

SCHOLASTIC RECORDS SL 9124

UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATION OF SHAKESPEARE

BY MORRIS SCHREIBER



THE ART OF SHAKESPEARE
CHARACTER PORTRAYAL-RANGE AND DEPTH
MEMORABLE THEMES
STYLE AND LANGUAGE
HIS SIGNIFICANCE FOR OUR TIMES

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ROSALIND

"... Now tell me, Orlando, how long you would have her... after you have possessed her..."

ORLANDO

"For ever and a day..."

ROSALIND

"Say 'a day' without the 'ever.' No, no, Orlando; men are April when they woo, December when they wed; maids are May when they are maids, but the sky changes when they are wives... I will weep for nothing when you are disposed to be merry; I will laugh like a hyena, and that when thou art inclined to weep."

1st N.

Highly florid writing, as is some early romantic exchanges between Romeo and Juliet--even though balanced by some of the finest and most exquisite love poetry in the same play. Here, in extravagant romantic vein, in the First Act at the ball, Romeo speaks to Juliet:

ROMEO

"If I profane with my unworthing hand
This holy shrine, the gentle fine is this:
My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand
To smooth that rough cheek with a tender kiss."

2nd N.

Inaccuracies and errors in fact, as when Shakespeare speaks of "the toad, ugly and venomous, which wears yet a jewel in his head" in "As You Like It"... Or when he strays geographically to speak of "a sea-coast off Bohemia" in "The Winter's Tale."

3rd N.

... Admit the inaccuracies... the occasional hasty and florid writing... the borrowings... the improvisations... the low comedy... Add them together...

--Examine the total:

--In the final balance, there still remain the majesty and the glory... The music of his lines... The power and sweep of his imagination... The range and depth of his characterization... It is to this last, the people of Shakespeare, that we now turn our attention...

1st N.

... UNIT TWO ... THE CHARACTERS OF SHAKESPEARE!

2nd N.

In Shakespeare's vast and colorful gallery of several hundred characters, merchants, peasants, shepherds, clowns, tinkers, weavers, wrestlers, soldiers mingle with priests, courtiers, generals, and kings. But, king as well as commoner, many a Shakespearean character has so fired the popular imagination that his name has become a byword for a type of personality, a symbol of conflict, or an example of some human drive or emotion... Among these are such designations as "A Romeo," "A Shylock," "A Falstaff," "A Lear"...

1st N.

But rich and varied as Shakespeare's characters are, many of them are cut from the same cloth, stamped from the same die. Certain types and certain patterns of action appear and reappear in his plays...

3rd N.

There is the stern but just duke, vigorous in carrying out the laws of his realm, but often capable of mercy and kindness when circumstances warrant. In

"The Comedy of Errors": The Duke of Ephesus reprieves from death the old merchant Aegeon, father of the twins involved in the mix-up...

1st N.

There is the friendly friar, helper, counsellor, and confidant of many of the leading characters:

In "Romeo and Juliet" a friar named Lawrence plays a vital role--listening to the young couple, counseling and protecting them, and secretly marrying them. Later, however, trying to save their marriage by having Juliet pretend to commit suicide by taking poison, he learns to his horror that his plans have gone tragically awry:

2nd N.

Another type fairly common in Shakespeare's plays is the woman forced to masquerade as a man. Among these are: Julia, in "The Two Gentlemen of Verona"...

Portia in "The Merchant of Venice"...

1st N.

Rosalind in "As You Like It"...

2nd N.

And Viola, in "Twelfth Night"...

3rd N.

In "Cymbeline" the innocent Imogen assumes male attire to escape danger threatening from three directions--her husband, the Queen, and the Queen's son, Cloten... But it takes all the servant's powers to induce her to do so, so aghast is she at her husband's plot to kill her because of her suspected infidelity. Having lost the will to live, she pleads with Pisanio, the servant, to carry out his orders to kill her.

IMOGEN

"..... Look!
I draw the sword myself; take it and hit
The innocent mansion of my love, my heart.
Fear not; 'tis empty of all things, but grief.
..... * * * Prithee, dispatch,
The lamb entreats the butcher. Where's thy knife?
Thou art too slow to do thy master's bidding,
When I desire it, too..."

1st WOMAN

Other heroines of Shakespeare--wives, sweethearts, mothers -- are also falsely suspected, driven into exile or cast into prison and forced to plead their innocence from a foreign land or a jail cell:

In "Much Ado About Nothing" Hero, falsely accused and abandoned by her lover Claudio, remains in hiding until she can clear her name. With the help of a Friar named Francis a false report of her death is circulated to aid her cause...

