IV

THE SHOWMAN

BY no means does Shakespeare always do that third thing.[1] Sometimes he is writing too hurriedly to do it. Sometimes the type of play he is writing or the artificial plot on which he is working will not permit the nuances without clouding the story, and as a practical playwright he must keep the story clear.

Doubtless, the story, the thing that interested the audience most, was that which interested Shakespeare least. But he was a practical business man with pressing obligations to himself and his business associates to make the theatrical concern to which he belonged a dividend-producing affair. That could be done only by drawing audiences to the theatre, and audiences could be drawn only by entertainment. So Shakespeare the artist, sometimes capitulated to Shakespeare the entertainer, and things were staged which probably gave Shakespeare the artist little artistic satisfaction.

Believing that this is a fair analysis of what has come down to us under the title of *Shakespeare's Complete Works,* it may be unwise to add a speculation in full knowledge that the speculation may not accord with the facts. However, one sometimes asks himself whether it is possible that Shakespeare's neglect to anticipate Ben Jonson by collecting his own plays in a permanent edition may have been due in part to dissatisfaction with what he had written, a recollection of his writing in mass rather than in detail, a remembrance

[1] See the concluding paragraph of the preceding lecture.

not of how often he had written as pure artist, but rather of how often he had permitted business exigencies to betray, suppress, distort the artist that was in him. It is admittedly a fancy, but it is a plausible fancy that the fastidious artist, recalling how much shoddy he had perpetrated for gain, felt that his writings as a whole were not worth preserving. He had accomplished his practical objects of helping to make the Globe Company a going concern, of supporting his family, and of accumulating a competency on which he could retire. Having done so, it is barely possible that he preferred to forget the whole London experience in which he had so often strangled the artist in order to provide the showman with a living.

Be that as it may, there are two indisputable facts: first that Shakespeare went to his grave without turning a hand to preserve his plays for posterity; and, secondly, that in his complete works there is a vast deal of which a sensitive artist had abundant reason to be heartily ashamed.

Some of this was left-over stuff in an old play which he revised, pulled about, retouched for his company's use, like, for instance, the obscene portrait of Joan of Arc in *First Henry The Sixth.* Some of it was later interpolation by another writer, like the vacuous, tinkling lines which Hecate pronounces in *Macbeth.* Some of it was quite possibly the contribution of a collaborator whom Shakespeare engaged to fill out a scene of which he had grown weary, like the journeyman balderdash of the vision of Posthumus in the fifth act of *Cymbeline.*

But much of the inferior stuff was written by Shakespeare himself.

Sometimes because he was in a hurry to finish his job, as in the huddled conclusion of *The Winter's Tale,* where he marries off Paulina, a high-spirited widow, to the excellent

Camillo, though until the very last speech in the play no intimation had been given that Paulina and Camillo were contemplating matrimony in the abstract or were in the least inclined to each other.

Sometimes he was compelled by the plot of the story which he was dramatizing to violate probability of individual action, as when he had Portia in *Merchant of Venice,* a young woman whose will power is in excellent working order, accept without question the monstrous provision in her father's last will and testament that she shall marry the first chance stranger who shall select a designated one of three metal caskets.

Sometimes he was afraid of his audience, as when he composed for Prince Hal the wretched soliloquy with which the second scene of the first act of *First King Henry the Fourth* ends—schemings of a calculating politician, which violate the spontaneous spirit of the young prince, an excuse which negatives the only real excuse for Hal's taste for taverns and low company, namely Hal's prankish disposition and his weariness of the portentous solemnity of court life under the rule of his hypochondriacal and conscience-stricken father. There can be but one explanation of that soliloquy, so out of character with the prince: Shakespeare was showing a patriotic audience one of their esteemed, national heroes in quite unheroic escapades, and early in the play he had to reassure the audience that their hero was coming out all right in the end, and he could think of no better way to stave off a theatre riot than to make Hal say things which the real Hal, as created by Shakespeare, never could have said.

Sometimes there was just a lapse in his master faculty of character motivation, as when he made Mark Antony in the third scene of the second act of *Antony and Cleopatra* a

hypocrite, which is the one thing faulty that Shakespeare's Antony is not. Shakespeare's Antony is politic, facile, easily adaptable, pleasure-loving, self-indulgent, sensuous and sensual, swift and sudden in his changing moods, but not hypocritical.[1] Aside from his genius and his Roman valor, with a remnant of Roman dignity even to the sad ending of his career, his outstanding virtue is candor.[2] Knowing his own failings, he admits them freely to himself and others. Having shaken off the "strong Egyptian fetters," namely Cleopatra, he returns to Rome, to a man's life, and enters into an honorable marriage with an honorable woman, Octavia, to whom he says with engaging frankness:

> I have not kept my square; but that to come
> Shall all be done by rule.

