

## THE PSYCHOLOGY OF SHAKESPEARE\*

THIS book may be classed at once as on the sane side in Shakespeare research. It is also on the side of the humaner letters, beautifully written and excellently produced, and striking a golden mean between Textual Criticism and Higher Criticism, better of so much futility and freak. Monsignor Kolbe prefaces his analyses of the plays with some simple and profound general remarks on the analogy between great pictures and great dramas. Both alike, he says, display the subconsciousness of the artist, appealing to the subconsciousness of the onlooker. Modern thought is much handicapped by a wilful ignorance of what ancient thought took for granted, and is perpetually bewrayed with startling discoveries of what everyone knew when the world was comparatively young, or at least unstaled. They, the ancients, knew that each man keeps a treasure-house of his experiences organic or mental, and that some have a larger and better store, some a choice and ordered store, and others a parti-coloured rag-bag. And this they called *Memoria*. Samuel Butler alone and early, rediscovered this mysterious mother of the Muses to be the mother of specific differences in organic matter, and the author of instinct; in one pregnant phrase undoing, or at least gainsaying, the disastrous error of Darwin, who stressed environment as one of the parents of specific differentiation.

First in the illustration of his thesis, the author chooses *Macbeth* as a clear indubitable example of Shakespeare's use of that *leit-motif*, or leading melody, or refrain, which, he maintains, gives the

\**Shakespeare's Way*. A Psychological Study by the Right Reverend F. C. Kolbe, D. Litt. (London, Sheed and Ward; 6/-.)

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key to the great playwright's leading motive in each play. Macbeth begins with a reiteration almost damnable, of BLOOD. Next comes the SLEEP movement, for Macbeth shall murder sleep, and the sympathetic resolution of the discord is most triumphantly achieved in the BLOOD and SLEEP scene of Lady Macbeth. These are the sense appeal of the tragedy, and slowly rises out of them the idea and growing emphasis of CONFUSION, or ANARCHY, of which the natural, inevitable end is self-contradiction or nullity. One sure advantage of the Kolbe method is the enhanced force and beauty of certain passages :

Give sorrow words : the grief that will not speak  
Whispers the o'erfraught heart and bids it break,

or

a breach in nature  
For RUIN's wasteful entrance.

Indeed, in the light of this valuable commentary I personally see Macbeth to be the open declaration of the thesis cryptical of Hamlet. Considering that Shakespeare was touching up Hamlet while pondering Macbeth is a pastime which may throw clear light into shadowy corners.

Our author passes at once to Hamlet, and from some of his remarks we hope the actor-manager may never, never, come back. At least not to play Hamlet. In Yorkshire the phrase to play Hamlet is a pious metonymy for playing Hell, and Monsignor Kolbe gives excellent reasons for the popular identification of the one with the other. Henry Irving was a specially noxious innovator, and as for Beerbohm Tree——! They all seem to cut out the delicate pointers to the dramatist's real meaning, not in one play alone, but in every one. And sometimes they fill in the ensuing blanks, God pity us! Ellen Terry relates how more

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than one of these self-made stars never addressed her on the stage, but declaimed a yard to the left of her left ear, or forty-five degrees above her head, or quite away from her altogether. But enough of the dead elephant, for still he stinks.

Shakespeare's play of Hamlet is all a tragedy of the QUANDARY. Hamlet, a brilliant but quite normal man (madness avault!), is faced with a situation of fearful complexity, the analysis being that the Royal Family are tied in a black knot, and that foreign affairs forbid any attempt to cut it. And yet a Higher Power hints that something must be done. (The foreign policy scenes are always cut wholesale, and it is hopeless to ask for their inclusion). So at every turn in the drama is a pointed reference to introspection, psycho-analysis, question, debate, all on the great problem. Protestant History makes small play of the fact that three-fourths of England in Shakespeare's day were ground to powder by one fourth, mostly lawyers and thieves. As our author says, young Fortinbras (him from Norway), or James the Sixth (him from Scotland or North Britain) would have settled the absurdity in half an hour, and Laertes, or the Catholic Party of Action (very heady and leaderless) in ten minutes. What could a real lover of England do? Speak daggers, but use none.

Why is Julius Caesar next best in general favour, after Hamlet? Because Brutus, or one of ourselves, is the hero, says the book. He, too, is in an impossible situation. He kills his friend, the foremost man of all the world, at instance of his political friends, who are friends to no one but themselves. He, a noble, sincere soul, had stood somewhat aloof from politics, melancholy, brooding. Aloof from the *mob*, isolated by his virtue, he is *got at* by a minor mob, who persuade him that the end justifies the means. Then the multitude are turned against him by one

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who well knows how, having his being in the main stream of politics. It is a clear doctrine of St. Thomas, I believe, that one must endure much rather than subvert established order whatsoever form it take. Did Shakespeare know? We can be absolutely sure that if Bacon knew, he cared for none of these difficult questions.

We have dwelt upon those plays which occupy most room in the author's consideration, leaving to purchasers of the book the delight of verifying its conclusions and following out its suggestions, improving on them, if they will call it so. We do not remember any book so truly enlightening on the superhuman poet since Father Bowden's *Religion of Shakespeare*. Lest we be brought in guilty of mere eulogy, we beg to note that we really wish the author had given more time and care to such plays as *Othello* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. A passing clout here and there to G. B. Shaw is part of the delight of the book.

JOHN O'CONNOR.

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