In "The Winter's Tale" the same pattern is repeated: The queen, Hermione, also wrongly suspected of infidelity by her husband, King Leontes, adopts a similar stratagem. She then remains concealed for sixteen years after her supposed death...

2nd WOMAN

Yes, Shakespeare's women do not have an easy time of it... Another type that suffers harshly at the hands of men is the rejected woman, cast aside by her faithless lover for another.

In this class are Mariana, who loves the Duke's evil deputy, Angelo, in the play "Measure For Measure," but is spurned by him for Isabella...

---Julia, neglected by the false Proteus in "The Two Gentlemen of Verona"... and -- the devoted Helena, disdained by Count Bertram in "All's Well That Ends Well..." Impatient to be rid of her and to hurry off to the wars, Bertram cries to Parolles, his follower:

BERTRAM

"... I'll send her to my house,
Acquaint my mother with my hate to her,
And wherefore I am fled; write to the king
That which I durst not speak...
* * * War is no strife
To the dark house and the detested wife."

1st N.

Yet Mariana and Helena have the last word: Shakespeare has them substitute for their rivals to trick the very men who spured them. Mariana pretends to be Isabella and traps Angelo. Helena substitutes for Diana and wins back Bertram.

2nd N.

These women undergo much hardship and suffering. . . But in the Romantic tradition Shakespeare nobly brings all the estranged couples together at the end of each play. . .

3rd N.

Shakespeare not only pits sweetheart against lover, husband against wife. He also portrays members of the same family in bitter opposition to one another. He pictures daughters against father (in "King Lear" and "The Merchant of Venice") . . . son against mother (in "Hamlet") . . . son against father (in the subplot of "Lear") . . . uncle against niece (in "As You Like It") . . . as well as other close kin in distinct hostility. . .

Here is such a set of characters arrayed in conflict against each other. . .

Do you recognize the relationship?

1st N.

. . . Prospero vs. Antonio in "The Tempest"
. . . Edgar vs. Edmund in "King Lear" . . .
Claudius vs. Hamlet's Father in "Hamlet" . . .
Duke Senior vs. Duke Frederick in "As You Like It"
. . . Orlando vs. Oliver in the same play.

3rd N.

Were you able to identify them? They are all brothers--each locked in a keen struggle against the other for high stakes--money, fame, the love of a woman. . . and other reasons. . .

In each of these plots Shakespeare presents not only fraternal conflict but also a sharply etched ethical situation--good arrayed against evil--and then proceeds to show us the consequences of that struggle.

Yet so strong is hope and the power of the human spirit even in calamity that Duke Senior can still find some good in misfortune:

DUKE SENIOR

"Now my co-mates and brothers in exile,
Hath not old custom made this life more sweet
Than that of painted pomp? Are not these woods
More free from peril than the envious court?
* * * Sweet are the uses of adversity;
Which like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head;
And this our life, exempt from public haunt,
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,
Sermons in stones, and good in everything.
I would not change it."

3rd N.

Closely associated with many of these characters is another group, liberally interspersed among Shakespeare's plays--personalities who do much to invigorate and enliven the proceedings:

These are the comic figures--the clowns, the servants, the tinkers, the schoolmasters, the barmaids, the curates, the constables, the soldiers of fortune headed by the roistering Falstaff, and a host of others. . .

What is the essence of Shakespeare's comic art? The ability to view his characters dispassionately, to treat them good-humoredly, to temper ridicule with good nature and sympathy, to blend disparagement with affection. Most of all, it is Shakespeare's capacity to view life whole--to see pathos in the comic and humor even in the midst of tragedy--the scatter-brained Nurse in "Romeo and Juliet," the pompous Polonius in "Hamlet," the nimble-witted Falstaff in "King Henry the Fourth."

1st N.

But there is pure comedy, too -- humor for the sake of humor:

. . . Here are some of the moments of high mirth and fun: Do you recognize the participants to?

VOICE (READING LETTER)

"If this fall into thy hands, revolve. In my stars I am above thee; but be not afraid of greatness. Some are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them. . . * * * She thus advises thee that sighs for thee. Remember who commended thy yellow stockings, and wish'd to see thee ever cross-garter'd. . . * * * If thou entertain'st my love, let it appear in thy smiling; thy smile becomes thee well. Therefore in my presence still smile, dear my sweet, I prithee."

1st N.