Octavia believes, and we have a right to believe, that Antony means what he says, that he has turned the corner, closed the old book, and opened a new one.

And yet this frank, attractive Antony only about thirty lines down the page says:

> I will to Egypt;
> And though I make this marriage for my peace,
> I' the East my pleasure lies.

It is a contradiction in character, in the character of the man with whom we have been in company through five acts of *Julius Caesar* and an act and a half of *Antony and Cleopatra,* whom we feel we have come to know intimately in his genius,

[1] Only a superficial reader can ascribe hypocrisy to Antony in the first scene of the third act of *Julius Caesar.* He makes terms with the conspirators as a politician, but as a man and friend of Caesar he is candid beyond the average of even respectable politicians.

[2] In his public capacity, he is a supreme demagogue, as in the oration over Caesar's body. He will turn this world tragedy to his political advancement. But he genuinely loved Caesar. Politically, he is a demagogue, but as G. K. Chesterton observes, there is a vein of sincerity in most successful demagogues. Demagoguery and personal hypocrisy are quite different things.

his charm, and his faults—among which is not hypocrisy. But Shakespeare knew he had to get Antony back to Egypt and Cleopatra some way, for that's the story. And so he commits an abominable blunder in motivation.

The most amazing thing is that right in the pages of Plutarch, from which he is drawing his story, the true motivation is given. Military strategy requires Antony's presence in Syria. Syria is perilously near Egypt. Weariness of the respectability of Octavia and propinquity to Cleopatra do the work for mercurial Antony. *"Then,"* says Plutarch, "began this pestilent plague and mischief of Cleopatra's love, which had slept a long time and seemed to have been utterly forgotten, and that Antonius had given place to better counsel, again to kindle and be in force so soon as Antonius came near to Syria."

For once Plutarch is a better psychologist than Shakespeare. It is not easy to see why Shakespeare did not follow Plutarch's leading here as he followed Plutarch in so much else concerning Antony (not concerning Cleopatra—that gorgeous creation is almost all Shakespeare's). Instead of following a natural development, Shakespeare brought in the soothsayer to warn Antony back to Egypt, a poor substitute for Plutarch's true perception. Shakespeare followed Plutarch in postponing for some time Antony's return to Egypt. So there was, clearly, no necessity for lugging in Antony's lapse just thirty lines after his pledge to Octavia. Surely it would have been better art and better humanity if Shakespeare had deleted the line "Though I make this marriage for my peace," had sent Antony to Syria, and there, in the suggestions of propinquity and ennui over Octavia, described by Enobarbus as "of a holy, cold and still conversation," in yearning for what Antony himself, later in the play, calls "one other gaudy night," had felt the clutch of the old

temptation beyond resistance, and had in Syria uttered the words: "I will to Egypt. I' the East my pleasure lies."

The shrewd Enobarbus knew from the outset that Rome and Octavia could not indefinitely hold Antony back from "his Egyptian dish." But Antony should not have known it when he married Octavia. Antony in the grip of his old passion, returning to Cleopatra and ruin, is understandable, is harmonious with the Antony that Shakespeare has drawn with consummate art; but committing duplicity is not harmonious with the Antony of Shakespeare's imagination.

A flaw in the art, this, rather difficult to explain unless on the supposition that Shakespeare even when writing this poetic masterpiece, this *Antony and Cleopatra,* was in a hurry, and took the shortest cut to a close, the reunion with Cleopatra and the ruin of Antony.

Sometimes the compass of a drama, "the two-hour traffic of the stage," was too circumscribed for the transformation of character which Shakespeare undertook to show. *Othello* is a classic example of this. Everybody who knows anything about dramatic art, either professionally or theoretically, knows that *Othello* is a masterpiece of craftsmanship. But as a convincing picture of a man's deterioration, under distorting passion, from noble dignity to ignoble behavior, the play has been frequently attacked, from Thomas Rymer's historical assault on it in the late seventeenth century,[1] to Doctor Stoll's withering analysis of it only a few years ago.[2]

With no time to enter into a discussion involving much detail, it must be admitted first: that Shakespeare attempts a task more suitable to a full-length, analytical novel than to a compressed play; what happens to Othello is not in-

[1] Thomas Rymer, *Short View of Tragedy,* 1693. Republished in vol. II, of *Critical Essays of the Seventeenth Century,* edited by J. E. Spingarn, Oxford, 1908.

