeare in this period. When, for example, Margaret Cavendish defends Shakespeare in one of her *Sociable Letters* of 1664, she argues that it is the vitality of his characters that is crucial to his success:

So well he hath expressed in his plays all sorts of persons, as one would think he had been transformed into every one of those persons he hath described; and as sometimes one would think he was really himself the clown or jester he feigns, so one would think, he was also the King and Privy Counsellor [. . .] nay, one would think he had been metamorphosed from a man to a woman, for who could describe Cleopatra better than he hath done? (Thompson and Roberts, 1997, pp. 12–13)

Early in this process of recuperating Shakespeare is John Dryden's important statement of neoclassical aesthetics, *An Essay Of Dramatic Poesie* of 1668. Dryden's essay takes the form of a discussion between four interlocutors: Eugenius, Crites, Lisedeus and Neander, generally believed to represent Dryden himself. While others of the conversationalists praise Ben Jonson as 'the greatest man of the last age' because of his adherence to classical rules, particularly the unities of time, place and action (p. 14), Neander favours Shakespeare for his untutored but instinctive, intuitive expression. Shakespeare is to be praised for his natural learning, despite his flaws:

he was the man who of all Modern, and perhaps Ancient Poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul. All the Images of Nature were still present to him, and he drew them not laboriously but luckily: when he describes anything, you more than see it, you feel it too. Those who accuse him to have wanted learning, give him the greater commendation: he was naturally learn'd; he needed not the spectacles of Books to read Nature; he look'd inwards, and found her there. (Dryden, 1969, pp. 47–8)

In the comparison with Ben Jonson which was to be the touchstone for the nascent literary criticism of Shakespeare in the Restoration period, Neander's

emotional loyalties were clear: 'If I would compare [Jonson] with *Shakespeare*, I must acknowledge him the more correct Poet, but *Shakespeare* the greater wit. *Shakespeare* was the *Homer*, or Father of our Dramatick Poets; *Johnson* was the *Virgil*, the pattern of elaborate writing; I admire him, but I love *Shakespeare*.' (p. 50)

Whereas Dryden's Neander can forgive Shakespeare his perceived failings and acknowledge his appeal to feeling, Thomas Rymer was much more intransigent. Rymer, an archaeologist and literary scholar, was convinced of the aesthetic value of the classical unities and, indeed, wrote his own unperformed rhyming play, *Edgar, or the English Monarch: an Heroick Tragedy*, which observed these rules precisely. Rymer's *A Short View of Tragedy; Its Original, Excellency, and corruption. With Some Reflections on Shakespear, and other Practitioners for the Stage* (1693) is remarkable for its devastating account of Shakespeare's *Othello*: 'So much ado, so much stress, so much passion and repetition about an Handkerchief! Why was not this call'd the *Tragedy of the Handkerchief*?' (Rymer, 1970, p. 139).

For Rymer, the play violates decorum in several ways. For one thing, Rymer argues, *Othello*'s race makes it preposterous that he would be in so powerful a position in the state, and that Desdemona would ever have consented to marry him:

The Character of that State [Shakespeare's Venice] is to employ strangers in their Wars. But shall a Poet thence fancy that they will set a Negro to be their General; or trust a *Moor* to defend them against the *Turk*? With us a Black-a-moor might rise to be a Trumpeter; but *Shakespear* would not have him less than a Lieutenant-General. With us, a *Moor* might marry some little drab, or Small-coal Wench; *Shakespear*, would provide him with the Daughter and Heir of some great Lord or Privy-Councillor: And all the Town should reckon it a very suitable match [. . .] Nothing is more odious in Nature than an improbable lye; And, certainly, never was any play fraught, like this of *Othello*, with improbabilities. (pp. 91–2)

Rymer finds *Othello*'s character insufficiently noble to carry the tragedy: '*Othello* shows nothing of the Souldier's Mettle: but like a tedious, drawling, tame goose, is gaping after any paultrey insinuation, labouring to be jealous; And catching at every blown surmise' (p. 120). He finds fault with the play's failure to observe the unities of place, and with Shakespeare's language. He also criticizes the moral temper of the play by extracting from it ludicrous maxims:

First, This may be a caution to all Maidens of Quality how, without their Parents consent, they run away with Blackamoors. [. . .]

Secondly, This may be a warning to all good Wives, that they look well to their Linnen.

Thirdly, This may be a lesson to husbands, that before their jealousie be Tragical, the proofs may be Mathematical. (p. 89)

Rather than providing a moral framework for the instruction of its audiences, the play calls morality into question. Whereas for twentieth-century critics this troubling interrogation of received ideas would become one of Shakespeare's most significant qualities, for Rymer it is to be deplored:

What can remain with the Audience to carry home with them from this sort of Poetry, for their use and edification? how can it work, unless (instead of settling the mind, and purging our passions) to delude our senses, disorder our thoughts, addle our brain, pervert our affections, hair our imaginations, corrupt our appetite, and fill our head with vanity, confusion, *Tintamarre* and jingle-jangle. (p. 146)

Rymer concludes that the play is 'none other, than a Bloody Farce' (p. 146), and that '*Shakepears* genius lay for Comedy and Humour. In Tragedy he appears quite out of his element' (p. 156).