This is Malvolio, priggish steward to the Lady Olivia in "Twelfth Night," reading aloud an anonymous love letter which he believes the Lady herself has addressed to him. But the real authors of the letter, who have contrived this hoax, are in hiding, watching his every reaction in great merriment. . .

. . . But courtship has other comic facets: Here is love shown in humorous conflict:

WOMAN

"I had rather hear my dog bark at a crow than a man swear he loves me."

MAN

"God keep your ladyship still in that mind, so some gentleman or other shall scape a predestinate scratcht face."

WOMAN

"Scratching could not make it worse, an' 'twere such a face as yours were!"

2nd N.

This is the high-spirited pair, Beatrice and Benedick, in "Much Ado About Nothing," parrying witty insults in a pretended feud, which is really a courtship.

1st N.

Included in the gallery of comic characters are other memorable figures:

There is Nick Bottom, the weaver, in "A Midsummer Night's Dream," who has been wandering, enchanted in the woods with an ass' head affixed to his ears, suddenly waking and shouting:

BOTTOM

"I have had a most rare vision! I have had a dream past the wit of man to say what dream it was. Man is but an ass if he go about to expound this dream. Methought I was--there is no man can tell what. Methought I was and methought I had, but man is but a patch'd fool if he will offer to say what methought I had. The eye of man hath not heard. . . the ear of man hath not seen. . . man's hand is not able to taste. . . his tongue to conceive. . . nor his heart to report what my dream was. I will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream. And it shall be called 'Bottom's Dream,' because it hath no bottom."

2nd N.

There is Touchstone, the court clown, who follows Rosalind and Celia into exile in the Forest of Arden--Touchstone, the true natural philosopher who can view himself as well as the other characters with complete detachment and wit. He can also say of mankind:

TOUCHSTONE

"Oh, sir, we quarrel in print by the book, as you have books for good manners. I will name you the degrees. The first, the Retort Courteous; the second, the Quip Modest; the third, the Reply Churlish; the fourth, the Reproof Valiant; the fifth, the Counter-check Quarrelsome; the sixth, the Lie with Circumstance; the seventh, the Lie Direct. All these you may avoid but the Lie Direct; and you may avoid that too with an If. . . * * * Your 'If' is the only peacemaker; much virtue in 'If.'"

3rd N.

There are the clownish gravediggers of "Hamlet" with their grisly humor, enlivening for a brief moment the grim and inexorable march of events. What mordant wit lies in the first gravedigger's sally to his comrade!

1st GRAVEDIGGER

"... In good faith the gallows does well; but how does it well? It does well to those that do ill... * * * And when you are asked the question next, 'Who builds stronger than a mason, a shipwright, or a carpenter?' --say 'A gravemaker.' The houses he makes last till doomsday!"

1st N.

And in "King Henry IV," there is that immortal rogue, Sir John Falstaff, the symbol of riotous merriment, perhaps the most comic of all Shakespeare's creations. It is he whose antics must surely have "split the ears of the groundlings" in the Elizabethan theatre. Companion and counsellor to the Prince in Hal's dissolute youth, Falstaff is boastful, lying, sensual, cowardly, and corrupt. Yet though the Prince shares in Falstaff's escapades, he merely tolerates them, never gives them his personal sanction, and in time outgrows them and sheds his fat drinking companion, who dies of a broken heart.

3rd N.

Inhabiting Shakespeare's fanciful world, too, are the characters of the supernatural. On the one hand roam the bright spirits --

--gay Ariel, Prospero's faithful helper in "The Tempest," singing from his favorite nook:

ARIEL

"Where the bee sucks, there suck I;
In a cowslip's bell I lie;
There I couch when owls do cry.
On the bat's back I do fly
After summer merrily.
Merrily, merrily shall I live now
Under the blossom that hangs on the bough."

3rd N.

--frolicsome Puck, in "A Midsummer Night's Dream," fleet emissary of Oberon, the Fairy King. . .

PUCK

"I go, I go; look how I go,
Swifter than arrow from the Tartar's bow!"

3rd N.

--playful Oberon, his jealous master, plotting to humble his fairy queen:

OBERON

"And with the juice of this I'll streak her eyes
And make her full of hateful fantasies."

2nd N.

On the other hand lurk the creatures of the dark:

There are the babbling witches of Macbeth and the slain Banquo . . . There are the fearsome spirits of Hamlet's father and the murdered Julius Caesar . . . Restless ghosts stir in "Cymbeline" when the dead of Posthumus' family plead with Jupiter to help their suffering son . . . And the ghosts of Richard III's murdered victims appear to him in a dream to fill the wretched king's night with torment.