[2] In the monograph on *Othello,* previously cited.

credible; it is only the rapidity with which it happens that taxes credulity; and secondly, that it is chiefly because the play is so great that it has been so often anatomized and condemned as unnatural. Every season plays have successful runs on Broadway which are more incredible than *Othello,* but audiences and critics accept the incredibility on the theory that "they are just plays and plays cannot be as real as life." But *Othello* is so masterly and is so nearly "true" that its flaws challenge the critics' attention.

How carefully Shakespeare strove to make Othello's unjustifiable jealousy natural is seen when Othello is compared with Leontes in *The Winter's Tale.* In the latter play Shakespeare was writing what he knew was an artificial type of drama, the Fletcherian type, and he does not attempt to make natural the jealousy of Leontes. Leontes comes nearer to the Ben Jonson formula of a man in his "humor," a creature of one passion, than to the normal, Shakespearean conception of a man as a mixture of conflicting motives and emotions. The jealousy of Leontes is so incredible that the incredibility is accepted and the beautiful play is read and enjoyed for its poetry and romance and for its superb characters of Hermione and Paulina. Leontes is not submitted to a clinical examination because he is obviously not a diseased man, but a disease itself. Othello, on the other hand, is so human, so much an actual understandable man that people (ordinary readers and play-goers as well as scholars and critics) inevitably fall to asking if such a man could be so tragically hoodwinked.

It is believable that when Shakespeare wrote this play, at the zenith of his creative powers, he thought he had laid down the premises rationally for the transformation.

It is evident that Shakespeare took no pains to make the jealousy of Leontes credible. Leontes' jealousy is merely the

springboard from which Shakespeare leaps into the dramatic action. Grant Leontes' preposterous jealousy, and the rest follows fairly sequentially. The play is an illustration of Macaulay's exaggerated dictum that if we grant a poet's premise the conclusion becomes inevitable, but that only a poet or a madman would set up the premise. In the case of Leontes the premise was laid down by one who was not only a poet but also a showman. He must get his story started and he starts it with the jealousy of Leontes, jealous from the outset (maugre a brief dialogue with Prolixenes urging him to postpone his return to Bohemia).

In the case of Othello the task was less arbitrary, more difficult: the author must show a reversal of Othello's nature from nobility to ignobility—and it may be added, back again to a sombre, stricken nobility. The real test of the difference between the two characters is in the all but universal reaction to them of readers and audiences. However much of a fool Othello is to permit himself to be so deceived (and when critics call him a "fool" they call him exactly what Othello calls himself in the last scene) he enlists pity for the misery which he suffers. Leontes does not enlist pity.

Othello is much older than Desdemona, he is a foreigner, he is a Moor, he has known nothing of sophisticated city life, he has known nothing of women, he is a blunt man whose mental processes are simple, no intellectual like Hamlet, no keen, shrewd intelligence like Iago who betrays him. Though poised and dignified, he has within him possibilities of passionate outbursts, as Shakespeare adroitly shows in Othello's uncontrollable anger when those responsible for order in the garrison violate the order—this before a suggestion of jealousy in Othello. It is a forewarning that such a man once roused will be dangerous. Desdemona's father contributes to the transformation by warning Othello that a

woman who has deceived her father may deceive her husband, a warning that means nothing to Othello in his happy, hymeneal dawn but which crashes upon his memory with paralyzing force when his suspicions have been roused and when Iago repeats, or echoes, what old Brabantio had said. Desdemona herself contributes to the transformation by her little, frightened lie, when she tells her husband that she has the handkerchief which he a little later sees with his own eyes in the hand of the suspected Cassio.

Some critics have scoffed the idea that Shakespeare had any precise conception of the disadvantage which Othello's race and color put him under. Those critics have surely failed to read the play carefully, to note the repeated references to Othello's nationality and color. They have, perhaps, not read Cinthio's story, from which Shakespeare took his plot, in which story Desdemona says explicitly: "You Moors are of so hot a nature that every little trifle moves you to anger and revenge." A hint like that was a sufficient starting point for the wild sweep of passion which Shakespeare showed in his play. Shakespeare may have known nothing of race psychology but he knew a dramatic motif when he saw it, and he saw one such in Cinthio's fragile story.

