"THIS IS NOT A POET; IT IS A CREATOR"—HERDER

"A Sea of Events," "The History of the World," the Great German Said

By Johann Gottfried Herder

Translated for THE NEW YORK TIMES by Thomas R. Ybarra from Herder's "Shakespeare," in "Von Deutscher Art und Kunst," published in 1773.

As from a sea of events where waves surge into each other, Shakespeare's theatre rises before one. The phenomena of nature appear and disappear, work into each other no matter how incoherent they seem, create and destroy each other in order that the purpose of the creator, who apparently has jumbled everything together in tumult and disorder, may reach fulfillment, and dark, diminutive symbols become a vindication of the justice of God.

Lear, the eager, impulsive, nobly-weak old man, as he stands there before his map in his first scene giving away crowns and partitioning territories, has in him already all the fatal seeds for harvesting the blackest future. See! He is destined soon to be the good-hearted spendthrift, the unthinkingly pitiless man, the childish father, even in the anterooms of his daughters—imploring, praying, begging, cursing, raving, blessing—O God!—and punishing madness. Soon he will stand with uncovered head amid thunder and lightning, hurled to the lowest rung of the human race, with a fool, and in the lair of a mad beggar, threatened himself with madness. And now he stands in the majesty of his misery and abandonment; and now, coming to himself, illumined with the last ray of hope, destined to go out forevermore. Then a captive, with his benefactress, she who forgave him, his child, his daughter, dead in his arms, he dies on her corpse, and the old servant follows the old King in death—God, what a changing of time, circumstances, storms, weather, periods. And it is not just one story; there is heroic and national action. If you will, from beginning to end, according to the strictest rules of your Aristotle.

But step nearer and feel the human mind that gave its right place to every person and period and character and unimportant side issue in the picture. Look at the two old fathers and their children, so different from each other. The son of one, unhappy and thankful to a cheated father, the other shamefully ungrateful against the most good-hearted of fathers and detestably happy. This one against his daughter, she against him; husband, suitors, helpers' helpers in good and bad fortune. Blind Gloster on the arm of his unrecognized son, and mad Lear at the feet of his ejected daughter! And then the moment when good fortune vanishes, when Gloster dies under his tree, and the trumpet summons all secondary circumstances, motives, characters, and situations—calls everything into play!—in order to develop them into a whole welded together from father and children and King and fool and beggar and misery, a whole in which, even in the most incoherent scenes, a soul breathes forth from every bit of action, where place, time, circumstances even, and the pagan philosophy of fate and the stars which reign throughout fit into this whole so closely that I could alter nothing, transpose nothing, add nothing from other works, transfer nothing from this work to others.

And yet they say that this is not drama!—that Shakespeare is not a dramatic poet!—he who encompassed the hundred manifestations of one world event, swept it with his vision, inspired all with the same life-giving breath, who gripped not only one's attention, but one's heart and all one's emotions, one's whole soul, from beginning to end. Not a dramatic poet?—let us listen to Father Aristotle's testimony—"the greatness of a living creature must be grasped only in one glance"—and then look to Shakespeare—Heavens!—and see how the entire action is advanced and concluded out of the very depths of his soul! It is a world of dramatic history as great and deep as nature, but its creator provides us with the eyes and the point of view by means of which we can see such greatness and plumb such depths.

Othello, the story of the Moor—what a world is there! What a whole!—a living story of the beginning, development, culmination, and sad end of the passion of this noble and unhappy man. And what fullness, what interworking of intricate machinery to one purpose! How Iago, that devil in human guise, looks upon the universe, plays with all those about him; how Cassio and Roderigo and Othello and Desdemona must abet him, touched with his hellish flame; how all comes his way and he uses everything, and everything hastens toward the tragic end. Suppose an angel of Providence, weighing human passions against each other, grouping souls and characters, creating circumstances wherein each would be under the delusion that he was acting of his own free will, and binding them all to his purpose by means of this illusion, as with the chain of fate—thus worked the human mind which planned, created, designed, and shaped Othello.

One should not even remember, in viewing Shakespeare, that time and place should be to the play as the shell to the kernel—and yet the greatest uproar of all has been raised concerning this point. Since Shakespeare discovered the divine way of grouping an entire universe of unrelated manifestations into a whole it was naturally necessary for the truthfulness of his action that he idealize time and place in order that they might contribute to the illusion. Is any one, then, indifferent to time and place even in a trifle of his life?—and especially in cases where the whole soul is moved, affected, changed; in youth, in scenes of pasion, in all life's acts? Then, is it not place and time and all the external circumstances which give to a whole story character, duration, existence? Can a child, a youth, a lover, a man in the grip of action, divorce himself from the how, where, or when without damage to the whole conception of his soul?

In this Shakespeare is the greatest master, merely because he is solely and invariably a servant of nature. When he thought out the action of his dramas, rolled them about, so to speak, in his head, place and time were always rolled about with them! From scenes and periods of the whole world's history he seems, as if by a decree of fate, to pick out the most powerful and ideal for the development of his drama, scenes in which the strangest and most extravagant circumstances aid most successfully the illusion of truth, where the interchange of time and place, over which the poet holds sway, cry loudest: "This is not a poet! This is a creator! This is the history of the world!"