1st N.

Shakespeare utilizes them all, blending the natural with the supernatural to unfold his great themes--love, jealousy, ambition, courage, mercy, justice. . .

It is these that we shall now consider. . .

1st N.

. . . UNIT THREE! . . . THE GREAT THEMES OF SHAKESPEARE

2nd N.

. . . Shakespeare never sleeps! . . . Dead these four hundred years, he still has a timeless story to unfold, a character to fit into the contemporary scene . . .

3rd N.

Here are headlines straight out of the recent past or the immediate present--modern versions of Shakespeare's grand themes:

Which of his great plays does each headline bring to mind? Why?

1st N.

"Jealous Army Officer Kills Wife Suspected of Infidelity!"

2nd N.

"Cruel Daughters Evict Elderly Father, Seize His Property!"

3rd N.

"Military Chief in Line to the Throne Plots Murder of King!"

1st N.

"Dictator Lured Into Death Trap By Trusted Associates!"

VOICE

"Parents' Objections Force Young Couple's Secret Marriage!"

1st N.

Do you recognize OTHELLO, KING LEAR, MACBETH, JULIUS CAESAR, and ROMEO AND JULIET--in that order--in those headlines?

2nd N.

Across the centuries Shakespeare's characters still tread their way. Take one example: Romeo and Juliet, the ill-fated lovers of Verona, are any young couple whose right to marriage is blocked by family feuds, blind tradition, unreasonable parents. The story has been retold in modern vein many times, most recently in "West Side Story" and "The Fantasticks."

3rd N.

The theme of love is a particularly dominant one in Shakespeare's works--appearing in many shades and forms and in varying degrees of intensity throughout his writings.

There are the controversial Sonnets, full of praise and affection for their subject, presumed to be one of Shakespeare's lordly patrons--Southampton, Lord Herbert, or William Hervey. . .

1st N.

Predominant in the Sonnets are Shakespeare's professions of love, loyalty, and friendship to the subject, who stands in a strange and anomalous relationship to the poet. Here are two such avowals of affection: From Sonnet 18:

VOICE

"Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?
Thou art more lovely and more temperate,
Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May
And summer's lease hath all too short a date. . ."

1st N.

. . . And Sonnet 57:

VOICE

"Being your slave, what should I do but tend
Upon the hours and times of your desire?
I have no precious time at all to spend
Nor services to do, till you require. . ."

1st N.

But though love and devotion pervade the Sonnets,
other themes are also interjected in support.
There are the inexorable passage of time. . .
nostalgia for the past. . . or the fading of Na-
ture's glories as in Sonnet 73. . .

VOICE

"That time of year thou mayst in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few do hang
Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang."

3rd N.

In contrast to the treatment of love in the Sonnets
are the whimsical **approach and the clever satire**
on love we find in one of Shakespeare's earliest
comedies, "Love's Labor Lost." Three lords of
Navarre have agreed to join their king, Ferdinand,
to forswear the company of women and to seclude
themselves in study for three years. But when the
Princess of France comes with three of her ladies
on a state visit, Berowne, one of the lords, and a
superb comic figure, is quick to weaken. The King
and the other lords are not slow to follow.

1st N.

Shakespeare could also treat love in even broader comic
vein. In "The Taming of the Shrew" his hero, Petruchio,
delivers a satirical commentary on the charms of
Katharina, the hot-tempered girl whom he courts and
eventually subdues by beating her at her own game:

KATHARINA

"They call me Katharine that do talk of me."

PETRUCHIO

"You lie, in faith, for you are called plain Kate,
And bonny Kate, and sometimes Kate the curst:
But Kate, the prettiest Kate in Christendom,
Kate of Kate Hall, my super-dainty Kate. . .
Take this of me, Kate of my consolation--
Hearing thy mildness praised in every town,
Thy virtues spoke of, and thy beauty sounded. . .
Myself am moved to woo thee for my wife."

2nd N.

Love, close to pure fantasy, is brilliantly captured
in "A Midsummer Night's Dream," where fairy creatures
mingle with human beings, each paired with the wrong
lover, in a spectacle of midsummer madness. . .

3rd N.

But in Romeo and Juliet love is starkly real, deeply
personal. The star-crossed pair, whose only fault
was to abandon themselves to love, die a tragic death
in the ancestral burial vault.