As a proposition in the abstract, it is difficult to see how anything else could have occurred than the thing which did occur, Othello being what he was, Iago being what he was, and the circumstances being what they were.

Balzac or Dostoevski, working on such people and circumstances deliberately and in detail in a three-decker novel, would have made the transformation so natural that nobody would have questioned its naturalness. It is the rapidity with which Shakespeare brings about the transformation that challenges skepticism. The transformation takes place in one scene.

Even within the brief compass of a play Shakespeare could have made the transformation more plausible if he had split the salient third scene of the third act in two, with a time interval between, a period of brooding on Iago's insinuations, a process of "soaking in." The play would be more natural if part of the transformation had taken place "behind the scenes"—so many things can occur behind the scenes, as Shakespeare himself showed in his later play, *The Winter's Tale,* where he allows a lapse of sixteen years between acts three and four and the many changes possible in sixteen years.

Shakespeare, however, chose to put the whole process of Othello's transformation into one scene and before the eyes of the audience. This time the showman's flaw in art seems to be due less to Shakespeare's habitual haste than to a proud virtuosity. At the height of his creative genius he seems to have preferred to show the audience the whole process in full view—like the prestidigitator who rolls up his sleeve to show his audience that he is concealing nothing. The flaw in *Othello* seems due less to Shakespeare's characteristic valiant carelessness than to a less characteristic over-confidence.

The fundamental difficulty lies in the conditions of the stage in the Elizabethan-Jacobean period, the omnibus character of the stage which undertook to accommodate any sort of story, even a story which, by modern standards, calls for analytical, novelistic, treatment rather than swift summary dramatic treatment—in this and in the Elizabethan-Jacobean habit of telling a whole story, not merely the culmination, as was the practice on the Greek stage. Shakespeare the showman saw theatrical opportunity in Cinthio's story of "Desdemona" and the "Moor" and the "Ancient," and Shakespeare, the dramatic artist, set to work to make the flimsy Italian tale as plausible as he could. He only half succeeded.

Sometimes Shakespeare the showman adopted without hesitation or scrutiny the primitive technique of the miracle and morality plays[1] (one source of Elizabethan drama, the other source being pretty much the whole flood of literature, ancient and modern, which the continental Renaissance brought to England). In the naïf manner of the miracle plays and moralities, Shakespeare repeatedly brought a character to the front of the stage in a communicative soliloquy in which he told the audience what to expect, as *Richard the Third* opens with a soliloquy, or monologue, in which Richard identifies himself as "a villian" as frankly as ever Judas or The Vice introduced himself to the audience in a morality play. Shakespeare never entirely dropped the primitive technique, though it is certainly pushing external criticism to unlicensed limits to assert that the soliloquies of Hamlet betray the same technique. Hamlet is emphatically not talking to the audience in his soliloquies. He is merely breathing aloud his inner doubts and agonies. He is revealing himself, not forecasting coming events. Only two of the five soliloquies give the audience information about events, and the informational forecast in one of these is only half fulfilled by subsequent occurrences, while it is the belief of many of us, not all, that the information in the other soliloquy misleads rather than apprises the audience of the real facts of the situation. When Hamlet has concluded one of his soliloquies the audience is more mystified than enlightened, is enlightened only with increasing awareness that Hamlet himself is hopelessly mystified about himself and the future, here and hereafter. Almost as perplexing are Macbeth's soliloquies except in so far as they acquaint the audience with the tumult of Macbeth's passion.

It is interesting that after Ibsen had apparently put an end

[1] Cf. Schücking and Stoll, passim. Both emphasize this point.

to soliloquy as an artificial, antiquated stage device, the soliloquy has come back into recent drama in such a flood of usage that Mr. Eugene O'Neill's *Strange Interlude* must be nearly a third in the form of soliloquy and aside—"aside" being first cousin to soliloquy.

To repeat, Shakespeare never altogether abandoned the expository method of acquainting his audience with the situation. In what is probably his last play, *The Tempest*,[1] the second scene of the first act is merely a modified soliloquy of the informative type. It was a difficult scene to manage even with the license of Shakespeare's age and stage to use narrative exposition at greater length than is permissible in modern drama. Shakespeare did his best, but his best is not very good, considered as natural drama. He tried to make dialogue out of the interminable narrative, but Miranda's share in the dialogue is little more than conventional interruption of her father's long-spun story. Prospero is talking to the audience, not to his daughter. It is primitive technique only a little advanced beyond the communicative monologue of the early forms of English drama.