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Mary Anderson.
Tears do not become a man

Anna Mowatt (1819-1870)
'Tis he; slink by, and note him.
From the Wendell Collection

A Group of Rosalinds

Helena Modjeska (1840-1909)
I thank God I am not a woman, to be touched with so many giddy offences.
Photo by Mora & From the Wendell Collection

Ada Rehan (1860-1916)
Down on your knees, And thank heaven, fasting, for a good man's love.

Fanny Davenport (1850-1898)
But what talk we of fathers, when there is such a man as Orlando? & Photo by Sarony
From the Wendell Collection

Shaw on Two Idealized Costers

From George Bernard Shaw's "Dramatic Opinions and Essays."—Copyright by Brentano

"MUCH ADO" is perhaps the most dangerous actor-manager trap in the whole Shakespearean repertory. It is not a safe play like "The Merchant of Venice" or "As You Like It," nor a serious play like "Hamlet." Its success depends on the way it is handled in performance; and that, again, depends on the actor-manager being enough of a critic to discriminate ruthlessly between the pretension of the author and his achievement.

The main pretension in "Much Ado" is that Benedick and Beatrice are exquisitely witty and amusing persons. They are, of course, nothing of the sort. Benedick's pleasantries might pass at a sing-song in a public-house parlor; but a gentleman rash enough to venture on them in even the very mildest £52-a-year suburban imitation of polite society today would assuredly never be invited again. From his first joke, "Were you in doubt, Sir, that you asked her?" to his last, "There is no staff more reverend than one tipped with horn," he is not a wit, but a blackguard.

He is not Shakespeare's only failure in that genre. It took the bard a long time to grow out of the provincial conceit that made him so fond of exhibiting his accomplishments as a master of gallant badinage. The very thought of Biron, Mercutio, Gratiano, and Benedick must, I hope, have covered him with shame in his later years. Even Hamlet's airy compliments to Ophelia before the court would make a cabman blush. But at least Shakespeare did not value himself on Hamlet's indecent jests as he evidently did on those of the four merry gentlemen of the earlier plays. When he at last got conviction of sin, and saw this sort of levity in its proper light, he made masterly amends by presenting the blackguard as a blackguard in the person of Lucio in "Measure for Measure."

Lucio, as a character study, is worth forty Benedicks and Birons. His obscenity is not only inoffensive, but irresistibly entertaining, because it is drawn with perfect skill, offered at its true value, and given its proper interest without any complicity of the author in its lewdness. Lucio is much more of a gentleman than Benedick, because he keeps his coarse sallies for coarse people. Meeting one woman, he says humbly: "Gentle and fair: your brother kindly greets you. Not to be weary with you, he's in prison." Meeting another, he hails her sparkingly with: "How now? Which of your hips has the more profound sciatica?" The one woman is a lay sister, the other a prostitute. Benedick or Mercutio would have cracked their low jokes on the lay sister, and been held up as gentlemen of rare wit and excellent discourse for it. Whenever they approach a woman or an old man you shiver with apprehension as to what brutality they will come out with.

Precisely the same thing in the tenderer degree of her sex is true of Beatrice. In her character of professed wit she has only one subject, and that is the subject which a really witty woman never jests about, because it is too serious a matter to a woman to be made light of without indelicacy. Beatrice jests about it for the sake of the indelicacy. There is only one thing worse than the Elizabethan "merry gentleman," and that is the Elizabethan "merry lady."

Why is it, then, that we still want to see Benedick and Beatrice, and that our most eminent actors and actresses still want to play them? Before I answer that very simple question let me ask another. Why is it that Da Ponte's "dramma giocosa," entitled "Don Giovanni," a loathsome story of a coarse, witless, worthless libertine, who kills an old man in a duel and is finally dragged down through a trapdoor to hell by his twaddling ghost, is still, after more than a century, as "immortal" as "Much Ado"? Simply because Mozart clothed it with wonderful music, which turned the worthless words and thoughts of Da Ponte into a magical human drama of moods and transitions of feeling.

That is what happened in a smaller way with "Much Ado." Shakespeare shows himself in it a commonplace librettist, working on a stolen plot, but a great musician. No matter how poor, coarse, cheap, and obvious the thought may be, the mood is charming, and the music of the words expresses the mood. Paraphrase the encounters of Benedick and Beatrice in the style of a blue-book, carefully preserving every idea they present, and it will become apparent to the most infatuated Shakespearean that they contain at best nothing out of the common in thought or wit, and at worst a good deal of vulgar naughtiness. Paraphrase Goethe, Wagner, or Ibsen in the same way, and you will find original observation, subtle thought, wide comprehension, far-reaching intuition, and serious psychological study in them.