As Friar Lawrence closes the story with his sad ac-
count of their death, we see once more in mind's eye
Romeo beneath Juliet's balcony window and hear their
ardent interchange:

ROMEO

"I would I were thy bird!"

JULIET

"Sweet, so would I!
"Yet I should kill thee with much cherishing,
Good night, good night! Parting is such sweet sorrow
That I shall say good night till it be morrow."

ROMEO

"Sleep dwell upon thine eyes, peace in thy breast!
Would I were sleep and peace, so sweet to rest!"

END SIDE I

1st N.

But when love turns to suspicion and fierce posses-
siveness we have jealousy. Jealousy-mistrust of
the faithfulness of husband, wife, or lover--is
another common theme in Shakespeare.

2nd N.

In "Anthony and Cleopatra" the Egyptian queen, learning
that Anthony has married Octavia, sister to Octavius
Caesar, is overcome with wild jealousy of her rival in
love. She plies the messenger bringing her the news
frantically with questions about Octavia: Is she tall?
Is her voice high or low? Is there majesty in her
gait?

3rd N.

But in "Othello" it is the Moor, tortured by the false
insinuations of the villainous Iago about the fidelity
of his wife Desdemona, whom jealousy racks most violent-
ly and drives to murder. Ironically, Iago himself
characterizes the passion of which he warns Othello to
beware:

IAGO

"O! beware, my lord, of jealousy;
It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock
The meat it feeds on: That cuckold lives in bliss
Who, certain of his fate, loves not his wronger;
But, O! what damned minutes tells he o'er
Who dotes, yet doubts, suspects, yet strongly loves!"

1st N.

Love, centered on the self and its aspirations--the
powerful drive toward personal advancement which we
call ambition--is another major theme in Shakespeare's
work.

Ambition--of the most compelling and obsessive kind--
dominates the thoughts and actions of many of the
characters in Shakespeare's historical plays. Chief
lure is the crown--with its promise of wealth, fame,
and the power to hold the fate of multitudes in one's
hands:

2nd N.

In the play "King John" ambition spurs John to con-
spire against his own nephew, young Arthur, rightful
heir to the throne. John drives Arthur to his death
in a leap from the Tower--only to die himself by
poison during a battle with the French:

3rd N.

Weakness of another king, Richard II, tempts a usurper
to plot against him. Lord Bolingbroke covets Richard's
throne, forces him to abdicate in his favor, and con-
vives at his imprisonment and death.

Bolingbroke later becomes Henry the Fourth, is himself
plagued by civil war, and dies ill, broken, and disil-
lusioned. His son, Prince Hal--later Henry the Fifth--
embarks on military conquest against France to build a
name and a dual empire for himself. But Hal's son,
King Henry the Sixth, caught up in the bloody War of
the Roses between rival factions of the nobility, falls
to the dagger of the villainous Richard of Gloucester.

1st N.

The evil Richard, in his own overwhelming desire for
the crown, leaves behind him a trail of murder--
Henry, rival lords, his two young nephews, and his
wife, Queen Anne. Obtaining the crown as Richard III,
he is himself defeated in battle and slain by the Earl
of Richmond, who becomes Henry the Seventh.

2nd N.

"Henry VIII," last of the cycle of British historical
plays, chronologically speaking, unfolds a power
struggle involving Henry, his chancellor, Cardinal
Wolsey, Anne Boleyn, and the Pope. Henry divorces his
Queen, Katherine, and marries Anne Boleyn, who becomes
the mother of Queen Elizabeth I, Shakespeare's patron. .

1st N.

Ambition--the surging force that drives Macbeth to murder. . . Ambition--the fear of which drives the idealistic Brutus to conspire in the assassination of Caesar. . .

2nd N.

Cassius, playing on Brutus' emotions, fans his distrust of Caesar:

CASSIUS

"Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world
Like a Colossus, and we petty men
Walk under his huge legs, and peep about
To find ourselves dishonorable graves.
Men at some time are masters of their fates.
The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars
But in ourselves that we are underlings."

2nd N.

Later, Brutus, aroused against Caesar, and deeply suspicious of his motives, himself soliloquizes on "Ambition."

BRUTUS

" But 'tis a common proof
That lowliness is young ambition's ladder,
Whereto the climber-upward turns his face;
But when he once attains the upmost round,
He then unto the ladder turns his back,
Looks in the clouds, scorning the base degrees
By which he did ascend."

2nd N.