Schücking[2] and Stoll[3] are correct in their assertion that Shakespeare employed the self-descriptive or self-explanatory method in making characters known to the audience. Stoll refers to "the Elizabethan self-descriptive or apparently self-conscious method . . . whereby tragic characters in passion speak of it as if it were an external fever."[4] Doctor Stoll, at his worst, pushes sound criticism to a length unwarranted by the Shakespearean text, but he is right in his assertion that Miranda (in *The Tempest*) illustrates the

[1] *Henry the Eighth*, which was written after *The Tempest*, is only in part by Shakespeare.

[2] *Character Problems*, Chap. I.

[3] *Shakespeare Studies*, pp. 104 ff. and passim.

[4] Ibid., p. 103.

point when she, an "Arcadian child of nature, to whom sin or temptation is unknown . . . calls to witness her own 'modesty' and 'innocence.' "[1] The proponent of Shakespeare's "inerrancy" may cite, in rebuttal, the fact that Miranda has been made aware of evil by Caliban's frustrated attempt to ravish her.[2] But Shakespeare has not "knit in" this experience with Miranda's mental processes. When she is with Ferdinand there are no *arrière-pensées,* no recollections of Caliban's assault. She is simply a pretty incident in a fantastic idyll. As there is nobody else present to tell Ferdinand how "modest," and "innocent" she is, Shakespeare must make her tell it, according to a well-established stage convention of the time. Her "hence, bashful, cunning!" is even worse, because more self-conscious, than the phrases cited by Doctor Stoll.

The fact is this whole Scene 1 of Act III of *The Tempest* is tiresome because it is mere pastoral, conventional dialogue. The wooing of Ferdinand and Miranda has in it none of the zest and warmth and sparkling humor of the wooing scenes in *As You Like It;* none of the suffocating anxiety of Portia when she watches with bated breath Bassanio meditating on the three caskets, hesitating which to choose, when Portia knows that her heart's satisfaction and her life's destiny hang in the balance, yet is by honor prevented from prompting Bassanio to the right choice, and when the agony of the suspense is over, and she sees that Bassanio is about to open the right casket, she is almost overwhelmed with joy and whispers to herself:

> O love,
> Be moderate; allay thy ecstasy;
> In measure rein thy joy; scant this excess!
> I feel too much thy blessing; make it less,
> For fear I surfeit.[3]

[1]Ibid., p. 104.
[2]*The Tempest,* Act I, sc. 2, lines 347–348.
[3]*Merchant of Venice,* Act. III, sc. 2, lines 111–115.

Portia and Rosalind are women in the clutch of holy emotion. But Miranda, for all the praises showered on her by critics and poets, is shadowy, unsubstantial. It was natural for Shelley to be fascinated by Miranda. She is of a kind with the fleshless etherealized quintessentials that Shelley put into his own poetry in place of actual people (Shelley's greatness is not in character-drawing). It is the magic, the poetry, the very remoteness from actuality which give the charm to *The Tempest,* not the solid "humans" which Shakespeare drew for plays nearer to earth and its realities. In many of the more substantial plays Shakespeare used, when he found it convenient, the prevailing Elizabethan, self-descriptive method, but he offset this with natural self-revelations as in the case of Portia, a completely humanized and individualized reaction in a story based upon an initial absurdity. Among the greatest of Shakespeare's abilities as a delineator of character was his ability to fit credible human beings to incredible situations, often to make it appear inevitable that what his people do is what they would do if such people could exist in such circumstances. In his last plays, however, made according to the Fletcherian artificial formula, Shakespeare permits more improbability of conduct than he had permitted in his tragedies, his histories, or his romantic comedies after the first flights in *Love's Labor's Lost* and *Two Gentlemen of Verona.* Everything "went" on the Elizabethan stage, and hard-ridden Shakespeare sometimes used the methods of an artist and sometimes the methods of a showman.

As a showman Shakespeare employed most of the well-worn stage tricks of his time, such as dressing up girls as boys and assuming that even their lovers and their fathers would be unable to penetrate the disguise. These lines are written in a Colorado city where the streets are filled with

young women, tourists and mountain "hikers," dressed as boys, but the most casual observer is not deceived about their sex. Yet Proteus and Bassanio and Gratiano and Orlando never suspect that the pretty boys they are talking with are their sweethearts, and Cymbeline and Posthumus are equally deceived about the "boy" Fidele in whom Cymbeline fails to recognize his daughter and Posthumus fails to recognize his lady love, Imogen. Viola's disguise even succeeds in so deceiving another woman that Olivia, otherwise a sensible woman, falls precipitately in love with the "boy."