In his preface to the first scholarly edition of Shakespeare's works (1709–10), the poet laureate and tragedian Nicholas Rowe advocates a more historically informed appreciation of Shakespeare's apparent divergence from Classical precepts:

If one undertook to examine the greatest part of these [Shakespeare's tragedies] by those rules which are established by Aristotle, and taken from the model of the Grecian stage, it would be no very hard task to find a great many faults: but as Shakespear lived under a kind of mere light of nature, and had never been made acquainted with the regularity of those written precepts, so it would be hard to judge him by a law he knew nothing of. We are to consider him as a man that lived in a state of almost universal license and ignorance: there was no established judge, but every one took the liberty to write according to the dictates of his own fancy. (p. xxvi)

Rowe argues that writing outside the constraints of literary tradition allows Shakespeare's imagination free rein:

I believe we are better pleased with those thoughts, altogether new and uncommon, which his own imagination supplied him so abundantly with, than if he had given us the most beautiful passages out of the Greek and Latin poets, and that in the most agreeable manner that it was possible for a master of the English language to deliver them. (p. iv)

He also recognizes the generic hybridity of many, even the majority, of Shakespeare's plays:

His plays are properly to be distinguished only into comedies and tragedies. Those which are called histories, and even some of his comedies, are really tragedies, with a run or mixture of comedy amongst them. That way of tragi-Comedy was the common mistake of that age, and is indeed become so agreeable to the English Taste, that though the severer critics among us cannot bear it, yet the generality of our audiences seem to be better pleased with it than with an exact tragedy. (p. xvii)

A final seventh volume appended to the series in 1710 added a more extensive critique of the dramatic qualities of the plays, in 'An Essay on the Art, Rise and Progress of the Stage in Greece, Rome and England' by Charles Gildon. Through his evaluation of Shakespeare, Gildon attempts the twin task of educating his readers' literary tastes more generally, proposing a definition of tragedy which draws extensively on Aristotelian ideas, but disagreeing with Rymer's conclusions:

in spite of his known and visible errors, when I read Shakespear, even in some of his most irregular plays, I am surprised into a pleasure so great, that my judgment is no longer free to see the faults, though they are never so gross and evident. There is such a witchery in him, that all the rules of art, which he does not observe, though built on an equally solid and infallible reason, vanish away in the transports of those, that he does observe, so entirely, as if I had never known any thing of the matter. (p. iv)

Gildon suggests that Shakespeare's women were less satisfactory than his male characters – an early intervention into the debate about Shakespeare and gender representation (see chapter 2: Gender).

It must be owned that Shakespear drew men better, than women; to whom indeed he has seldom given any considerable place in his plays; here and in *Romeo and Juliet* he has done most in this matter, but here he has not given any graceful touches to Desdemona in many places of her part. (p. 411)

Like Rymer he is disturbed at the apparent amorality of the conclusions of Shakespeare's tragedies, particularly *King Lear*:

The King and Cordelia ought by no means to have died, and therefore Mr Tate has very justly altered that particular, which must disgust the reader and audience to have virtue and piety meet so unjust a reward. So that this plot, though of so celebrated a play, has none of the ends of tragedy moving neither fear nor

pity. We rejoice at the death of the Bastard and the two sisters, as of monsters in nature under whom the very earth must groan. And we see with horror and indignation the death of the King, Cordelia and Kent; though of the three the King only could move pity if that were not lost in the indignation and horror the death of the other two produces, for he is a truly tragic character not supremely virtuous nor scandalously vicious, he is made up of choler, and obstinacy, frailties pardonable enough in an old man, and yet what drew on him all the misfortunes of his life. (p. 406)

In the end, Gildon's view of Shakespeare is mixed:

Shakespear is indeed stor'd with a great many Beauties, but they are in a heap of Rubbish; and as in the Ruines of a magnificent Pile we are pleas'd with the Capitals of Pillars, the Basso-relievos and the like as we meet with them, yet how infinitely more beautiful, and charming must it be to behold them in their proper Places in the standing Building, where every thing answers the other, and one Harmony of all the Parts heightens the Excellence even of those Parts. (p. 425)

Gildon expanded this view in his book *The Complete Art of Poetry* (1718), in which the final chapter offers 'Shakespeariana: or Select Moral Reflections, topicks, Similies and Descriptions from Shakespear' – the first book of Shakespearean quotations.

It's easy to see how this idea of a Shakespeare good in parts also reflects contemporary stage practice. What Gildon is attempting critically – the sifting of worthy from unworthy elements of the plays – scores of stage-plays attempted dramatically, in adapting, rewriting and recombining Shakespeare's works to suit the tastes of new audiences. These adaptations are themselves works of criticism, often, in prefatory material and epilogues, explicitly so. John Dryden's preface to his reworking of *Antony and Cleopatra* as *All for Love* (1677) claims that his play 'imitate[s] the Divine Shakespeare' but does not copy 'servilely: Words and Phrases must of necessity receive a change in succeeding Ages: but 'tis almost a Miracle that much of his Language remains so pure' (Vickers, 1974, I, p. 164). Edward Ravenscroft's *Titus Andronicus, Or the Rape of Lavinia . . . A Tragedy* (1687) condemned Shakespeare's play as 'the most incorrect and indigested piece in all his Works; It seems rather a heap of Rubbish than a Structure'(Vickers, 1974, I, p. 239), despite making relatively few changes until the final scene. Such adaptations also reveal many of the same critical judgements and preoccupations as the emerging literary scholarship on Shakespeare. Thus John Dryden adapts *Troilus and Cressida* in 1679 in order to 'correct' a tragedy Dryden sees as one of Shakespeare's earlier and less accomplished works (it is now generally dated to the period 1602–3). Dryden notes that the play fails on moral and aesthetic grounds: 'the later part

of the Tragedy is nothing but a confusion of Drums and Trumpets, Excursions and Alarms. The chief persons, who give name to the Tragedy, are left alive: *Cressida* is false, and is not punish'd' (Vickers, 1974, I, p. 251). In order to rectify these perceived errors, Dryden announces 'the whole Fifth Act, both the Plot and the Writing, are my own Additions' (p. 251). The seal of approval on his changes is implied by the scripting of a patriotic prologue spoken by Shakespeare's ghost. Nahum Tate's version of *King Lear*, his *The History of King Lear* (1681), opens with a sententious Prologue warning 'Morals were alwaies proper for the Stage, / But are ev'n necessary in this Age' (Vickers, 1974, I, p. 346), thus implicitly endorsing Gildon's criticism about the cruel ending of Shakespeare's play. Tate rewrites a play rather closer to Shakespeare's source *The True Chronicle History of King Leir and his three Daughters* (1605), which ends with Lear retiring with Kent to 'pass our short reserves of Time / In calm Reflections on our Fortunes past, / Cheer'd with relation of the prosperous Reign / Of this celestial Pair' (p. 385) – the newly-wed sovereigns of ancient Britain, Cordelia and Edgar. In part this adaptation counters the questions about Shakespeare's aesthetics, but it also adapts this play of a king restored to his throne to the specific political tenor of the 1680s, as Nancy Klein Maguire's article in Marsden (1991) demonstrates. Similar political motives can be seen at work in Thomas Otway's rewriting of the plot of *Romeo and Juliet* crossed with the politics of *Coriolanus*, *Carius Marius* (first performed 1680) in which the fated lovers, Marius and Lavinia, are separated by political differences between their fathers in republican Rome.