But whether Shakespeare is depicting "emperor or clown," he is interested in the man behind the facade, in his view of life, in his dreams and aspirations--most of all, in his courage and strength of character.

3rd N.

Courage--moral as well as physical--or the lack of courage--is the leading theme of several of Shakespeare's dramas:

Pericles, who courts death at the hands of King Antiochus by expounding the riddle of the King's dark secret, has physical as well as moral courage. Timon of Athens, who dares to cast out his false followers when they fail him in his need, has great moral courage.

1st N.

Macbeth, a brave and resolute general, driven by his ambition and the goading of his wife, has the physical courage to carry out his deed, the slaying of King Duncan, his kinsman. But tortured by his crime and its moral implications, both he and his wife grow increasingly irresolute, fearful, and brutalized.

2nd N.

The once heroic Macbeth, cut off from his fellow men by the heinousness of his murders, sinks deeper into moral and spiritual degradation, finally meeting death at Dunsinane with little will to resist.

Earlier, his courage waning, he had found continued existence a heavy and tiresome burden:

MACBETH

" I am in blood
Stepped in so far that, should I wade no more,
Returning were as tedious as go o'er."

2nd N.

The valorous Mark Antony, model of efficiency and courage, is helpless in the grip of his passion for the Egyptian queen. Lacking the moral courage to break away, he goes to his ruin at Actium, dying in the presence of Cleopatra, who has dragged him down. Another of Shakespeare's women, fickle

Cressida, in the play, "Troilus and Cressida," shows similar weakness of character. Betrothed to the Trojan prince, Troilus, she is induced by her passion for the Greek warrior Diomedes to play false to her true lover.

1st N.

Coriolanus, another Roman general, in the play of the same name, although valiant in battle against the redoubtable Volscians, also lacks strength of character. Unsympathetic to the needs and hopes of the common people, haughty and contemptuous, he is rejected for the consulship and sinks so low as to join the enemy against his own people in revenge.

Later, though he lifts the siege of Rome on the pleas of his mother and wife, he is treacherously assassinated by the orders of Aufidius, the very enemy with whom he had leagued himself.

3rd N.

Lear, a man swayed largely by his instincts and emotions, lacks both insight into the true nature of his daughters and understanding of his own responsibilities as a king and a father. Deficient in strength of character, he allows himself to be victimized by Goneril and Regan, the two evil daughters, and falls easy prey to their machinations. In the process he brings ruin, madness, and death upon himself and capture and execution on his innocent daughter Cordelia.

1st N.

Hamlet, intellectually superior, lonely and sensitive, cannot bring himself to purposeful and brutal action--vengeance for his father's murder. Possessed of physical courage, even savage at times in his actions, he is irresolute, lacking the moral determination to carry out his mission. Pensive, deliberative, hesitating until it is too late, he is engulfed in a tragedy which earlier action on his part could have averted.

His frustration, his inability to strike are eloquently mirrored in his own keen analysis of his inaction. He has much cause--but still he lacks the will.

HAMLET

"How all occasions do inform against me,
And spur my dull revenge! What is a man,
If his chief good and market of his time
Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more.
Sure he that made us with such large discourse
Looking before and after, gave us not
That capability and godlike reason
To fust in us unused."

2nd N.

Opposed to the idea of vengeance--no matter how strong the provocation--is the theme of mercy and forgiveness. In many of his plays, Shakespeare, though he never condones evil, is magnanimous and forgiving, granting even the blackest villains absolution for their crimes. Prospero forgives Antonio. Orlando saves Oliver from death. And Duke Senior forgives his evil brother, Duke Frederick.

3rd N.

In "The Merchant of Venice" Shylock seeks to exact a fearful punishment from Antonio for the community's mistreatment of him. But Shakespeare tempers the enormity of the penalty by showing us the reasons for Shylock's bitterness and resentment. He also puts into the mouth of Portia, defending Antonio, one of the most impassioned and stirring pleas for mercy in all literature--a plea revealing clearly Shakespeare's own innate nobility and generosity of soul:

PORTIA

"The quality of mercy is not strain'd,
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
Upon the place beneath. It is twice bless'd:
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.
'Tis mightiest in the mightiest; it becomes
The throned monarch better than his crown;

His sceptre shows the force of temporal power,
The attribute to awe and majesty,
Wherein doth sit the dread and fear of kings;
But mercy is above this sceptred sway,
It is enthroned in the hearts of kings,
It is an attribute to God himself."

1st N.

... PART FOUR. . . STYLE AND LANGUAGE OF SHAKESPEARE!