A stage trick repeated by Shakespeare *ad nauseam* is to have country louts use words in a sense opposite to their correct meaning with almost scientific precision of inaccuracy. It is noticeable that in his last employment of the old "gag," the "clown" (country fellow) in *The Winter's Tale,*[1] the use is meager and the humor is languid as if Shakespeare had grown weary of the thread-bare device.

Sometimes the fidelity to his central conception slipped, apparently simply because Shakespeare, consciously or unconsciously, permitted himself the license of romance in an art form that had not developed realism systematically,[2] sometimes substituting for *mot de caractère* the *mot d'auteur,* his own thoughts instead of his character's thoughts.

There are in his work many examples of this flaw (a flaw from the point of view of realistic criticism), many phrases that are obviously out of character with the people that utter them.

For instance, there is the exquisite antiphonal threnody sung by Guiderius and Arviragus over Fidele in *Cymbeline,*[3]

[1] Act IV, sc. 4, lines 189–190.

[2] Schücking refers frequently and aptly to Shakespeare's "limited realism."

[3] Act IV, sc. 2.

that "lyrical dirge," which Sidney Lee says "for perfect sureness of thought and expression has no parallel in the songs of previous years."[1] But the "sureness of thought" is Shakespeare's, not the boys' who sing the dirge. They were stolen from court when one of them was three years old, the other in swaddling clothes, and reared in the mountain wilderness of Wales, far removed from contact with civilization and its disappointments. When they are mourning the (supposedly) dead Fidele, and bethinking them of the release which death brings from life's misfortunes it is natural enough that they should enumerate the perils of an exposed life in the wilderness, natural enough that they should console themselves for Fidele's untimely death with the thought that Fidele has forever escaped the terrors and perils of "lightning flash," "all dreaded thunder-stone," "heat o' the sun," "furious winter's rages," and (in Wales, where the supernatural is natural) "witchcraft charm," "ghost unlaid." These things are in character with the boys and their limited experiences in wild places. But what can they know about "frown o' the great," "tyrant's stroke," "sceptre," "learning?" What do they know about "chimney sweepers?" These latter phrases are Shakespeare's, city dweller, observer of the arrogance of those who are "dressed in a little brief authority." Indiscriminately the poet mingles what is natural to him with what is natural to the wildling boys.

There are similar false notes of character detail in Hamlet's great soliloquy, the greatest of them all, that in the first scene of the third act, when the Prince, enumerating "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune," specifies (among others) "the proud man's contumely" and "the insolence of office." These are things the Prince had not experienced.

[1]*Life,* 423.

True, they can be defended on the ground that Hamlet is a sympathetic observer of life and may conceivably, in his meditation on the vanity of life, instance sorrows which he had observed rather than shared. But instead of trying to square everything in Shakespeare with a pre-conception of Shakespeare's inerrancy, it is better to accept such things as expressions of the poet himself rather than of Hamlet, of the poet who, perhaps speaking in his own person, in sonnet 66, had complained of life's inequalities, specifying "gilded honor shamefully misplaced," "strength by limping sway disabled," "art made tongue-tied by authority," "folly, doctor-like controlling skill," "simple truth miscalled simplicity," and "captive good attending captain ill."

Schücking[1] confirms the long-ago impression of the present writer that Mercutio's speech about Queen Mab in *Romeo and Juliet* is "out of character," is Shakespeare's own exuberant, poetic fancy, carried over from *Midsummer Night's Dream* into a character of solid flesh-and-blood, and "resembles," says Schücking, "an operatic air inserted for the sake of the music without regard to the characterization." It is beautiful poetry but it does not harmonize with Mercutio's blunt character and forthright speech.

Shakespeare criticism can never go straight if it ignores the principle laid down in Ibsen's simple phrase, "We are no longer living in Shakespeare's time," which time permitted liberties and discrepancies unallowable in a more realistic age and on a more realistic stage than Shakespeare's.

He got his effects, not only as a showman but as a romantic showman on a romantic stage where nearly anything was permissible that could seize and hold the attention of an audience but little tutored in the demand for verisimilitude.

[1] *Character Problems in Shakespeare's Plays*, pp. 97–99.

Examples and varieties of showman's tricks and romancer's artifices could be multiplied into a book. This is an obvious side of Shakespeare's work which cannot be overlooked without emasculating his product or distorting it to fit standards of plausibility mandatory in our day, but often in his day more honored in the breach than in the observance.