John Dennis, who adapted *Coriolanus* as *The Invader of his Country, or the Fatal Resentment* (1705), also wrote an extensive criticism of Shakespeare in his *An Essay on the Genius and Writings of Shakespear*, published in 1712. Following previous commentators, Dennis counters the obstacle of Shakespeare's lack of scholarship with an appeal to nature, and makes a particular feature of Shakespeare's characterization and his emotional draw:

He had so fine a Talent for touching the Passions, and they are so lively in him, and so truly in Nature, that they often touch is more without their due Preparations, than those of other Tragick Poets, who have all the Beauty of Design and all the Advantage of Incidents. His Master-Passion was Terror, which he has often mov'd so powerfully and so wonderfully, that we may justly conclude, that if he had had the Advantage of Art and Learning, he wou'd have surpass'd the very best and strongest of the Ancients. (Dennis, 1712, p. 2)

Dennis suggests that we can only begin to imagine what Shakespeare's plays might have been had their author 'join'd to so happy a Genius Learning' (p. 3). But the absence of this knowledge has led him into aesthetic error:

Shakespear has been wanting in the exact Distribution of Poetical Justice not only in his *Coriolanus*, but in most of his best Tragedies, in which the Guilty and the Innocent perish promiscuously; as *Duncan* and *Banquo* in *Mackbeth*, as likewise *Lady Macduffe* and her Children; *Desdemona* in *Othello*; *Cordelia*, *Kent*, and King *Lear*, in the Tragedy that bears his Name; *Brutus* and *Porcia* in *Julius Caesar*, and young *Hamlet* in the Tragedy of *Hamlet*. (p. 9)

Despite these lapses, Dennis reverses Rymer's view that Shakespeare was a better comic than tragic writer, arguing: 'Tho' *Shakespear* succeeded very well in Comedy, yet his principal Talent and his chief Delight was Tragedy' (p. 27).

By the second decade of the eighteenth century, therefore, both Shakespearean textual scholarship in the form of Rowe's edition of 1709–10, and literary criticism in the contributions of Rymer, Gildon and Dennis, were both established and contested fields. Divergent impulses towards the canonizing and concretizing of the Shakespearean text on the one hand, and towards disintegration on the other, are key to eighteenth-century approaches.

1720–1765: Editions and Editors

Alexander Pope's edition of 1725 described itself on its title page as 'Collated and Corrected by the former Editions'. Pope's 'Preface of the Editor' evades the task of the critic in favour of that of the new, humanist textual scholar, the editor. Rather than entering 'into a Criticism upon this Author', Pope sets out to 'give an account of the fate of his Works, and the disadvantages under which they have been transmitted to us. We shall hereby extenuate many faults which are his, and clear him from the imputation of many which are not' (Pope, 1725, I, pp. i–ii). Pope acquits Shakespeare of the charges neoclassical critics had laid at his door: 'To judge therefore of Shakespear by Aristotle's rules, is like trying a man by the Laws of one Country, who acted under those of another' (p. vi). Rather, Pope repeats the critical orthodoxy that Shakespeare 'is not so much an Imitator, as an Instrument, of Nature; and 'tis not so just to say that he speaks from her, as that she speaks thro' him' (p. ii), and makes a particular feature of Shakespeare's characterization:

His Characters are so much Nature her self, that 'tis a sort of injury to call them by so distant a name as Copies of her [. . .] Every single character in Shakespear is as much an Individual, as those in Life itself; it is as impossible to find any two alike; and such as from their relation or affinity in any respect appear most to be Twins, will upon comparison be found remarkably distinct. To this life and variety of Character, we must add the wonderful Preservation of it; which is such throughout his plays, that had all the Speeches been printed without the very

names of the Persons, I believe one might have apply'd them with certainty to every speaker. (pp. ii–iii)

Pope praises Shakespeare's 'Power over our Passions' (p. iii), and also his intellectual control of 'the coolness of Reflection and Reasoning' (p. iv).

Many of Shakespeare's perceived faults are in fact, Pope proposes, errors of the printing and publication process. He surmises that Shakespeare did not authorize or check those of the plays published in quarto editions during his lifetime, and that therefore:

how many low and vicious parts and passages might no longer reflect upon this great Genius, but appear unworthily charged upon him? And even in those which are really his, how many faults may have been unjustly laid to his account from arbitrary Additions, Expunctions, Transpositions of scenes and lines, confusion of Characters and Persons, wrong application of Speeches, corruptions of innumerable Passages by the Ignorance, and wrong Corrections of 'em again by the Impertinence, of his first Editors? (p. xxi)

In 1726, a volume appeared with the descriptive title *Shakespeare Restored, or a Specimen of the many errors as well Committed as Unamended by Mr. Pope in his late edition of this poet: designed not only to correct the said Edition, but to restore the true Reading of Shakespeare in all the Editions ever published. By Mr. Theobald*. Its author, Lewis Theobald, proposed numerous new readings and emendations, particularly of *Hamlet*, many of which were plagiarized by Pope for his second edition which appeared in 1728. (A 1971 edition of this title is available.) Pope pilloried Theobald in the first edition of his mock-epic poem the *Dunciad* published a few months later, mocking his pedantry in footnotes wondering whether 'Dunciad' should be spelt 'Dunceiad' and pitying 'hapless Shakespear, yet of Tibbald sore, / Wish'd he had blotted for himself before'. Theobald's riposte was his own Shakespeare edition of 1733, *The works of Shakespeare: in seven volumes. Collated with the Oldest Copies, and Corrected; With notes, Explanatory and Critical*.