---Shakespeare's mercy and compassion, his sense of justice, and his belief in the inherent dignity of Man pervade and illuminate his plays.

What distinguishes them, then, from other searching studies of human nature and conduct?

2nd N.

The answer lies not only in Shakespeare's understanding of humanity but also in the power of the literary vehicle with which he conveys his brilliant interpretation of Man and his place in the universe--the vehicle of style and language:

3rd N.

The essence of Shakespeare's style is a compound of brilliant rhythms, word music, vivid imagery, subtle overtones, and precision and concreteness of language.

In his hands, blank verse becomes a fluid, living instrument. There is flexibility in its many run-on lines, psychological impact in his dramatic pauses. There is poetic unity in his richly sustained metaphors. And there is freedom of movement to tell a story, set a mood or background, or paint a vivid word picture.

Note, for example, the rocking rhythms, the alliteration, and the long vowels that combine to produce the effect of the swell and surge of the sea. The speaker is the invisible Ariel, telling Ferdinand in song that his father lies drowned:

ARIEL

"Full fathom five thy father lies
Of his bones are coral made;
Those are pearls that were his eyes;
Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea change
Into something rich and strange.
Sea-nymphs hourly ring his knell.

Hark! now I hear them. . . Ding-dong bell. . .

1st N.

Note, too, the skilfully suggestive overtones, the unspoken thoughts in Macbeth's reactions to the news of his wife's death:

MACBETH

"She should have died hereafter;
There would have been a time for such a word.
To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. . ."

1st N.

Macbeth, pausing dramatically after the words, "dusty death," concludes with a vivid metaphor taken directly from Shakespeare's own stage background:

". Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more; it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing. . ."

1st N.

What a challenge to the imagination, what profound philosophy lie in Portia's luminous remark to Nerissa in "The Merchant of Venice!":

PORTIA

"How far that little candle throws his beams,
So shines a good deed in a naughty world!"

1st N.

Or let your fancy play on the rich imagery evoked by the rogue Autolycus singing the contents of his pedlar's pack in the shepherd's cottage, in the play "The Winter's Tale."

AUTOLYCUS

"Lawn as white as driven snow;
Cypress black as e'er was crow;
Gloves as sweet as damask roses;
Masks for faces and for noses;
Bugle bracelet, necklace amber;
Perfume for a lady's chamber;
Golden quoifs and stomachers,
For my lads to give their dears;
Pins and poking-sticks of steel--
What maids lack from head to heel.
Come, buy of me, come; come buy; come buy;
Buy, lads, or else your lasses cry.
Come, buy."

2nd N.

Shakespeare's plays are full of such striking images--on plant and animal life, time, light and dark, earth, sea, sky, war, disease, death, in fact, almost every aspect of human experience.

1st N.

The basis of Shakespeare's style and thought is keenness of observation, beauty, and precision of language, and imaginativeness of concept. All these are blended in his famous comparison of the Seven Ages of Man to acts unfolding on a stage. The passage is an extended metaphor or comparison, elaborating the opening line "All the world's a stage" to encompass the major cycles of life. The melancholy Jaques--replying to Duke Senior in the play "As You Like It" -- delivers the lines:

JAQUES

"All the world's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players.
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one man in his time plays many parts,
His acts being seven ages. At first the infant,
Mewling and puking in the nurse's arms.
And then the whining schoolboy, with his satchel
And shining morning face, creeping like a snail
Unwillingly to school. And then the lover,
Sighing like furnace, with a woful ballad
Made to his mistress' eyebrow. Then the soldier,
Full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard;
Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel,
Seeking the bubble reputation
Even in the cannon's mouth. And then the justice,
In fair round belly with good capon lined,
With eyes severe and beard of formal cut,
Full of wise saws and modern instances;
And so he plays his part. The sixth age shifts
Into the lean and slipper'd pantaloon,
With spectacles on nose and pouch on side;
His youthful hose, well saved, a world too wide
For his shrunk shank; and his big manly voice
Turning again toward childish treble, pipes
And whistles in his sound. Last scene of all
That ends this strange eventful history,
Is second childishness and mere oblivion,
Sans teeth, sans eyes, sans taste, sans everything."

3rd N.

. . . Shakespeare's style and magic are unmistakable. . . Even in plays of disputed authorship--like "Timon of Athens" and "Pericles"--the passages attributed to Shakespeare stand out from the rest in the power, the beauty, and the dignity of the lines. . .