Give Shakespeare a fairer chance in the comparison by paraphrasing even his best and maturest work, and you will get nothing more than the platitudes of proverbial philosophy, with a very occasional curiosity in the shape of a rudiment or some modern idea not followed up. Not until the Shakespearean music is added by replacing the paraphrase with the original lines does the enchantment begin. Then you are in another world at once. When a flower girl tells a coster to hold his jaw, for nobody is listening to him, and he retorts, "Oh, you're there, are you, you beauty?" they reproduce the wit of Beatrice and Benedick exactly. But put it this way: "I wonder that you will still be talking, Signor Benedick; nobody marks you." "What! My dear Lady Disdain, are you yet living?" You are miles away from costerland at once.

When I tell you that Benedick and the coster are equally poor in thought, Beatrice and the flower girl equally vulgar in repartee, you reply that I might as well tell you that a nightingale's love is no higher than a cat's. Which is exactly what I do tell you, though the nightingale is the better musician. You will admit, perhaps, that the love of the worst human singer in the world is accompanied by a higher degree of intellectual consciousness than that of the most ravishingly melodious nightingale. Well, in just the same way there are plenty of quite second-rate writers who are abler thinkers and wits than William, though they are unable to weave his magic into the expression of their thoughts.

It is not easy to knock this into the public head, because comparatively few of Shakespeare's admirers are at all conscious that they are listening to music as they hear his phrases turn and his lines fall so fascinatingly and memorably; while we all, no matter how stupid we are, can understand his jokes and platitudes, and are flattered when we are told of the subtlety of the wit we have relished and the profundity of the thought we have fathomed. Englishmen are specially susceptible to this sort of flattery, because intellectual subtlety is not their strong point. In dealing with them you must make them believe that you are appealing to their brains when you are really appealing to their senses and feelings.

With Frenchmen the case is reversed; you must make them believe that you are appealing to their senses and feelings when you are really appealing to their brains. The Englishman, slave to every sentimental ideal and dupe of every sensuous art, will have it that his great national poet is a thinker. The Frenchman, enslaved and duped only by systems of calculation, insists on his hero being a sentimentalist and artist. That is why Shakespeare is esteemed a master mind in England and wondered at as a clumsy barbarian in France.

Love and Jealousy

Translated for The New York Times from the Russian of Nicholas Storozhenko.

(Greatest Russian authority on Shakespeare. Author of "Predecessors of Shakespeare," "Robert Greene," &c.)

A STUDY of the male and female characters created by Shakespeare, that embody the different kinds of love, will give us Shakespeare's views on love and its meaning in the existence of man. He considered it an emotion of tremendoes import, looking at it from a serious, even tragic, point of view, and regarding it as the main source of human joys and sufferings. He never allowed himself to mock the genuine emotion or deprecate its importance, and if some comical episodes can be encountered in his love dramas sometimes, it is not love but love-making that is being derided there, which Shakespeare as a supreme realist could not help deriding.

Whether he presents to us in his dramas a spiritualized passion, an instinctive irrepressible enticement, or an idealistic emotion, inspired by moral motives, Shakespeare is of the opinion that neither logical arguments nor family obligations are capable of putting out the flame of love, and that before its power they always will remain powerless. That is why we don't find in his dramas the favorite theme of other dramatists, the conflict taking place in the heart of the hero or heroine between love and family duties.

Believing in love as in an elemental but beneficial force, freshening to the spiritual atmosphere of humanity, Shakespeare ardently championed the rights of the human heart. According to Shakespeare, every one has the right of deciding for himself this most important question of one's life—the question of love. Shakespeare, defending the inalienable rights of their hearts, makes the weak lovers grow strong, the gentle inflexible.

Creating a whole row of bright characters in whose lives love was the climax, Shakespeare showed that his blessing will always rest on this holiday of youth. Whenever the rights of the heart clash with social inequality the poet is on the side of the first. One can see it from the way he paints the heroes defending those rights, and from his deep sympathy with their frequently tragic ends.

In his love dramas Shakespeare created women as his chief characters, for he considered woman more capable than man of self-sacrifice in the name of love. But in his jealousy dramas he gave the first place to man. This is not due to the fact that he thought women incapable of strong fits of jealousy, but most likely because jealousy, as an egotistic emotion, is more natural in man, in whom it is related to the feeling of violated honor. Jealousy is different not only in different races, but also in different individuals. As a true artist, Shakespeare does not separate jealousy from the character of the person affected by it. Othello is not only a husband poisoned by jealousy, killing an unjustly suspected wife; he is a character original in other respects also, interesting, surpassing the limits of his dramatic function. In his person Shakespeare gave us a type quite often found among military heroes. In spite of his great mind, courage, military genius, he is but a child in life.

A study of the types of the jealous characters drawn by Shakespeare in his dramas devoted to the psychology of jealousy will lead us to the conclusion that Shakespeare discriminated between the jealousy resulting from the natural fear of losing or being disillusioned of one's beloved and the jealousy originating in envy and petty egotism, inherent suspiciousness, and a vulgar view of women. The best expression of the former catgeory is Othello, of the latter Iago.

Maude Adams
I pray you, do not fall in love with me, For I am falser than vows made in wine & & &
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