Theobald's style is effusive:

No Age, perhaps, can produce an Author more various from himself, than Shakespeare has been universally acknowledg'd to be. The Diversity in Stile, and other Parts of Composition, so obvious in him, is as variously to be accounted for. His Education, we find, was at best but begun: and he started early into a Science from the Force of Genius, unequally equally assisted by acquir'd Improvements. His Fire, Spirit, and Exuberance of Imagination gave an Impetuosity to his Pen: His Ideas flow'd from him in a Stream rapid, but not turbulent; copious, but not ever overbearing its Shores. The Ease and Sweetness of his Temper might not a little contribute to his Facility in Writing: as his Employ-

ment, as a Player, gave him an Advantage and Habit of fancying himself the very Character he meant to delineate. (Theobald, 1733, I, p. xv)

His view of his predecessor and literary rival Pope is clear; Shakespeare studies has its first real personality clash:

He has acted with regard to our Author, as an Editor, whom Lipsius mentions, did with regard to Martial; *Inventus est nescio quis Popa, qui non vitia ejus, sed ipsum, excidit.* He has attack'd him like an unhandy Slaughterman; and not lopp'd off the Errors, but the Poet.

Praise sometimes an Injury. When this is found to be the Fact, how absurd must appear the Praises of such an Editor? It seems a moot Point, whether Mr. Pope has done most Injury to Shakespeare as his Editor and Encomiast; or Mr. Rymer done him Service as his Rival and Censurer. Were it every where the true Text, which That Editor in his late pompous Edition gave us, the Poet deserv'd not the large Encomiums bestow'd by him: nor, in that Case, is Rymer's Censure of the Barbarity of his Thoughts, and the Impropriety of his Expressions, groundless. They have Both shewn themselves in an equal Impuissance of suspecting or amending the corrupted Passages: and tho' it be neither Prudence to censure, or commend, what one does not understand; yet if a Man must do one when he plays the Critick, the latter is the more ridiculous Office. And by That Shakespeare suffers most. (pp. xxxv–xxxvi)

Theobald's is not, however, the last word in this particular bibliographic and personal spat. In 1747 Pope, together with his collaborator William Warburton, brought out an edition to trump Theobald: *The works of Shakespear in eight volumes. The Genuine Text (collated with all the former Editions, and then corrected and emended) is here settled: Being restored from the Blunders of the first Editors, and the Interpolations of the two Last: with A Comment and Notes, Critical and Explanatory.*

Theobald's edition establishes and promulgates his own theory of the editor's task. This covers three activities: 'the Emendation of corrupt Passages; the Explanation of obscure and difficult ones; and an Inquiry into the Beauties and Defects of Composition' (p. xl). He elaborates on his editorial principles:

Where-ever the Author's Sense is clear and discoverable, (tho', perchance, low and trivial;) I have not by any Innovation tamper'd with his Text; out of an Ostentation of endeavouring to make him speak better than the old Copies have done.

Where, thro' all the former Editions, a Passage has labour'd under flat Nonsense and invincible Darkness, if, by the Addition or Alteration of a Letter or two, I have restored to Him both Sense and Sentiment, such Corrections, I am persuaded, will need no Indulgence.

And whenever I have taken a greater Latitude and Liberty in amending, I have constantly endeavoured to support my Corrections and Conjectures by parallel Passages and Authorities from himself, the surest Means of expounding any Author whatsoever [. . .] Some Remarks are spent in explaining Passages, where the Wit or Satire depends on an obscure Point of History: Others, where Allusions are to Divinity, Philosophy, or other Branches of Science. Some are added to shew, where there is a Suspicion of our Author having borrow'd from the Antients: Others, to shew where he is rallying his Contemporaries; or where He himself is rallied by them. And some are necessarily thrown in, to explain an obscure and obsolete Term, Phrase, or Idea. (p. xliii–xliv)

Further editions, including those by Hamner and Capell, appeared throughout the eighteenth century as each editor claimed to be improving on the text of his predecessors (see chapter 12: Texts).

Shakespeare's most significant and influential eighteenth-century mediator was editor and critic Samuel Johnson, whose annotated edition appeared in 1765. Johnson sets out 'to inquire, by what peculiarities of excellence *Shakespeare* has gained and kept the favour of his countrymen' (Johnson, 1765, I, p. viii). The answer, for Johnson is that:

Shakespeare is above all writers [. . .] the poet of nature; the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirrour of manners and of life. His characters are not modified by the customs of particular places, unpractised by the rest of the world, by the peculiarities of studies or professions, which can operate but on small numbers; or by the accidents of transient fashions or temporary opinions; they are the genuine progeny of common humanity, such as the work will always supply, and observation will always find. His persons act and speak by the influence of those general passions, and the whole system of life is continued in motion. (pp. viii–ix)

For Johnson, Shakespeare is a philosopher and teacher, filled with 'practical axioms and domestick wisdom', but he argues strongly against the recent tendency to find Shakespeare's greatness in particular passages: 'he that tries to recommend him by select quotations, will succeed like the pedant in *Hierocles*, who, when he offered his house to sale, carried a brick in his pocket as a specimen' (p. ix). Verisimilitude, the quality of creating recognizable individuals, dialogue and scenarios, is key to Johnson's appraisal of Shakespeare's work. Thus '*Shakespeare* has no heroes; his scenes are occupied only by men, who act and speak as the reader thinks that he should himself have spoken or acted on the same occasion', he 'approximates the remote, and familiarizes the wonderful', and his reader can benefit from 'reading human sentiments in human language' (pp. xi–xii).