--For Shakespeare's style bears the hallmark of genius.

1st N.

... UNIT FIVE! . . SHAKESPEARE'S SIGNIFICANCE FOR
OUR TIMES . . .

2nd N.

--Stop for a moment--and consider the following expressions--words and phrases we use practically every day of our lives. Do you know where they come from?

OMNES

"... A fool's paradise... A dish fit for the gods
... Every inch a king... In my mind's eye...
Make sweet music... As plain as the nose on
one's face... A sorry sight... It's Greek to me...
Pomp and circumstance... To eat one out of house and
home... Flaming youth..."

1st N.

Do these sound familiar?... These common, everyday expressions are drawn straight from Shakespeare's works--as fitting, eloquent, and timely in many cases as when Shakespeare first uttered them four hundred years ago...

2nd N.

Shakespeare's aptness of language, his wide-ranging art, his understanding of men and their motives, and the universality and timeliness of his themes give him unique significance for our times...

3rd N.

He does not preach... He does not propagandize... He does not take sides... He presents down-to-earth, flesh and blood characters in situations fraught with passion, emotion, and conflict. But he lets you draw the moral, the precept for righteous living, for getting along with your fellow men...

1st N.

In a century that has twice witnessed cataclysmic war engulf whole nations Shakespeare is withering in his condemnation of force and violence in any age:

VOICE

"No more the thirsty entrance of this soil
Shall daub her lips with her own children's blood;
No more shall trenching war channel her fields
Nor bruise her flowerets with the armed hoofs
Of hostile paces..."

2nd N.

He frowns upon gossip and false report, warns of the dangers of spreading idle rumours:

VOICE

"Rumour is a pipe
Blown by surmise, jealousies, conjectures,
And of so easy and so plain a stop
That the blunt monster with uncounted heads,
The still-discordant, wav'ring multitude
Can play upon it."

2nd N.

He counsels against vanity and the sin of pride:

VOICE

"..... Pride,
Which out of daily fortune taints
The happy man."

1st N.

He points out that one must have the courage of one's convictions...

VOICE

"Virtue is bold, and goodness never fearful."

2nd N.

He advises obedience to authority, but warns that power carries with it responsibility not to misuse it:

WOMAN

"O, it is excellent
To have a giant's strength, but it is tyrannous
To use it like a giant."

3rd N.

He cautions that he who would judge others must himself be above reproach:

VOICE

"He who the sword of Heaven will bear
Should be as holy as severe."

1st N.

And he affirms, as Cassius also declared to Brutus, that men are masters of their fate and must look to themselves, not Heaven, for their salvation:

WOMAN

"Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie,
Which we ascribe to heaven. The fated sky
Gives us free scope; only backward pull
Our slow designs when we ourselves are dull."

3rd N.

Despite blind Chance, Man can do much to mold his own destiny, Shakespeare maintains. To be sure, he concedes that evil often triumphs, life is transitory and full of travail, and death a dark and unknown force--

VOICE (INTERJECTING)

"We are such stuff as dreams are made on,
And our little life is rounded
With a sleep."

3rd N.

But he counsels optimism--sings the joys of living... the virtues of love and friendship, conviviality in good food and drink, the beauties of art and music, the timeless glories of Nature...

2nd N.

From the sum of Shakespeare's works emerges a picture of the ideal man. He is mature, cultured, balanced, judicious. He is a man of action, with a zest for life and living. He is sensitive to the needs of others, and just and temperate in his dealings with his fellow men.

VOICE

"What a piece of work is man!... How noble in reason!
... How infinite in faculty!... In form and moving
how express and admirable!... In action how like an
angel!... In apprehension how like a god!..."

1st N.

In this distillation of Shakespeare's century-old wisdom, with its implications of how modern Man can grow and improve his government and society, lies Shakespeare's significance for our times.

In the embattled Cardinal Wolsey's words to his servant Cromwell in the play "King Henry VIII" much of this wise counsel is epitomized. The voice is Wolsey's, but the grand ideals are Shakespeare's:

CARDINAL WOLSEY

"... I charge thee, fling away ambition:
By that sin fell the angels...
... Love thyself last: cherish those hearts that
hate thee;
Corruption wins not more than honesty.
Still in thy right hand carry gentle peace,
To silence envious tongues: be just, and fear not:
Let all the ends thou aim'st at be thy country's,
Thy God's, and truth's..."

3rd N.

--Thus, through Shakespeare's great art, theme, characterization, language, and story merge into a dramatic and balanced whole...