Johnson's approach to Shakespeare's genres is radical:

Shakespeare's plays are not in the rigorous or critical sense either tragedies or comedies, but compositions of a distinct kind, exhibiting the real state of sub-lunary nature, which partakes of good and evil, joy and sorrow, mingled with endless variety of proportion and innumerable modes of combination; and expressing the course of the world, in which the loss of one is the gain of another; in which, at the same time, the reveller is hastening to his wine and the mourner burying his friend; in which the malignity of one is sometimes defeated by the frolic of another; and many mischiefs and benefits are done and hindered without design. (p. xiii)

While this, Johnson admits, is 'a practice contrary to the rules of criticism', 'there is always an appeal open from criticism to nature'. Unlike the classical authors set as exemplars by neoclassical critics, '*Shakespeare* has united the powers of exciting laughter and sorrow not only in one mind but in one composition' (p. xiv). Johnson exonerates him from the charge of neglecting the classical unities, arguing that spectators are not so literal-minded as to require the stage to represent a single place or continuous time:

the truth is, that spectators are always in their senses, and know, from the first act to the last, that the stage is only a stage and that the players are only players. [...] Where is the absurdity of allowing that space to represent first *Athens*, and then *Sicily*, which was always known to be neither *Sicily* nor *Athens* but a modern theatre. (p. xxvii)

Shakespeare is close to nature, not nature itself: the consciousness of artifice is a necessary condition of the theatre:

The reflection that strikes the heart is not, that the evils before us are real evils, but that they are evils to which we ourselves may be exposed. If there be any fallacy, it is not that we fancy the players, but that we fancy ourselves unhappy for a moment; but we rather lament the possibility than suppose the pretence of misery, as a mother weeps over her babe, when she remembers that death may take it from her. The delight of tragedy proceeds from our consciousness of fiction; if we thought murders and treasons real, they would please no more. (p. xxvii)

Johnson's awareness of Shakespeare's 'excellencies' makes him equally clear about his failings. The moral objections to Shakespeare's tragic plots recur: writing of *King Lear*, Johnson notes that 'Shakespeare has suffered the virtue of Cordelia to perish in a just cause, contrary to the natural ideas of justice, to the hope of the reader, and, what is yet more strange, to the faith of Chronicles' (Johnson, 1765, IV, p. 160):

A play in which the wicked prosper, and the virtuous miscarry, may doubtless be good, because it is a just representation of the common events of human life: but since all reasonable beings naturally love justice, I cannot easily be persuaded, that the observation of justice makes a play worse; or, that if other excellencies are equal, the audience will not always rise better pleased from the final triumph of persecuted virtue.

In the present case the publick has decided. Cordelia, from the time of Tate, has always retired with victory and felicity. And, if my sensations could add any thing to the general suffrage, I might relate, that I was many years ago so shocked by Cordelia's death, that I know not whether I ever endured to read again the last scenes of the play till I undertook to revise them as an editor. (VI, p. 160)

He also criticizes Shakespeare for loose and sometimes careless plotting, and for a tendency to tail off in the latter part of his plays, so that 'his catastrophe is improbably produced or imperfectly represented' (I, p. xx) – *Hamlet* serves as an example. Shakespeare is rebuked for the violation of chronology and his use of anachronisms, and for occasionally strained or wearisome rhetoric, but Johnson reserves his most lengthy, and famous, censure for Shakespeare's wordplay:

A quibble is to *Shakespeare*, what luminous vapours are to the traveller; he follows it at all adventures, it is sure to lead him out of his way, and sure to engulf him in the more. It has some malignant power over his mind, and its fascinations are irresistible. Whatever be the dignity or profundity of his disqualification, whether he be enlarging knowledge or exalting affection, whether he be amusing attention with incidents, or enchaining it in suspense, let but a quibble spring up before him, and he leaves his work unfinished. A quibble is the golden apple for which he will always turn aside from his career, or stoop from his elevation. A quibble poor and barren as it is, gave him such delight, that he was content to purchase it, by the sacrifice of reason, propriety and truth. A quibble was to him the fatal *Cleopatra* for which he lost the world, and was content to lose it. (I, pp. xxiii–xxiv)

Like previous commentators, Johnson allows for a mixture of good and bad qualities in Shakespeare's work: 'he has scenes of undoubted and perpetual excellence, but perhaps not one play which, if it were now exhibited as the work of a contemporary writer, would be heard to its conclusion.' Rather, Johnson argues, 'it must be at last confessed, that as we owe everything to him, he owes something to us; that, if much of his praise is paid by perception and judgement, much is likewise given by custom and veneration' (I, p. xlvi).

1765–1800: Texts on Page and Stage

Johnson's interest in the texts of the plays did not extend to an interest in their theatrical performance. Sandra Clark describes the eighteenth century's preference for adapted Shakespeare on the stage as a 'paradox whereby Shakespeare's works achieved the status of "classics" in the study while for a long period on the stage the divine Bard (as he came to be called) was often represented by plays only a small proportion of which he actually wrote' (Clark, 1997, p. xliii). Shakespeare's position in the theatre during the eighteenth century was largely dependent on his tragedies (see Hogan, 1952, vol. II). Bell's Acting Edition of 1774, dedicated to David Garrick – 'the best illustrator of, and the best living comment on, Shakespeare' (Bell, 1969, I, p. 3) – presents itself as a 'a companion to the theatre' (p. 8) rather than a critical edition. It prints the texts with the standard performance cuts and emendations, proposing that these changes allow 'the noble monuments he has left us, of unrivalled ability, [to] be restored to due proportion and natural lustre, by sweeping off those cobwebs, and that dust of depraved opinion, which Shakespeare was unfortunately forced to throw on them' (p. 6). Bell's edition also presents itself as an alternative to the increasingly scholarly and specialized writing on Shakespeare, as a forerunner to self-consciously pedagogic or introductory volumes popular in the twentieth century:

it has been our peculiar endeavour to render what we call the essence of Shakespeare, more instructive and intelligible; especially to the ladies and to youth; glaring indecencies being removed, and intricate passages explained; and lastly, we have striven to supply plainer ideas of criticism, both in public and private, than we have hitherto met with.

A general view of each play is given, by way of introduction.

Though this is not an edition meant for the profoundly learned, nor the deeply studious, who love to find out, and chace their own critical game; yet we flatter ourselves both parties may perceive fresh ideas started for speculation and reflection. (pp. 9–10)

The edition's particular stress on theatrical representation is often cited as an alternative locus of aesthetic success to critical appreciation. Thus *Macbeth* 'even amidst the fine sentiments it contains, would shrink before criticism, did not Macbeth and his Lady afford such uncommon scope for acting-merit: upon the whole, it is a fine dramatic structure, with some gross blemishes' (p. 3), and the end of *Hamlet* is criticized: 'The fifth Act of this play is by no means so good as we could wish; yet it engages attention in public, by having a good deal of bustle, and, what English audiences love, many deaths' (p. 84).

While Shakespeare criticism looks to be a male preserve, women were also increasingly involved. Elizabeth Montagu's *An Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespear, compared with the Greek and French Dramatic Poets* (1769) was extensively reprinted and translated. Montagu scorned as narrow-minded critics who criticized Shakespeare's learning:

For copying nature he found it in the busy walks of human life, he drew from an original, with which the literati are seldom well acquainted. They perceive his portraits are not of the Grecian or of the Roman school: after finding them unlike to the celebrated forms preserved in learned museums they do not deign to enquire whether they resemble the living persons they were intended to represent. (Montagu, [1769] 1970, p. 17)

It is Shakespeare's facility with drawing recognizable characters which Montagu most admires: he 'seems to have had the art of the Dervise, in the Arabian tales, who could throw his soul into the body of another man, and be at once possessed of his sentiments, adopt his passions, and rise to all the functions and feelings of his situation' (p. 37). Writing of *Macbeth*, Montagu praises it for exciting 'a species of terror that cannot be effected by the operation of human agency, or by any form or disposition of human things' – constructing the play as a kind of Gothic story rather like Ann Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) which uses quotations from *Macbeth* for several of its chapter epigraphs.

Elizabeth Griffith, in her *The Morality of Shakespeare's Drama Illustrated* (1775), described Shakespeare as a 'Philosopher' whose 'anatomy of the human heart is delineated from *nature*, not from *metaphysics*; referring immediately to our intuitive sense and not wandering with the schoolmen' (Griffith, 1971, p. ix), and thus, perhaps, uniquely accessible and applicable to contemporary women largely denied a classical education. Like Montagu, Griffith is able to claim authority to write on Shakespeare by wresting him from the enervating grasp of the scholar and reinstating him as the poet of everyday life. At times in her extensive commentary, Griffith speaks consciously as a female reader of Shakespeare, as when she discusses Lady Macbeth's line 'That which hath made them drunk, hath made me bold' (2.2.1):

Our sex is obliged to Shakespeare, for this passage. He seems to think that a woman could not be rendered completely wicked, without some degree of intoxication. It required two vices in her; one to intend, and another to perpetrate the crime. He does not give *wine* and *wassail* to Macbeth; leaving him in his natural state, to be actuated by the temptation of ambition alone. (pp. 412–13)

In this she echoes Elizabeth Montagu: 'The difference between a mind naturally prone to evil, and a frail one warped by force of temptations, is delicately

distinguished in Macbeth and his wife' (Montagu, 1970, p. 200), and anticipates the great female defender of Lady Macbeth, Mrs Jameson in her *Characteristics of Women* (1832).

Character study was to be the dominant theme of Romantic criticism of Shakespeare. There were, however, other strands emerging. In 1794 Walter Whiter published *A Specimen of a Commentary on Shakspeare. Containing I. Notes on As You Like It. II. An Attempt to Explain and Illustrate various passages on a new principle of criticism, derived from Mr. Locke's doctrine of The Association of Ideas*. Whiter explained John Locke's idea of 'association' as 'the combination of those ideas, which have no natural alliance or relation to each other' (Whiter, 1972, p. 65). Whiter argued that critics had hitherto been preoccupied by discovering

the *direct*, though sometimes perhaps obscure allusions, which the poet has *intentionally* made to the customs of his own age, and to the various vices, follies, passions and prejudices, which are the pointed objects of his satire or his praise. But the commentators have not marked those *indirect* and *tacit* references, which are produced by the writer with *no* intentional allusion; or rather they have not unfolded those trains of thought, alike pregnant with the materials *peculiar* to his age, which often prompt the combinations of the poet in the wildest exertions of his fancy, and which conduct him, unconscious of the effect, to the various *peculiarities* of his imagery or his language. (pp. 71–2)

Whiter's commentary on Lady Macbeth's 'Come, thick Night, / And PALL me in the dunnest smoke of Hell! / That my keen KNIFE see not the wound it makes; / Nor HEAVEN PEEP thro' the BLANKET of the dark, / To cry, *Hold, hold*' (1.5.49–53) is a model of his method to disinter connections between the words highlighted. First, Whiter cites previous authorities: Steevens and Warburton discuss 'pall' as a robe of state or funeral cloth; Malone has objected to knife 'as being connected with the most sordid offices; and therefore unsuitable to the great occasion on which it is employed' (p. 153); the anonymous play *A Warning to Fair Women* shows that it is in fact synonymous with 'dagger'; Malone suggests blanket was 'suggested to him by the coarse *woollen* curtain of his own Theatre' (p. 154):

Let not the reader smile at this specimen of conjectural criticism, nor imagine that it should be regarded only as a quaint and whimsical conceit. Nothing is more certain, than that all the images in this celebrated passage are borrowed from the stage [. . .] the peculiar and appropriate dress of TRAGEDY personified is a PALL with a KNIFE. [. . .] With respect to the passage before us, I imagine that the whole of this image was suggested to our Poet from the appearance of the Stage, as it was furnished at those times when Tragedies were represented: it was then hung with *black* [. . .] supported with reference to Malone, and parallel to Marston's Insatiate Countess. (p. 154)

Whiter's careful exposition of linguistic details marks an early example of something twentieth-century critics as diverse as William Empson and Patricia Parker (see chapter 6: Language) have developed.

1800–1840: Romantic Criticism by Schlegel, Coleridge and Hazlitt

For many early nineteenth-century readers of Shakespeare the stage was inadequate to the plays. Charles Lamb's essay 'On the tragedies of Shakspeare, considered with reference to their fitness for stage representation' (1811) codified one of Romanticism's major feelings about Shakespeare: that his works were better read and studied than performed, indeed, that 'the plays of Shakspeare are less calculated for performance on a stage, than those of almost any other dramatist whatever' (Lamb, 1903, p. 115). Lamb's objection to performance was partly because of the difficulty of separating the character from the actor, thus displacing contemplation of the author with contemplation of the actor in a confusion 'from which persons otherwise not meanly lettered, find it almost impossible to extricate themselves' (p. 114). It is a relief to escape into plays which have remained unperformed and therefore unspoilt, Lamb suggests:

I confess myself utterly unable to appreciate that celebrate soliloquy in Hamlet, beginning 'To be or not to be,' or to tell whether it be good, bad or indifferent, it has been so handled and pawed about by declamatory boys and men, and torn so inhumanly from its living place and principle of continuity in the play, till it is become to me a perfect dead member. (p. 115)

Hamlet is essentially an interior character:

nine parts in ten of what Hamlet does, are transactions between himself and his moral sense, they are the effusions of his solitary musings, which he retires to holes and corners and the most sequestered parts of the palace to pour forth; or rather, they are the silent meditations with which his bosom is bursting, reduced to *words* for the sake of the reader, whom must else remain ignorant of what is passing there. These profound sorrows, these light-and-noise-abhorring ruminations, which the tongue scarce dares utter to deaf walls and chambers, how can they be represented by a gesticulation actor, who comes and mouths them out before an audience, making four hundred people his confidants at once? (pp. 116–17)

Watching an actor 'personating a passion' is true only to 'that symbol of the emotion which passes current at the theatre for it' (p. 119) – a derivative and enervated experience. Thus:

To see Lear acted – to see an old man tottering about the stage with a walking-stick, turned out of doors by his daughters in a rainy night, has nothing in it but what is painful and disgusting [. . .] The greatness of Lear is not in corporal dimension, but in intellectual: the explosions of his passion are terrible as a volcano: they are storms turning up and disclosing to the bottom that sea, his mind, with all its vast riches. It is his mind which is laid bare. This case of flesh and blood seems too significant to be thought on; even as he himself neglects it. On the stage we see nothing but corporal infirmities and weakness, the impotence of rage; while we read it, we see not Lear, but we are Lear – we are in his mind, we are sustained by a grandeur which baffles the malice of daughters and storms. (p. 124)

Lamb's final assessment, that 'the Lear of Shakspeare cannot be acted' (p. 124) is consonant with contemporary stage practice, as adaptations such as that by Tate continued to hold the stage in place of Shakespeare's text.

Lamb's conclusions are elaborated elsewhere. In his 'Shakespeare und kein Ende' (translated as 'Shakespeare ad Infinitum') of 1815, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe claimed Shakespeare as a poet whose works are 'not for the physical vision':

Shakespeare speaks always to our inner sense [. . .] if we study the works of Shakespeare enough, we find that they contain much more of spiritual truth than of spectacular action. He makes happen what can easily be conceived by the imagination, indeed what can be better imagined than seen. Hamlet's ghost, Macbeth's witches, many fearful incidents, get their value only through the power of the imagination, and many of the minor scenes get their force from the same source. In reading, all these things pass easily through our minds, and seem quite appropriate, whereas in representation on the stage they would strike us unfavourably and appear not only unpleasant but even disgusting. (LeWinter, 1970, p. 58)

For Goethe, Shakespeare's power is in the language: 'there is no higher of purer pleasure than to sit with closed eyes and hear a naturally expressive voice recite, not declaim, a play of Shakespeare's' (p. 58). For Goethe, as for many critics of the period, Shakespeare is a Romantic thinker, 'a decidedly modern poet' (p. 60), and one whose work, particularly in his tragedies, is animated by the connection between 'Will and Necessity' (p. 62):

The person, considered as a character, is under a certain necessity; he is constrained, appointed to a certain particular line of action; but as a human being he has a will, which is unconfined and universal in its demands. Thus arises an inner conflict, and Shakespeare is superior to all other writers in the significance with which he endows this. But now an outer conflict may arise, and the individual through it may become so aroused that an insufficient will is raised

through circumstance to the level of irremissible necessity. These motives [can be seen] in the case of Hamlet; but the motive is repeated constantly in Shakespeare – Hamlet through the agency of the ghost; Macbeth through the witches, Hecate and his wife; Brutus through his friends gets into a dilemma and situation to which they were not equal; even in Coriolanus the same motive is found. This Will, which reaches beyond the power of the individual, is decidedly modern. But since in Shakespeare it does not spring from within, but is developed through external circumstance, it becomes a sort of Necessity. (LeWinter, pp. 62–3)

Macbeth was a particular nineteenth-century favourite. Thomas De Quincey's essay, 'On the Knocking at the Gate in Macbeth' (1823), locates the play's tragic interest in its creation of sympathy not for the victim of murder but its perpetrator:

Murder in ordinary cases, when the sympathy is wholly directed to the case of the murdered person, is an incident of coarse and vulgar horror; and for this reason – that it flings the interest exclusively upon the natural but ignoble instinct by which we cleave to life [. . .] exhibits human nature in its most abject and humiliating attitude. Such an attitude would little suit the purposes of the poet. What then must he do? He must throw the interest on the murderer: our sympathy must be with *him*; (of course I mean a sympathy of comprehension, a sympathy by which we enter into his feelings, and are made to understand them, – not a sympathy of pity or approbation:) [. . .] In *Macbeth*, for the sake of gratifying his own enormous and teeming faculty of creation, Shakspeare has introduced two murderers: and, as usual in his hands, they are remarkably discriminated: but though in *Macbeth* the strife of mind is greater than in his wife, the tiger spirit not so awake, and his feelings caught chiefly by contagion from her, – yet, as both were finally involved in the guilt of murder, the murderous mind of necessity is finally to be presumed in both. (De Quincey, 2000, III, p. 152)

De Quincey, most famous for his account of opium addiction in his *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1822), imagines the Macbeths cut off from humanity in a kind of trance of their own wickedness, broken only by the knocking at the gate:

Here, [in *Macbeth*] the retiring of the human heart and the entrance of the fiendish heart was to be expressed and made sensible. Another world has stepped in; and the murderers are taken out of the region of human beings, human purposes, human desires. [. . .] In order that a new world may step in, this world must for a time disappear. The murderers, and the murder, must be insulated – cut off by an immeasurable gulph from the ordinary tide and succession of human affairs – locked up and sequestered in some deep recess: we must be made

sensible that the world of ordinary life is suddenly arrested – laid asleep – tranced – racked into a dread armistice: time must be annihilated; relation to things without abolished; and all must pass self-withdrawn into a deep syncope and suspension of earthly passion. Hence it is that when the deed is done – when the work of darkness is perfect, then the world of darkness passes away like a pageantry in the clouds: the knocking at the gate is heard; and it makes known audibly that the reaction has commenced; the human has made its reflux upon the fiendish: the pulses of life are beginning to beat again: and the re-establishment of the goings-on of the world in which we live, first makes us profoundly sensible of the awful parenthesis that has suspended them. (p. 153)

It was a frequent turn of eighteenth-century criticism to compare Shakespeare's tragedies with those of ancient Greece. In his *The Philosophy of Fine Art*, based on lectures delivered in the 1820s and published posthumously a decade later, G. W. F. Hegel used *Hamlet* to illustrate the difference between ancient and modern tragedy. The main difference is the role and inscription of individuality, or character:

The heroes of ancient classical tragedy discover circumstances under which they, so long as they irrefragably adhere to the *one* ethical state of pathos which alone corresponds to their own already formed personality, must infallibly come into conflict with an ethical Power which opposes theme and possesses an equal ethical claim to recognition. Romantic characters, on the contrary, are from the first placed within a wide expanse of contingent relations and conditions, within which every sort of action is possible; so that the conflict, to which no doubt the external conditions presupposed supply the occasion, essentially abides within the *character* itself, to which the individuals concerned in their passion give effect, not, however, in the interests of the ethical vindication of the truly substantive claims, but for the simple reason that they are the kind of men they are. [. . .] In a modern tragedy it is the individual character (and for such a character it is a matter of accident whether he chooses that which on its own account is right, or whether he is led into wrong and crime) who makes his decisions, either following his personal desires and needs or responding to purely external influences. (LeWinter, 1970, p. 81)

Hegel develops his idea of dialectical tragedy, arguing that:

It is precisely Shakespeare who, as a contrast to that exposition of vacillating and essentially self-divided characters, supplies us with the finest examples of essentially stable and consequential characters, who go to their doom precisely in virtue of this tenacious hold upon themselves and their ends. Unsupported by the sanction of the moral law, but rather carried onward by the formal necessity of their personality, they suffer themselves to be involved in their acts by the coil of external circumstances, or they plunge blindly therein and maintain

themselves there by sheer force of will, even where all that they do is merely done because they are impelled to assert themselves against others, or because they have simply come to the particular point they have reached. (pp. 85–6)

There are two possible responses to such tragedies, Hegel argues. One is to see a kind of justice implied in its operations, along with the demand that the characters

should of necessity appear themselves to acknowledge the justice of their fate. Such a state of acceptance may either be of a religious nature, in which case the soul becomes conscious of a more exalted and indestructible condition of blessedness with which to confront the collapse of its mundane personality; or it may be of a more formal, albeit more worldly type [. . . which] preserves with unimpaired energy all its personal freedom [. . . or] the recognition that the lot which the individual receives is the one, however bitter it may be, which his action merits. (p. 87)

The other point of view sees the tragedy as a matter ‘of the effect of unhappy circumstances and external accidents’:

From such a point of view we have merely left us the conception that the modern idea of individuality, with its searching definition of character, circumstances, and developments, is handed over essentially to the contingency of the earthly state, and must carry the fateful issues of such finitude. Pure commiseration of this sort is, however, destitute of meaning; and it is nothing less than a frightful kind of external necessity in the particular case where we see the downfall of essentially noble natures in their conflict thus assumed with the mischance of purely external accidents. Such a course of events can insistently arrest our attention; but in the result it can only be horrible, and the demand is direct and irresistible that the external accidents ought to accord with that which is identical with the spiritual nature of such noble characters. Only as thus regarded can we feel ourselves reconciled with the grievous end of Hamlet and Juliet. (pp. 87–8)

Whereas one major current in eighteenth-century Shakespeare criticism was to sift the plays for their beauties and point out their weaknesses, Romantic critics such as Schlegel argued for their ‘organic unity’, a structural organization intrinsic to the literary work which ‘unfolds itself from within’ and not imposed by a framework of rigid classical aesthetics. As Bate argues, the ongoing influence of this method, taken up by I. A. Richards as ‘practical criticism’, can still be seen in the many educational contexts in which close reading aimed at uncovering organic form is taught and examined (Bate, 1992, p. 5). In his lectures, translated into English in 1864, Schlegel identifies characterization as one of Shakespeare’s most dominant qualities: