ARIOSTO, SHAKESPEARE AND CORNEILLE

BY
BENEDETTO CROCE

TRANSLATED BY
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TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

Evviva L'Italia! Italy, Britain's ancient friend and loyal ally, has been an important factor both in winning the war and in bringing it to an earlier conclusion. The War! That greatest practical effort that the world has ever made is now over and we must all work to make it a better place for all to live in.

Now at the hands of her philosopher-critic, Italy offers us a first effort at reconstruction of our world-view with this masterly treatise on the greatest poet of the English-speaking world, so original and so profound that it will serve as guide to generations yet unborn. And it will not be only the critics of Shakespeare who should benefit by this treatise, but all critics and lovers of poetry — including prose — who go beyond the passive stage of mere admiration. The essays on Ariosto and Corneille are also unique and the three together should inaugurate everywhere a new era in literary criticism.

These are the first of Benedetto Croce's literary criticisms to see the light in English.

They are profound and suggestive, because based upon theory, the *Theory of Aesthetic,* with which some readers will be acquainted in the original, others in the version by the present translator. These will not need to be told that Croce's theory of the independence and autonomy of the aesthetic fact, which is intuition-expression, and of the essentially lyrical character of all art, is the only one that completely and satisfactorily explains the problem of poetry and the fine arts.

But this is not the place for philosophical discussion, although it is important to stress the point, that all criticism is based upon philosophy, and that therefore if the philosophy upon which it is based is unsound, the criticism suffers accordingly. Croce has elsewhere shown that the shortcomings of such critics as Sainte-Beuve, Taine, Lemaître and Brunetière are due to incorrect or insufficient philosophical knowledge and a similar criterion can be applied at home with equal truth.

The translator will be satisfied if the present version receives equal praise from the author with that accorded to the four translations of the Philosophy into English, which Croce has often declared to come more near to his spirit

than those in any other language — and he has been translated into all the great European languages — the *Aesthetic* even into Japanese. The object adhered to in this translation has been as close a cleaving as possible to the original, while preserving a completely idiomatic style and remaining free from all pedantry.

A translation should not in any case be taken as a pouring from the golden into the silver vessel, as used to be erroneously supposed, for Croce has proved that in so far as the translator rethinks the original he is himself a creator. This explains why so many writers have been addicted to translation — in English we have Pope, Fitzgerald, Rossetti, to name but three of many — and the author of the Philosophy of the Spirit, Croce himself, has published a splendid Italian version of Hegel's *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophic Sciences*.

DOUGLAS AINSLIE.

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CONTENTS

PART I

LUDOVICO ARIOSTO

PART II

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

PART III
PIERRE CORNEILLE

PART I

LUDOVICO ARIOSTO

CHAPTER I

A CRITICAL PROBLEM[1]

The fortune of the *Orlando Furioso* may be compared to that of a graceful, smiling woman, whom all look upon with pleasure, without experiencing any intellectual embarrassment or perplexity, since it suffices to have eyes and to direct them to the pleasing object, in order to admire. Crystal clear as is the poem, polished in every particular, easily to be understood by whomsoever possesses general culture, it has never presented serious difficulties of interpretation, and for that reason has not needed the industry of the commentators, and has not been

[1] In the preparation of this essay, I believe that I have examined all, or almost all, the literature of erudition and criticism, old and new, in connection with Ariosto; this will not escape the expert reader, although particular discussions and quotation of titles and pages of books have seemed to me to be superfluous on this occasion. But in judging this work, the reader should have present in his mind above all the chapter of De Sanctis on the *Furioso* (illustrated with fragments from his lectures at Zurich upon the poetry of chivalry), which forms the point of departure for these later investigations and conclusions.

injured by their quarrelsome subtleties; nor has it been subject, more than to a very slight extent, to the intermittences from which other notable poetical works have suffered, owing to the varying conditions of culture at different times. Great men and ordinary readers have been in as complete agreement about it, as, for instance, about the beauty, let us say, of a Madame Récamier; and the list of great men, who have experienced its fascination, goes from Machiavelli and the Galilei, to Voltaire and to Goethe, without mentioning names more near to our own time.

Yet, however unanimous, simple and unrestrainable be the aesthetic approbation accorded to the poem of Ariosto, the critical judgments delivered upon it are just as discordant, complicated and laboured; and indeed this is one of those cases where the difference of the two spiritual moments, intuitive or aesthetic, the apprehension or tasting of the work of art, and intellective, the critical and historical judgment,— a difference wrongly disputed from one point of view by sensationalists and from another by intellectualists,— stands out so clearly as to seem to be almost spatially divided, so that one can touch it with one's hand.

Anyone can easily read and live again the octaves of Ariosto, caressing them with voice and imagination, as though passionately in love; but to say whence comes that particular form of enchantment, to determine that is to say, the character of the inspiration that moved Ariosto, his dominant poetical motive, the peculiar effect which became poetry in him, is a very different undertaking and one of no small difficulty.

The question has tormented the critics from the time when literary and historical criticism acquired individual prominence and energy, that is to say at the origin of romantic aestheticism, when works of art were no longer examined in parts separated from the whole, or in their external outline, but in the spirit that animated them. Yet we must not think that earlier times were without all suspicion of this, for an uncertain suggestion of it is to be found even in the eccentric enquiries, as to whether the *Furioso* be a moral poem or not, or whether it should be looked upon as serious or playful. But intellects such as Schiller and Goethe, Humboldt and Schelling, Hegel, Ranke, Gioberti, Quinet and De Sanctis, treated or touched upon it in the last century, and very many others dur-

ing and after their times, and the theme has again been taken up with renewed keenness, in dissertations, memoirs and articles, some of them foreign, but mostly Italian.

Many of the problems or formulas of problems, which one at one time critically discussed have been allowed to disappear, like cast-off clothes as the results of the new conception of art: that is to say, not only those we have mentioned, as to whether the *Furioso* were or were not an epic, whether it were serious or comic, but also a throng of other problems, such as whether it possessed unity of action, a protagonist or hero, whether its episodes were linked to the action, whether it maintained the dignity of history, whether it afforded an allegory, and if so, of what sort, whether it obeyed the laws of modesty and morality, or followed good examples, whether it could be credited with invention, and if so in what measure, whether it were finer than the *Gerusalemme* or less fine, and as to what it was finer or less fine; and so on. All these problems have become obsolete, because they have been solved in the only suitable way, that is to say, they have been shown to be fallacious in their theoretical terms; and to say that they are obsolete does not mean that there

have not been some, both in the nineteenth century and at the present time, who have set to work to solve them, and have arrived at unfortunate conclusions in different ways. The unity of action of the *Furioso* has also been investigated and determined (by Panizzi, for example, and by Carducci); its immorality has also been blamed (by Cantù, for instance); the book of the debts of Ariosto to his predecessors has been re-opened and charged with so very many figures on the debit side that the final balance-sheet of credit and debit presents an enormous deficit (Rajna); the comparison with examples from prototypes under the name of "*Evolutionary History of Romantic Chivalry*," in which the *Furioso*, according to some, does not represent the summit, but rather a deviation and decadence from the ideal prototype (Rajna again); according to others, the *Furioso* gave final and perfect form to "The French Epic of Germanic Heroes" (Morf); allegory, contained in a moral judgment as to Italian life at the time of the Renaissance, lost in its pursuit of love, like the Christian and Saracen knights in their pursuit of Angelica (Canello). But whether in their primitive or in their more modern forms these problems are obsolete, for

us who are aware of the mistakes and errors in aesthetic, from which they arise; and others of more recent date must also be held obsolete with these, such theories as these for instance (to quote one of them) which undertake to study the *Furioso* in its "formation," understanding by formation the literary presuppositions of its various parts, beginning with the title. Decorated with the name of *Scientific Study,* this is mere inconclusive or ill-conclusive philology.

The work of modern criticism does not restrict itself to the clearing away of these idle and unnecessary enquiries, but also includes a varied and thorough investigation into the poetry of Ariosto, whose every aspect we may claim to have illuminated in turn, and to have given all the solutions as to the true character of the problem that can be suggested. And it almost seems now that anyone who wishes to form an idea upon the subject needs but select from the various existing solutions, that one which shows itself to be clearly superior to all others, owing to its being supported by the most valid arguments, after he has possessed himself of the critical literature relating to Ariosto. It seems impossible to suggest a new solution, and

as though the argument were one of those of which it may be said that "there is no hope of finding anything new in connection with it."

And this is very nearly true, but only very nearly, for a non-superficial examination of those various solutions leads to the result that none of them is valid in the way it is presented, that is to say, with the arguments that support it. It is therefore advisable to indicate some of these arguments, which have already been given, and to deduce from them other consequences, though we may not succeed in framing others which shall shine with amazing novelty. But upon consideration, this will be nothing less than providing a new solution, just because the problem has been differently presented and differently argued: a novelty of that serious sort which is a step forward upon what has already been observed and acquired, not that sort of extravagant novelty agreeable to false originality and to sterile subtlety.

There are two fundamental types of reply to the question as to the character of Ariosto's poetry; of these the more important is the first, either because, as will be seen, really here near to the truth, or because supported with the

supreme authority of De Sanctis. Prior to De Sanctis, it is only to be vaguely discerned as suggested by the eighteenth century writer, Sulzer, and more clearly in the German aesthetic writer, Vischer; it was afterwards repeated, prevailed and was accepted, among others by Carducci. According to De Sanctis and to his precursors and followers, in the *Furioso* Ariosto has no subjective content to express, no sentimental or passionate motive, no idea become sentiment or passion, but pursues the sole end of art, singing for singing's sake, representing for representation's sake, elaborating pure form, and satisfying the one end of realising his own dreams.

This affirmation is not to be taken in a general sense, the words in which it is formulated must not be construed literally, for in that case it would be easy to raise the reasonable objection, that not only Ariosto, but every artist, just because he is an artist, never has any end but that of art, of singing for singing's sake, representing for representation's sake, of elaborating pure form, and of satisfying the need that he feels to realise his own dreams: woe to the artist, who has an eye to any other ends, and tries to teach, to persuade, to shock,

to move, to make a hit or an effect, or anything else extraneous to art. The theory of art for art, opposed by many, is incontestable from this point of view, it is indeed indubitable and altogether obvious. The critics who attribute that end as a character of Ariosto's poetry, mean rather to affirm, that the author of the *Furioso* proceeded in his own individual proper manner with respect to other poets; and they then proceed to determine their thoughts upon the subject in two ways, differing somewhat from one another. Both of these are to be found mingled and confused in the pages of De Sanctis. Ariosto is held to have allowed to pass in defile within him the chain of romantic figures of knights and ladies and the stories of their arms and audacious undertakings, of their loves and their love-making, with the one object of *delighting the imagination.* Ariosto is held to have depicted that various human world without interposing anything between himself and things, without reflecting himself in things, without sinking them in himself or in his own feelings. He is held to have been solely an *objective observer.* Now, taking the first case, that is to say, if the work of Ariosto be really resolved into a plaything of the imag-

ination, although he might have pleased himself by doing something agreeable to himself and to others, yet he would not have been a poet, "the divine Ariosto," because the pleasure of the fancy belongs to the order of practical acts, to what are called games or diversion. And in the second case, when he has been praised for being perfectly objective, this is not only at variance with the actual creation of the poet, but is also in contradiction to it — and indeed in contradiction to every form of spiritual production. As though things existed outside the spirit and it were possible to take them up in their supposed objectivity and to externalise them by putting them on paper or canvas. The theory of art for art, when taken as a theory of merely fanciful pleasure or of indifferent objective reproduction of things, should be firmly rejected, because it is at variance with and contradicts the nature of art and of the universal spirit. At the most, these two paradigms,— art as mere fancy and art as extrinsic objectivity,— might be of avail as designating two artistic forms of deficiency and ugliness, *futile* art and *material* art, that is to say, in both cases, non-art; and in like manner the theory of art for art's sake would in those

cases be the definition of one or more forms of artistic perversion.

Owing to the impossibility of denying to Ariosto any content, and at the same time of enjoying him and of acclaiming him a poet,— an impossibility more or less obscurely felt by some, although without discovering and demonstrating it as has been done above,— it has come about that not only other critics, but those very critics who, like De Sanctis, had described him as a poet of pure fancy or pure objectivity, have been led to recognise in him a content, and sometimes several contents, one upon the top of the other, in a heap. One of such contents, perhaps that most generally admitted, is without doubt the *dissolution of the world of chivalry,* brought about by Ariosto through irony: a historical position conferred upon him by Hegel, and amply illustrated by De Sanctis. But what do they mean by saying that Ariosto expresses the dissolution of the world of chivalry? Certainly not simply that in his poem are to be found documents concerning the passing of the ideals of chivalry, because whether this be true or not, it does not concern the concrete artistic form, but its abstract material, considered and treated as a

source of historical documentation. Nor can it mean that he was inspired with aversion to the ideals of chivalry and in favour of new ideals, because polemic and criticism, negation and affirmation, are not art. So what was really meant was (although those who maintain this interpretation often understand it in one or other of those meanings, which are external to art), that Ariosto was animated with a true and real feeling toward the ideals of the life of chivalry, and that this feeling supplied the lyrical motive for his poem. This motive has been disputed in its details in various ways, some holding it to have been aversion, others a mixture of aversion and of love, others of admiration and of pleasure; but before we engage in further investigation, we must first ascertain if there exist, that is to say, if Ariosto really endowed with his own feeling — whatever it be, prevailing aversion or prevailing inclination or a prevalent alternation of the two,— the material of chivalry, rendering it serious and emotional, through the seriousness and emotion of his own feeling. And this does not exist at all, for what all feel and see as chivalry in Ariosto's mode of treatment, is on the contrary a sort of aloofness and superiority, owing to which he

never engages himself up to the hilt in admiration or in scorn or in passionate disagreement with one or the other; and this impression which his narratives of sieges and combats, of duels and feats of arms produce upon us, has afforded the ground for the above-mentioned opposed theories as to his objective attitude and as to his cultivation of a mere pastime of the imagination. Had Ariosto really aimed, as is said, at an exaltation or a semi-exaltation or at an ironisation of chivalry, he would clearly have missed the mark, and this failure would have been the failure of his art.

What has been remarked concerning the content of chivalry is to be repeated for all the other contents which have been proposed in turn, each one or all of them together as the true and proper leading motive; and of these (leaving out the least likely, because we are not here concerned with collecting curious trifles of Ariostesque criticism, but are resuming the essential lines of this criticism with the intention of cutting into it more deeply and with greater certainty), the next thing to mention, immediately after chivalrous ideality or anti-ideality, is the philosophy of life, the *wisdom,* which Ariosto is supposed to have ad-

ministered and counselled. This wisdom is supposed to have embraced love, friendship, politics, religion, public and private life, and to have been directed with great moderation and good sense, noble without fanaticism, courageous and patient, dignified and modest. We admit that these things are to be found in the *Furioso,* just as chivalrous things are to be found there also; but they are there in almost the same way, that is to say, with the not doubtful accent of aloofness and remoteness, which at once places a great chasm between Ariosto and the true poets of wisdom, such as were for instance, Manzoni and Goethe. The latter of these, in the fine verses (of the *Tasso*) in praise of Ariosto,— who is held to have there draped in the garb of fable all that can render man dear and honoured, to have exhibited experience, intelligence, good taste, the pure sense of good, as living persons, crowned with roses and surrounded with a magic winged presence of Amorini,— somewhat transfigured the subject of his eulogy, by approaching him to himself: although, as we perceive from the images that he employed, it did not escape him that in the case of the lovable singer of the *Furioso,* the wisdom was covered, and as it were

smothered beneath a cloud of many coloured flowers. Thus the two principal solutions hitherto given of the critical problem presented by Ariosto, the only two which appear thinkable, — that the *Furioso* has no content; that it has this or that content,— each finds countenance in the other and arguments in its favour. This means that they confute one another in turn. And since it is impossible that there should be no content in Ariosto, and on the other hand, since all those to which attention was first directed (admiration or contempt of chivalry, wisdom of life) turn out to be without existence, it is clear that there is no way out of the difficulty, save that of seeking another content, and such an one as shall show how the truth has been improperly symbolised in the formulas of " mere imagination," of " indifferent objectivity " and of " art for art's sake."

CHAPTER II

THE LIFE OF THE AFFECTIONS IN ARIOSTO, AND THE HEART OF HIS HEART

Ariosto had ordinary emotional experiences in life, and this has been shown to be true, not so much through the biographies of his contemporaries and documents which have later come to light, as through his own words, because he took great pleasure, if not exactly in confessing himself, at any rate in giving vent to his feelings. It is well known that he was without profound intellectual passions, religious or political, free from longing for riches and honours, simple and frugal in his mode of life, seeking above all things peace and tranquillity and freedom to follow his own imagination, to give himself over to the studies that he loved. Rarely or only for brief spaces of time was it given to him to live in his own way, owing to the necessity, always on his shoulders, for providing for his younger brothers and sisters and

for his mother, and also the necessity of obtaining bread for himself. All these circumstances together constrained him to undertake the hard work and the annoyances of a court life. He was admirable in the fulfilment of family duties, perfectly honest and reliable on every occasion, full of good, just and generous sentiments, and therefore the recipient of universal esteem and confidence. Owing to reasons connected with his office, he was obliged to associate with greedy, violent, unscrupulous men, but he did not allow himself to be stained by their contact, preserving the attitude of an honest employee towards his patrons, attentive to the formal duties with which he was charged. He is discreet, but pure and dignified, refraining from taking part whatever in the secret plots and machinations of those whose orders he obeys. He was thus enabled to carry out the instructions of his superiors, whom he regarded solely as filling a certain lofty rank, idealising them in conformity with their rank, praising them, that is to say, for their attainments, their ability and their noble undertakings, either because they really possessed them and really accomplished the things for which he praised them, or be-

cause they should have possessed them and accomplished the feats in question, as attributes inherent to their social station.

Among these duties and labours one single passion ran like an ever warm stream through his brain: love, or rather the need of woman's society, to have with him a beloved woman, to enjoy her beauty, her laughter, her speech: and although he frequently alludes to this passion, it is as one ashamed of a weakness, but aware that he can by no means dispense with the sweetness that it procures for him and which is a vital element of his being. But even his love for woman, however strong it may have been, found its correct framework in his idyllic ideal and in his reflective and temperate spirit: it contained nothing of the fantastic, the adventurous, the Donjuanesque; and after the customary evil and evanescent adventures of youth, he took refuge in her "for whom he trembled with amorous zeal" and (as his friend Hercules Bentivoglio tells us in verse): in that Alexandra, who was his friend for twenty years, and finally his more or less legal wife. United to his desire for quietude, there was thus a potent stimulus not to remove himself at all, or if at all, then as little as possible, from

her who was warmth and comfort for him, and to whom he clung like a child to the bosom of its mother. His latter years, in which, recalled from his severe sojourn at Garfagnana, he occupied himself with correcting his poems at Ferrara, with the woman he loved at his side, were perhaps the happiest he knew; and he passed away in that peace for which he had sighed, ere attaining to old age.

Such tendencies of soul and the life which resulted from them, have sometimes been admired and envied, as for instance by the sixteenth century English translator of the *Furioso,* Harrington. After having described them, and having disclaimed certain sins, indeed as he said, the single *pecadillo of love,* he concludes with a sigh: *"Sic me contingat vivere, Sicque mori."* Sometimes too they have been looked upon from above and almost with compassion, as by De Sanctis and others, who have insisted upon the negative aspects of the character of Ariosto. These negative aspects are however nothing but the limits, which are found in everyone, for we are not all capable of everything; and really Italian critics, especially in the period of the Risorgimento, were often wrong in laying down as a single measure

for everyone, civil, political, patriotic, religious, excellence, forgetful that judgment of an individual's character should depend upon his natural disposition, his temperament. Certainly, the life of Ariosto was not rich and intense, nor does it present important problems in respect of social and moral history; and the industry of the learned, although it has been able to increase its collections and conjectures as to his economic and family conditions, as to his official duties as courtier, as ambassador and administrator for the Duke of Ferrara, as to his loves and as to the names and persons of the women whom he loved, as to the house which he built and inhabited, and other similar particulars, anecdotes and curiosities concerning him (the collection of which shows with how much religion or superstition a great man is surrounded, and also sometimes the futility of the searcher), has not added anything substantial to what the poet tells us himself, far less has been able to furnish materials for a really new biography, which should be at once profound and dramatic.

Nevertheless, such as it was, the life of a good and of a poor man, of one tenaciously devoted to love and poetry, it found literary ex-

pression in the minor works of the author: in the Latin songs, in the Italian verses, and in the satires.

In saying this, we shall set aside the comedies, which seem to be the most important of those minor works and are notwithstanding the least significant, so that they might be almost excluded from the history of his poetical development, connected rather with his doings as a courtier, as an arranger of spectacles and plays, for which purpose he decided to imitate the Latin comedy, for he did not believe there was anything new to be done in that field, since the Latins had already imitated the Greeks. No doubt Ariosto's comedies stand for an important date in the history of the Italian theatre and of the Latin imitation which prevailed there, that is to say, the history of culture, but not in that of poetry. There they are mute. They are works of adaptation and combination, and therefore executed with effort; there is nothing new, even about their form, and a proof of this is that Ariosto, after he had made a first attempt to write them in prose, finally put them into monotonous and tiresome antepenultimate hendecasyllabics, which have never pleased anyone's ear, because they were not

born, but constructed according to design, with evident artifice and with a view to giving to Italy the metre of comedy, analogous to the Roman iambic. Whoever (to cite an instance from the same period and "style") calls to memory the *Mandragola* of Machiavelli, instinct with the energetic spirit, the bitter disdain of the great thinker, or even the sketches thrown upon paper anyhow by the ne'er-do-well Pietro Aretino, is at once sensible of the difference between dead ability and living force, or at any rate careless vigour. Nor does the dead material come alive, as some easily contented critics maintain, from the fact that Ariosto introduced, especially into the later of those comedies, allusions to persons, places and customs of Ferrara, or satirical gibes at the vices of the time; all these things are light as straws and quite indifferent when original inspiration lacks, as in the present case.

On the other hand, there are many pure and spontaneous parts in the minor works: even the imitations of Horace, of Catullus, of Tibullus in the Latin poems, do not produce a sense of coldness, because we feel that they are inspired with devotion of the humanists for the Latins, for "my Latins," as he affectionately called

them; and the heart of the poet often beats with theirs, whether he be lamenting the death of a friend and companion, or drawing the portrait of some fair lady, or describing the delights of the country, or inveighing against some treacherous and venal woman. In like manner, we observe some fine traits of lofty emotion among the Italian poems, such as the two songs for Philiberta of Savoy; and the true accents of his love find their way to utterance among the Petrarchan, the madrigalesque and the courtly qualities of others. Such is the song celebrating their first meeting, in which he records the Florentine *festa,* where he saw her who was to become his mistress, and who immediately occupied a place above all other women in his eyes, her whose fair, dense hair, as it shaded her cheeks and neck and fell upon her shoulders, whose rich silken robe adorned with scarlet and gold, became part of his soul; and the elegy which is an outburst of joy upon having attained the desired felicity; and that other which records the lovers' meeting at night; then too the chapter upon the visit to Florence, where all the attractions of the sweet city failed to secure for him a moment's respite, eager as he was to return to the longed-

for presence of the loved one, whom he describes poetically in her absence as a fair magician:

"Oltra acque, monti, a ripa l'onda vaga
Del re de' fiumi, in bianca e pura stola,
Cantando ferma il sol la bella maga,
Che con sua vista può sanarmi sola."

and in the sonnet which ends:

"Ma benigne accoglienze, ma complessi
Licenziosi, ma parole sciolte
D'ogni freno, ma risi, vezzi e giuochi."

They are often echoes of the erotic Latin poets, refreshed by the true condition of his own spirit which, in the passion of love, never went beyond a tender and somewhat slight degree of sensuality. It would be vain to seek in him what he does not possess — that suave imagining, those cosmical analogies, those moral finesses and lofty thoughts, which are to be found in other poets of love.

For this reason, reflections upon himself and upon the society in which it was his fate to live, confidences about his own various ways of feeling and the recital of his adventures, follow and accompany the brief lyrical effusions of this eroticism. When Ariosto limits himself to

the thoughts and happenings of his daily life, it is rather a question of narrating than creating, and the culmination of the minor works are known as the *Satires,* which must not be limited to the seven which bear this title in the printed editions, but should be extended to include other compositions of like tone and content, to be found among the elegies and the capitals, and even among the odes, such as the elegy *De diversis amoribus.* In all of these, Ariosto is writing his autobiography in fragments, or rather as a series of confidential letters to his friends, such as he did not write in prose, at least none are to be found among those of his that remain. These are all connected with business, dry, summary, and written in haste, only here and there revealing the personality of the writer; whereas, when he expressed himself in verse, he made his own soul the subject, paying attention to the vivacity of the representation and the precise accuracy of what he said. This is a most pleasing versified correspondence, where we hear him lamenting, losing patience, telling us what he wants, forming projects, refusing, begging a favour, candidly laying bare for us his true disposition, his lack of docility,

his volubility and his caprices, discussing life and the world, smiling at others and at himself; we converse with an Ariosto in his dressing-gown, who experiences great pleasure and has no compunction about showing us himself as he is, and we know how he abhorred any sort of restraint. But these letters in verse, although perfect in quality, vivacious and eloquent as only the writings of a man who speaks of things that concern himself can be, yet are letters, confessions, autobiography: they are not pure poetry; their metrical form is to them something of a delicate pleasing whim, in harmony with such a definition of the soul. In saying this, we do not wish to detract in any way from their value, which is great, but only to prevent their true character from escaping us.

It is no marvel then if a connection, such as prevails between hills and valleys, seems to run between these lesser works, the odes, the verses of the satires, and the *Furioso*. It is sufficient to read an octave or two of the poem to discover at once the difference in altitude separating it from the most delicious of the love-songs, from the most nimble and picturesque of the satires, which express the feelings of

the author far more directly than does the *Furioso*. It is further to be noted that Ariosto never wished to publish, and certainly never would have had published a great number of them, with the exception of the comedies, even after his death, except perhaps the satires; but since the minor works are nevertheless the expression of his feelings in real and ordinary life, it follows that if we wish to discover the inspiration of the *Furioso,* the passion which informed and gave to it its proper content, we must seek for this beyond his ordinary life, not in the heart which we know as that of a son, a brother, a poor man, a lover: it is something hidden yet more deeply within him, the heart of his heart.

That there really was a hidden affection; that Ariosto really had a heart of his heart shut up within himself; that beyond and above the beloved woman he worshipped another woman or goddess, with whom he daily held religious converse, is apparent from his whole habit of life. Why had he so lofty a disdain for practical ambitions, why was life at court and business so wearisome to him, why did he renounce so much, sigh so often and so often pray for leisure and rest and freedom, save to celebrate that cult, to give himself over to

that converse, to work upon the *Furioso,* which was its altar, or the statue which he had sculptured for it and was perfecting with his chisel? What was the origin of his well-known "distraction," that mind of his so aloof from his surroundings, ever dwelling upon something else, which his contemporaries observe and about which curious anecdotes are preserved? His need of love and of feminine caresses did not present itself to him as a supreme end, as with people desirous of ease and pleasure, but seemed to him to be rather a means to an end: as though it were the surrounding of serene joy, of tumult appeased, which he prepared for himself and for that other more lofty love. Carducci has successfully defined this psychological situation in his sonnet on the portrait of Ariosto, where he says that the only longed for and accepted "prize for his poems" was for the great dreamer "a lovely mouth — which should appease the burning of his Apollonian brow — with kisses . . ."

The proof of the scrupulous attention which he devoted to the *Furioso,* is to be found in the twelve years, during which he worked upon it in the flower of his age, "with long vigils and labours," as he wrote to the Doge of Venice,

when requesting the privilege of printing the first edition of 1516; and in his having always returned to it, to chisel smooth and to soften it in innumerable delicate details, or to amplify it, or in the throwing away of five cantos, which he had written by way of amplification, but which did not go well with the general design, and finally failed to content him. For these he substituted as many more, and personally superintended the edition of 1532, which also failed to content him altogether, so that he began to work upon it again during the few months which separated him from death. His son Virginio attests that he "was never satisfied with his verses, that he kept changing them again and again, and for this reason never remembered any of them . . ."; and contemporaries never cease marvelling at his diligence as a corrector and a maker of perfect things: Giraldi Cinzio, to mention but one witness, says that after the first edition, "not a single day passed," during sixteen years, "that he was not occupied upon it with pen and with thought," and that he was also desirous of obtaining the opinions and impressions of the greatest men of letters and humanists in Italy as to every part of it, men such as Bembo, Mol-

za, Navagero; and as Apelles with his paintings, Ariosto kept his work for two years "in the hall of his house, leaving it there that it might be criticised by everyone"; and he particularly said that he wished his critics merely to mark with a stroke of the pen those parts which did not please them, without giving any reason for so doing, that he might find it out for himself, and then discuss it with them, and so arrive at a decision and a solution in his own way. He pushed his minute delicacy of taste so far as to be preoccupied about the choice of modes of spelling, refusing, for instance, to remove the "h" from those words which possessed it by tradition, thus opposing the suggestion of Tolomei and the new fashion of the illiterate crowd, by jocosely replying that "He who removes the *h* from *Huomo,* does not know *Huomo* (man), and he who removes it from *Honore,* is not worthy of honour."

What then was the passion which he thus expressed, who was the goddess, for whom, since he could not raise a temple and a marble statue in the little house which he longed for and built in the Via Mirasole, he constructed the architecture, the forms and the poetical adornments of the *Furioso?* He never uttered her name,

because none of the other great Italian poets was so little a theorist or critic as Ariosto. He never discussed his art or art in general, limiting himself to saying very simply, and indeed very inadequately, that what he meant by art was "A work containing pleasing and delightful things"; nor, as we have seen, have the critics told us who she was, since they have at the most indicated vaguely and indirectly in their illogical formula that "his Goddess was Art."

CHAPTER III

THE HIGHEST LOVE: HARMONY

But we on the other hand shall name her, and we shall call her Harmony, and we shall prove that those who assign a simple aim to Ariosto in the *Furioso,* Art or Pure Form, were gazing at her and seeing her as it were through a veil of clouds. In doing this, we shall at the same time define the concept of Harmony. We cannot avoid entering upon certain theoretical explanations in relation to this matter; but it would be wrong to look upon them as digressions, since it is only by their means that the way can be cleared to the understanding of the spirit which animates the *Furioso.* There is something comic or at least ironic in this necessity in which we find ourselves, of weighting with philosophy a discourse relating to so transparent a poet as Ariosto; but we have already warned the reader at the beginning that it is one thing to read and let sing to him the verses of a poet, and another to understand him, and

that what is easy to learn may sometimes be very difficult to understand.

It is therefore without doubt contradictory to state that an artist has for his special and particular end or content, art itself, art which is the general end of every artist: as contradictory as to say that an individual has for his concrete and proper end, not this or that work and profession, but life. And there is also no doubt that since every error contains in it an element of truth, those erroneous theories aimed at something effectively existing: a particular content, which they were not able to define, and which could never be in any case art for art. Two sorts of judgments of that formula have nevertheless been expressed in relation to two different groups of works of art: those relating to works which seemed to be inspired by a particular form of art, and those which seem to be inspired by the idea of Art itself, by Art in universal; and for this reason our rapid investigation must be divided and directed first to the one and then to the other case.

The first case includes the poetry which may be called "humanistic" or "classicistic": not the classicism and humanism of pedants without talent or taste, but that lively humanism

and classicism which we are wont to admire and enjoy in several poets of our Renaissance in the Latin language, such as Sannazaro, Politian and Pontano, and also in later times those extremely lettered writers in Italian, of whom Monti, in his best work, may be said to be the greatest representative and we might add to him Canova, although he has not poetised in verse. What is there that pleases us in them, in their imitations, their re-writing, their cantos of classical phrases and measures? And what was it that warmed and carried them away, so that they were able to transmit their emotion to us and obtain our delighted sympathy? It has been answered that this was due to their remaining faithful to the already sacred traditions of beautiful form, handed down by the school; but this answer is not satisfactory, because pedants also can be mechanically faithful in repeating; we have alluded to these and shown that on the contrary they weary and annoy us. The truth is that the former hold to those forms of art, because they are the suitable symbol, the satisfactory expression of their feeling, which is one of affection for the *past,* as being venerable, glorious, decorous, national or super-national and cultural;

and their content is not literary form by itself, but love for that past, love for some one or other *historical* age of art. And if this be true, we must place those romantic archaisers in the same class of art with the humanists or classicists, when considering the substantial nature of things. For the former nourish the same feeling and employ the same procedure, not in relation to the Greek and Roman past, but in relation to the Christian and medieval past, particularly in Germany, where they let us hear again the rude accent of the medieval epic, and represent the ingenuous forms of pious legends and sacred dramatic representations, and make themselves the echo of ancient popular songs: this re-writing has often something in it of the pastiche (as the humanists and classicists also have something of the pastiche, which with them is pedantry), yet sometimes produce passages of delicate art, which if not profound, were certainly agreeable to the heart that remembers, to the eternal heart of childhood which is in us.

Ariosto was also a more or less successful humanist in certain of his minor works, as we have said, but in the *Furioso,* although he took many schemes and details from Latin poets, he

stands essentially outside their line of inspiration, for instead of directing his spirit towards the past, he always draws the past towards his spirit, and there is no observable trace in it of Latin-Augustan archaism, or of the archaism of medieval chivalry. For this reason, the view that he had Art itself as his content must be taken as applicable without doubt in the other sense to him and to certain other artists: as devotion to Art as universal, to Art in its Idea, a devotion which is bodied forth in his narratives, his figures and his verse.

Now it must be remembered that Art in its Idea is nothing but expression or — representation of the real,— of the real which is conflict and strife, but a conflict and a strife that are always being settled; that it is multiplicity and diversity, but at the same time unity, dialectic and development, and also and through that, cosmos and Harmony. And since Art cannot be the content of Art, that is to say, it is impossible to represent representation (as it is impossible to think thought, so that if thought is made the object of thought, it is always itself and the other, that is to say, the whole), by eliding the term which is superfluous and has been unduly retained, we obtain the result that

when it is stated of Ariosto or of other artists that they have for content pure Art or pure Form, it is really to be understood that they have for content devotion to the pure rhythm of the universe, for the dialectic which is unity, for the development which is *Harmony*. Thus, if humanistic or otherwise archaistic artists do not as is generally believed love beautiful forms, but rather the past and history, it may be said of those others that they do not love pure Art, but the *pure and universal content* of Art, not this or that particular strife and Harmony (erotic, political, moral, religious, and so on), but strife and *Harmony* in idea and eternal.

The concept of cosmic Harmony, which has also been called pure Beauty or absolute Beauty, and indeed God, has been much employed in old philosophy, and notably in the old aesthetic (old always being understood in its logical-historical sense, which is still tenacious of life and re-appears in our own day, where it might be least expected), and has made an elaboration of the new theory, which conceives of art as lyrical intuition or expression, very laborious. For many reasons that it would occupy too much time and be out of place to detail here, Harmony or Beauty came to be considered

as the true essence of Art; hence the impossibility of accounting, not only for many works of art, but for art in general, and the artificial attempts made by the upholders of this doctrine and by criticism to pervert facts in support of a partial and incorrect principle. For the reasons given above, it is easy for us to discern the origin of the error, which lay in transferring one of the classes of particular contents which Art is able to elaborate, to serve as the end and essence of Art. And the one selected was precisely that which owing to its religious and philosophical dignity, appeared to have the power to absorb Art into itself together with everything else and to dissolve the whole in a sort of mysticism. This is confirmed by the historical course of the doctrine, the first conspicuous form of which was Neoplatonism, which reappeared on several occasions in the Middle Ages, at the time of the Renaissance and during the Romantic period. De Sanctis himself, owing to the romantic origins of his thought, was never altogether free from it; and his judgment upon Ariosto bears traces of the transcendental conception of Art as an actualisation of pure Beauty.

Similar traces are to be found in another doc-

trine to which De Sanctis held and formulated as the distinction and opposition between the *poet* and the *artist:* a doctrine which it is desirable to make clear, not only with a view of strengthening the concept to which we have had recourse, but also because Ariosto himself is numbered among the poets to whom the distinction has been chiefly applied, as he has been held to be distinct and opposed, along with Politian and Petrarch, and perhaps others, as artists, to Dante or to Shakespeare, as poets. The doctrine appears to be endorsed by facts, and therefore looks plausible and is readily accepted and continually reproduced, as on several occasions in the history of aesthetic ideas. It was not altogether unknown in the days of Ariosto himself, if Giraldo Cinzio can be held to have suggested it, when in his description of an allegorical picture, in which were to be seen the two great Tuscans " in a green and flowery meadow upon a hill of Helicon," Dante, with his robe fastened at the knees, " manipulated the circular scythe, cutting all the grass that his scythe met with," while Petrarch, " robed in senatorial robe, lay there selecting among the noble herbs and the delicate flowers." In spite of this, it is altogether unsustainable as an

exact theory, because it introduces an unjustified and unjustifiable dualism, which it is altogether impossible to mediate, since each of the two distinct terms contains in itself the other and nothing else, thus demonstrating their identity: the poet is poet because he is an artist, that is to say, he gives artistic form to feeling, and the artist would not be an artist, if he were not a poet, that is to say, if he had not a feeling to elaborate. The apparent confirmation of this theory by facts arises from this, that there are as we know, artists who have a devotion for cosmic Harmony as their chief content, and others who have other devotions: and this proves that it is advisable to make a very moderate and restrained use of the distinction between poets and artists, between those who represent the beautiful and those who represent the real, as is the case with all empirical distinctions. Sometimes the same distinction, taken from the bosom of poetry or of some other special art, has been thrown into the midst of the series of the so-called arts, severing those arts which have cosmic Harmony, absolute Beauty, ideal Beauty, the rhythm of the Universe for their object, from others which have for their object individual feelings and

life. Among the former were numbered (as in the school of Winckelmann) the art of sculpture and certain sorts of painting at least, and among the latter, poetry; or (according to Schelling and Schopenhauer) bestowing upon music alone the whole of the first field. Music would thus be opposed to the other arts and would possess the value of an unconscious Metaphysic, in so far as it directly portrayed the rhythm of the Universe itself. A clumsy doctrine, which we only mention here, because Ariosto would furnish the best example of all among the poets, against the exclusion of poetry from among the arts which alone were able to portray the rhythm of the Universe or Harmony: Ariosto, who, if he had seemed to an Italian philologist to be nothing less than "a poet who was an excellent observer and reasoner," has yet appeared to Humboldt, whose ear was more sensitive to the especially "musical" *musikalisch,* and to Vischer more especially as one who developed his fables of chivalry "in a melodious labyrinth of images, which produced in its sensual serenity the same enjoyment as the rocking and dying of the Italian canzone," thus giving the reader "the pure pleasure of moving without matter."

When empirical classifications are not handled with caution and with a consciousness of their limits, not only do they deprive the principles of science of their rigour and vigour, but also carry with them the unfortunate result of making it seem possible to distinguish concretely what has been roughly divided for the purpose of aiding the creation of images. The double class of poets and of artists, the one moved by particular affections, the other by universal Harmony, does not hold as a logical duality, because the love of Harmony is itself one of many particular affections, and forms part of the series comprising the comic, tragic, humorous, melancholy, jocose, pessimistic, passionate, realistic, classicistic poets, and so on. But even when it has been reduced to the level of the others, there is no necessity, either in its case or in that of the others, to fall into the illusion that there really exist poets who are only tragic or only comic, only realistic or only classicistic, singers only of Harmony, without the other passions, or solely passionate without the passion for Harmony. The love of traditional forms, for example, which we have seen to be the base of classicism, exists in a certain measure in every poet, for the reason that every

poet employs, re-lives and renews the words of a given language, which has been historically formed, and is therefore charged with a literary tradition and full of historical meaning. And the love of Harmony exists also in every poet worthy of the name, since he cannot represent his drama of the affections, save as a particular mode of drama and of the dramatic or dialectic cosmic Harmony, which is therefore contained and dwells in it as the universal in the particular.

Are we ourselves overthrowing our own distinctions, immediately after asserting them? We are not overthrowing the principles which we had established in connection with the nature of Art, and with the nature of Harmony and Beauty in the super-aesthetic and cosmical sense; but it was necessary clearly to state and to overthrow the definition of Ariosto as poet of Harmony, because in doing so, we cease to preserve it in its abstractness, but make use of it as a living principle. In other words, by thus defining him, we have attained the first object of our quest, which was no longer to leave him hidden beneath the nebulous description of a poet of art for art's sake, nor beneath that other equally fallacious description of him as a

satirical and ironical poet, or as a poet of prudence and wisdom, and so on; and we have pointed out *where the principal accent of his art falls.* Passing now to other determinations, in order to show in what matter and in what way or tone that accent is realised, maintained and developed, even when it happens that we can do this in the best possible manner, we shall not allow ourselves to be ensnared by the fatuous belief, in vogue with certain critics of the day, that we have supplied an equivalent to Ariosto's poetry with our aesthetic formulas: such an equivalent would not only be an arrogance, but it would also be useless, because Ariosto's poetry is there, and anyone can see it for himself. The new determinations must however also be asserted and refuted, only the new results being preserved, analogous to those already obtained, by means of which we shall dispose of other false ideas circulated by the critics concerning Ariosto and point out the salient characteristics of the material which he selected for treatment, together with the mode and the tone of his poem. The poetry of the *Furioso,* as for that matter all poetry, is an *individuum ineffabile,* and Ariosto, the poet of Harmony, limited in this direction and that,

never at any time exactly coincides with Ariosto, the Ariostesque poet, the poet of Harmony, and not only of Harmony as defined in the way we have defined it, but also in other ways understood or indefinable. We do not propose to exhaust or to take the place of the concrete living Ariosto; he is indeed present to the imagination of our readers as to our own and forms the perpetual criterion of our critical explanations, which without this criterion would be unintelligible.

CHAPTER IV

THE MATERIAL FOR THE HARMONY

Had Ariosto been a philosopher or a poet-philosopher, he would have given us a hymn to Harmony, similar to a good many others which are to be found in the history of literature, celebrating that lofty Idea, which enabled him to understand the discordant concord of things and while satisfying his intellect, filled his soul with peace and joy. But Ariosto was the opposite of a philosopher, and certainly, were he able to read what we are now investigating and discovering in him, first he would be astonished, then he would smile and finally he would comment upon our work with some good-natured jest.

His love for Harmony never took the form of a concept, it was not love of the concept and of the intelligence, that is to say of things answering to a need which he did not experience: it was love for Harmony directly and ingenuously perceived, for sensible Harmony: a har-

mony, therefore, which did not arise from a loss of his humanity and an abandonment of all particular sentiments, a religious mounting up to the world of the ideas, but existed for him rather as a sentiment among sentiments, a dominant sentiment, surrounding all the others and assigning to each its place. In this respect, he really belonged to one of the chief spiritual currents of the period of the Renaissance, or more accurately, of the early Cinquecento: to the period, that is to say, when Leonardo, Raphael, Fra Bartolommeo, Andrea del Sarto, with their beautiful, harmonious decorum and majestic forms, had succeeded to Ghirlandaio, to Botticelli, to Lippi, when it seemed (in the words of Wölfflin, a historian of art) "as though new bodies had suddenly grown up in Italy," a new and magnificent population, resplendent in painting and sculpture, which was indeed the reflection of a new psychical attitude, of a different direction and of a new centre of interest.

Now if we undertake to consider the sentiments which form part of the *Furioso,* if we dissociate them from the connection established among them by the harmonising sentiment of Harmony, and therefore in their particularity,

disaggregation and materiality, we shall have before us the *material* of the *Furioso*. For the "material" of Art is nothing but this, when ideally distinguished from the *content,* in which the sentiments themselves are fused in the dominant sentiment, whether it be called the leading motive or the lyrical motive: a content which in its turn can be only ideally distinguished from the *form,* in which it expresses itself or is possessed and present in the spirit. Philological criticism, deprived of philosophical enlightenment, philology in its bad sense or philologism, means rather by "material" or "sources," as they are also called, external things, such as the books which the poet had read or the stories that he had heard told, and on the pretext of supplying in this way the genesis of a work of art *ab ovo,* it penetrates to the sources of the sources, let us say to the origins of warrior women, of the ogress and the hippogryph of Ariosto. Their procedure suggests that of one who when asked what language a poet found in circulation in his time, should open for that purpose an etymological dictionary of the Italian language, or of the romance languages, or of Indo-European languages, which expound formative ideological

processes, either forgotten or thrown into the background of the speaker's consciousness when engaged in speaking. But even if we do not lose our way in such learned and interminable dissertations, if we escape the error referred to above, of forming judgments as to merit upon them, philologistic search for sources and for material becomes capricious and ends by being impossible; because it takes as sources only certain literary lumber scattered here and there, and were we to unite this with the whole of the rest of literature, with the figurative and musical arts, and with other external things which actually surround the poet, public and private events, scientific teachings and disputes, beliefs, customs, and so on, we should find ourselves involved in all endless and infinite enumeration, convincing proof of the illogical nature of such an inquiry. Nor do we make any progress in the determination of the material by limiting it to more modest terms, that is to say, only to certain things which the poet had before him (even if they be documents and information, not without use for certain ends), because the true *material* of art, as has been said, is not *things* but the *sentiments* of the poet, which determine and explain one another, why and

for what reason he turns to certain things and not to others, to these things rather than to those. Since we have already described Ariosto's character and shown its reflection in his minor works, now that we are examining the material of the *Furioso,* we shall find the same character, that is to say, the same complex of sentiments which it will be desirable to illustrate and to distinguish in a somewhat different manner, with an eye no longer directed to the psychology of the man or to the minor works, but just to the *Furioso.*

And we shall find above all *an amorous* Ariosto, Ariosto perpetually in love, whom we already know: an Ariosto for whom love and woman are an important affair, a great pleasure which he is not able to renounce, a great torment from which he cannot set himself free. That love is always altogether sensual, love for a beautiful bodily form, shining forth in the luminous eyes, seductive, charming; virtuous too, but relatively virtuous, just as much as avails to prevent too much poison entering into the delicate linked tenderness of love; and for this reason, all ethical or speculative idealisation, in the new or Platonic style, is excluded ("Not love of a lady of theology . . . ":

here too, Carducci saw clearly and spoke well). Absent too or extraneous are the consecration and purification of love in "matrimony"; the choice of a wife, the treatment of a wife, are for Ariosto, things differing but slightly from the choice and the breaking in of a horse, and matrimony in its noble ethical sense belongs at the most to his intellect, and to his intellect in so far as it is passive: in the *Furioso* are to be found the politics and not the poetry of matrimony, and among innumerable ties of free love, the chaste sighing of Bradamante alone aims at "the conjugal tie" with Ruggiero. But the love of Ariosto is healthy and natural in its warm sensuality; it is not sophisticated with luxurious images, it is conscious of its own limits; nor does it suffer from mad or inextinguishable desires, but only from that which was known in the language of the time as the "cruelty" of woman, her refusal or her coldness; but it tortures itself yet more with jealousy and the anxious working of the imagination. The Ferrarese Garofalo, a contemporary biographer, bears witness to the very lively jealousy of Ariosto, saying that since he loved "with a great vehemence," he was "above measure jealous," and "always

carried on his love affairs in secret and with great solicitude, accompanied with much modesty"; but this is evident in the matter of the poem itself, being exhibited in many of his personages, descriptions and situations, and finding complete expression in the verse which closes on so pathetic a note: "believe one who has had experience of it." Cruelty on the one side and jealousy on the other, although they torture, do not make him sad or cause him to give vent to desperate utterances, because, since he had not too lofty nor too madly an intransigent idea of love, although it greatly delighted him, he is not apt to expect too much from it, and knowing the infidelity and the fragility of man, a sort of sense of justice forbids him from bringing his hand down too heavily upon the infidelity and the fragility of woman. Hence comes, not forgiveness, but resignation and indulgence. "My lady is a lady, and every lady is weak"; remarks Rinaldo wisely. Ariosto's is an indulgence without moral elevation, but also without cynicism and inspired with a certain element of goodness and humanity. Reciprocal deception and illusion are inherent to love affairs; but how can they be done away with, without also doing away at the same time

with the charm of that bitter but amiable sport? The lover takes care to preserve the illusion by his very passion, which blinds him to what is visible and makes the invisible visible, leading him to believe what he desires, to believe the person who fascinates him, as does Brandimarte with his Fiordiligi, wandering about the world and returning to him uncontaminated: "To fair Fiordiligi, of whom I had believed greater things." Thus the imagination of Ariosto, as these various equal and conflicting sentiments wove their own images, became quite filled with marvellous seductive beauties, perfect of limb, and with voluptuous forms and scenes (Alcina and her arts, Angelica in the arms of Ruggiero who had set her free, Fiordispina); of others which oscillate between the passionate and the comic (Gicondo and Fiametta, the knight who tests the wife he loves too much, the judge Anselmo and his Argia): of others whose love was unworthy or criminal (Origille, whom Grifone strives to save from the punishment that she deserves, notwithstanding her wickedness proved on several occasions and her known treachery; the sons of King Marganorre; Gabrina, who did receive punishment, perhaps because her depraved old age was so repulsive);

and above all of the woman who symbolises Woman, for whom the bravest knights sustain every sort of labour and danger, and because of whom a big strong man loses control of himself, and who, herself slave of a love which owns no law outside itself, ends by bestowing her hand upon a "poor servant" (Angelica, Orlando and Medoro). These are but a few instances of the many places in the *Furioso,* bearing upon love in its various modes of presentation, in addition to the introductions to the cantos and the digressions into which Ariosto pours his whole store of feeling or sets forth his reflections. And the love matter is of so great a volume as to dominate all the rest, possibly in extent, certainly in relief and intensity; so much so, that it is a marvel that among the many attempts to establish the true motive and argument of the poem, by abstracting it from its subject matter, and to determine its design and unity in the same way, no one has yet insisted upon considering it, or has been able to consider it as "the poem of love," of the casuistry of love, to which knightly and warlike life should but provide the decorative background. This theory would certainly seem to be less unlikely than the other, which assigns to it as its end

and unity the war between Carlo and Agramante. In any case, this motive is placed second in the protasis to the *Furioso,* where the first word is not by chance "women," and the first verse ends with "loves" (and in the first edition we even read: "The ancient loves of ladies and of knights"); and the scene with which the poem opens is the flight of Angelica, who is immediately met by Sacripante and Rinaldo who are in love with her, and that with which it concludes is the marriage feast of Ruggiero and Bradamante, disturbed yet heightened in its solemnity of celebration by the incident of the duel with Rodomonte.

Love matter dominates in the *Furioso,* because it dominated in the heart of Ariosto, where it easily passed over into more noble feelings, into piety that goes beyond the tomb, into justice rendered to calumniated innocence, into kindness ill-recompensed, into admiration for the sacred tie of friendship. Hence, in marked contrast to the beautiful Doralice, so crudely sensual, that when her lover's body is still warm, she is capable of looking with desire upon his slayer, the valiant Ruggiero, Isabella deliberately decides upon putting herself to death that she may keep faith with her dead lover; and

Fiordiligi, whose pretty little face, upon which still flitters something of the impudence attributed to her by Boiardo, becomes furrowed with anguish and sublime with sorrow, when she apprehends the loss of Brandimarte. And Olympia stands by the side of Ginevra, trapped and drawn to the brink of ruin by a wicked man, and is rescued by Rinaldo, the righter of wrongs, Olympia whom Orlando twice saves, the second time not only from death, but from desperation at the desertion of her most thankless husband. Zerbino, brother of Ginèvra and lover of Isabella, is a flower of nobility among the knights. He alone understands and pities the affectionate deed of Medoro, careless of his own life and absorbed in the anxiety to obtain burial for the body of his lord. When his former friend who has shown himself to be a most infamous traitor, is dragged before him in chains, he cannot find it in him to inflict upon him the death he deserves, for he remembers their long and close friendship. Devoted to the greatness of Orlando and in gratitude for what he had done in saving and taking care of Isabella, he collects the arms of the Paladin, scattered at the outbreak of his madness, and sustains a combat with Mandricardo for these

arms, dying rather for sorrow at not having been able to defend them than from his wound. Cloridano and Medoro, Orlando and Brandimarte, are other idealisations of a friendship which lasts beyond the tomb; and anyone searching the poem for motives of commiseration and indignation for oppressed virtue, for unhappy peoples trodden beneath the heel of the tyrant, robbed, tortured and allowed to perish like cattle and goats, would find other instances of the goodness and generosity which burned in the mild Ariosto.

Goodness and generosity were also the substance of his political sentiment, which was that of the honest man of all times, who laments the misfortunes of his country, loathes the domination of foreigners, judges the oppression of the nobles with severity, is scandalised by the corruption and hypocrisy of the priests and of the Church, regrets that the united arms of Europe cannot prevail against the Turks, that barbarian " of ill omen "; but it does not go beyond this superficial impressionability, and ends by accepting his own times and respecting the powerful personages who have finally prevailed. For this reason there is but slight interest in noting (and it can be noted in the *Furioso*

itself) the variety of the political ideas of Ariosto, first hostile to the Spaniards, as we see from several references to them, and from certain attributes given to the Spaniard Ferraù, and finally to the French, who had lost the game in Italy, and we find him extolling the Spanish-Imperial Carlo V., and those who maintain his cause in Italy, whether they were Andrea Doria or the Avalos. But on the other hand, as we have already said, it is unjust to reprove him for not having been a champion of italianity and of rebellion against tyrants and foreigners,— such existed in those days, although they were rare — or a passionate political thinker and prophet, like Machiavelli. The famous invective against firearms suffices to indicate the quality of Ariosto's politics: for him politics were morality, private morality, a morality but little combative and very idyllic, although not vulgar, disdainful indeed of the vulgar of all sorts, however fortunate and highly placed. Thus it was not such as to create figures and scenes in the poem, like love and human piety; suffice that if it insinuated itself here and there among the reflective, exclamatory and hortatory octaves.

His feeling towards his own sovereign lords,

the Estes, has not, as we have suggested, either in his soul or in the *Furioso,* anything in it of the specifically political, although he admired them for the splendour of art and letters, which they and their predecessors had conferred upon the country, and for the strength of their rule. And he praised them with words and comparisons, which he introduced into his poem on a large scale, and into the general scheme itself. These have at times been held to be base adulation or a subtle form of irony almost amounting to sarcasm; they were however neither, being serious celebrations of glorious military enterprises and of magnanimous acts (it does not matter whether they really were so or seemed so and were bound to seem so to him) ; and for the rest, and especially as far as concerned Cardinal Hippolyto, they resemble the madrigals addressed to ladies or their attendants, which always contain a vein of mockery mingled with the hyperbole of their compliments. In fact he treated this material as an imaginative theme, now decorous and grave, now elegant and polished as by a courtier; and he would have been still more inclined to treat the Estes in this way, had they in return for his words and "works of ink" dispensed him from the

duties of his post, and particularly from those which obliged him to run hither and thither, to behave like a "teamster." Like many peaceful individuals, who have no taste for finding themselves in the midst of battles, or for changing the place of their abode, or for travelling to see foreign races, or for voyages, or for rapid ups and downs and adventures, or for anything of an upsetting and extraordinary nature that happens unexpectedly, he was quite ready to accept all these things in his imagination, where he preserved, caressed and made idols of them. His inclination imaginatively to decorate the Estes, the nobles of Italy, great ladies, artists, good or bad men of letters of any sort, to make radiant statues of them, had the same root as his inclination for stories of knightly romance.

These stories were the favourite reading, the "pleasant literature" of good society, especially in Ferrara, where the Estes possessed a fine collection in their library, whence had come the majority of Italian poets, who had versified them during the previous century, setting them free from plebeian prose and verse. Ariosto must have read very many of these in his youth, and must have delighted in them, and we know

that he himself translated some from French and Spanish. Here were to be found terrible and tremendous battles, duels of hard knocks and of masterly blows, combats with giants and monsters, tragical situations, magnanimous deeds, proofs of steadfast faith, a vying together of loyalty and courtesy, persecutions and favours and aid afforded by prodigious beings, by fairies and magicians, travels in distant lands, by sea or by flight, enchanted gardens and palaces, knights of immense strength, Christian and Saracen, warlike women and women who were women, royally: all this gave him the desirable and agreeable pleasure of one who looks on at a variously coloured exhibition of fireworks, and owing to this pleasure they gave, he incorporated a great number of them in the *Furioso*. It is superfluous to inquire whether the material of chivalry appeared to him to be serious or burlesque, when we have understood the feeling which led him in that direction: it was beyond all judgment of that sort, because we do not judge rockets or fireworks morally or economically, with approval or reproof. It can of course be remarked that knightly tales had henceforth been reduced to such an extent in Italy and in

the spirit of Ariosto that they were not only without the religious and national feeling of the ancient epic, but even without what is still to be found in certain popular Italian compilations, such as the *Monarchs of France;* but this observation, though correct and important enough in the history of culture, has no meaning whatever as regards Ariosto's poetry. The fact that Ariosto was sometimes entranced and carried away as it were by the spectacles which his fancy presented to him, and sometimes kept aloof from them, with a smile for commentary, or turned away towards the real world that surrounded him, goes without saying, and does not appear to demand the discussions and the intellectual efforts which have been devoted to it.

His was on the other hand a distinctly jesting outlook upon religious beliefs, God, Christ, Paradise, angels and saints; and Charlemagne's prayer to God, the vision of the angel Michael upon earth and the voyage of Astolfo to the world of the Moon, his conversations with John the Evangelist, the deeds and words of the hermit with whom Angelica and Isabella find themselves, and finally those of the saintly hermit who baptises Ruggiero, accord with this laughing and almost mocking spirit. Here we

do not find even the seriousness of the game and in the game, with which he treats of knightly doings; nor could there be, because relation towards religion admits only of complete reverence or complete irreverence. And Ariosto was irreverent, or what comes to the same thing, indifferent; his spirit was as areligious as it was aphilosophical, untormented with doubts, not concerned with human destiny, incurious as to the meaning and value of this world, which he saw and touched, and in which he loved and suffered. He was altogether outside the philosophy of the Renaissance, whether Ficino's or Pomponazzi's, as he was outside every sort of philosophy. This limits and as it were deprives of importance his mockeries and to salute him as some have done "the Voltaire of the Renaissance" or as a precursor of Voltaire, and Voltaire himself who so much enjoyed Ariosto's profanations of sacred things, maliciously underlining the witticism that escapes from the lips of St. John about "my much-praised Christ" (after having said that writers turn the true into the false, and the false into the true, and that he also had been a "writer" in the world), has given Ariosto a place which does not belong to him at all.

Voltaire was not areligious or indifferent, and was only irreligious in so far as he attacked all historical religions with a religion of his own, which was deism or the religion of the reason; and for this reason his satires and his lampoons possess a polemical value, which is not to be found in the jests of Ariosto.

Presented in its outstanding features, and to the extent which suits our purpose, such is the complex of sentiments which flowed together to form the *Furioso* and to produce the images of which it consists. They produced them all the same, where he seems to have taken them from other poems or books, from Virgil or from Ovid, from French or Spanish romances, because in the taking and with the taking of them, he made them images of his own sentiment, that is to say, he breathed into them a new life and poetically created them in so doing. But although this material of the poem may seem to us who have considered it to be anterior and external to the poem itself and owing to our analysis, disaggregated, it must not be supposed that those sentiments ever existed in the spirit of Ariosto as mere matter or in an amorphous condition, because there is nothing in the spirit without some form and

without its own form. Indeed, we have seen a great part of it take form in the minor works, while some dwelt in his mind, expressed and realised in their own way, even if unfulfilled or if we lack written record of their existence. But they possessed a different aspect in this anterior form, differing therefore from that which they assumed in the poem. In the lyrics and satires, words of love and nostalgia, of friendship and complaint, of anger and indignation against princes who take little interest in poets, of impatience and contempt for the ambitious throng, and the like, are more lively and direct; and it would be easy to find parallels for identical thoughts appearing with different intonations in the two different places. Had Ariosto always accorded artistic treatment to those sentiments at the moment of experiencing them, he would have continued to write songs, sonnets, epistles and satires, and would not have set to work upon the *Furioso*. An examination of the poem upon Obizzo D'Este as to the material of chivalry, or if we like the sound of it better, as to feats of arms and of daring, will at least yield us a glimpse of what it would have become, had it received immediate treatment, whether this poem belongs to the early years of

Ariosto, prior to the composition of the *Furioso,* or whether (as is more probable), it be later than the composition of the poem and the appearance of the first edition. The fragment is notable for its great limpidity and narrative fluency, but one sees that if the poet had continued in this direction, the poem would have been nothing but an elegant book of songs; Ariosto did not wish to be a song-writer, so he ceased the work which had been begun. Had he versified his mockeries of sacred things, he would have become a wit, a collector of burlesque surprises, capable of arousing laughter about friars and saints; but Ariosto disdained such a trade, Ariosto whose many grandiose distractions are on record, but no witticisms or smart sayings: he was too much of a dreamer, too fine an artist to take pleasure in such things. His sentiment for Harmony aided him to turn the pleasant stories of chivalry and capricious jesting into poetry, and lesser erotic or narrative and argumentative poetry into more complex poetry, to accomplish the passage and ascent from the minor works to that which is truly great, to mediate the immediate, by transforming his various sentiments in the manner that we are about to consider.

CHAPTER V

THE REALISATION OF HARMONY

The first change to manifest itself in them so soon as they were touched by the Harmony which sang at the bottom of the poet's heart, was their loss of autonomy, their submission to a single lord, their descent from being the whole to becoming a part, their becoming occasions rather than motives, instruments rather than ends, their common death for the benefit of the new life.

The magical power which accomplished this prodigy was the *tone* of the expression, that self-possessed, lightness of tone, capable of adopting a thousand forms and remaining ever graceful, known to the old school of critics as " the confidential air," and remembered among the other " properties " of the " style " of Ariosto. But not only does his whole style consist of this, but since style is nothing but the expression of the poet and of his soul, this was all Ariosto himself and his harmonious singing.

This work of disvaluation and destruction is to be detected in the expressive tone in the proems to the separate cantos, in the digressive argumentations, in the observations interjected, in the repetitions, in the use of vocables, in the phrasing and the arrangement of periods, and above all in the frequent comparisons that form pictures which rather than intensifying the emotion, cause it to take a different path, in the interruptions to the narrative, sometimes occurring at their most dramatic point, in the nimble passage to other narratives of a different and often opposite nature. Yet the palpable part of this whole, what it is possible to segregate and to analyse as elements of style, forms but a small part of the impalpable whole, which flows along like a tenuous fluid, and since it is soul, we feel it with our soul, though we cannot touch it with our hands, even though they be armed with scholastic pincers.

And this tone is the often noted and named, but never clearly defined *irony* of Ariosto; it has not been well-defined, because described as a kind of jesting or mockery, similar or coincident with what Ariosto sometimes employed in his descriptions of knightly personages and their adventures. It has thus been both restricted

and materialised, but what we must not lose sight of is that the irony is not restricted to one order of sentiments, as for instance those of knighthood or religion, and so spares the rest, but encompasses them all, and thus is no futile jesting, but something far more lofty, more purely artistic and poetical, the victory of the dominant sentiment over all the others.

All the sentiments, sublime and mirthful, tender and strong, the effusions of the heart and the workings of the intellect, from the pleadings of love to the laudatory lists of names, from representations of battles to witticisms, are alike levelled by the irony and find themselves uplifted in it. The marvellous Ariostesque octave rises above them all as they fall before it, the octave which has a life of its own. To describe the octave as smiling, would be an insufficient qualification unless the smile be understood in the ideal sense, as a manifestation of free and harmonious life, poised and energetic, throbbing in veins rich with good blood and satisfied in this incessant throbbing. The octaves sometimes have the quality of radiant maidens, sometimes of shapely youths, with limbs lithe from exercise of the muscles, careless of exhibiting their prowess, because it is re-

vealed in their every gesture and attitude.— Olympia comes ashore with her lover on a desolate and deserted island, after many misfortunes, and a long, tempestuous sea voyage:

> Il travaglio del mare e la paura,
> che tenuta alcun dì l'aveano desta;
> Il ritrovarsi al lito ora sicura,
> lontana da rumor, nella foresta:
> e che nessun pensier, nessuna cura,
> poi che'l suo amante ha seco, la molesta;
> fûr cagion ch'ebbe Olimpia si gran sonno
> che gli orsi e i ghiri aver maggior nol ponno.[1]

Here we have the complete analysis of the reasons why Olympia fell into the deep sleep, expressed with precision; but all this is clearly secondary to the intimate sentiment expressed by the octave, which seems to enjoy itself, and certainly does so in describing a motion, a becoming, which attain completion.— Bradamante and Marfisa vainly pursue King Agramante, to put him to death:

> Come due belle e generose parde
> che fuor del lascio sien di pari uscite,

[1] Tempestuous seas and haunting fear which had kept her waking for days now gave place to a feeling of security: deep in the forest and removed from care and noise, Olympia clasped her lover to her breast and fell into sleep as deep as that of bears and dormice.

poscia ch' i cervi o le capre gagliarde
indarno aver si veggano seguite,
vergognandosi quasi che fûr tarde,
sdegnose se ne tornano e pentite;
così tornâr le due donzelle, quando
videro il Pagan salvo, sospirando.[1]

Here we find a like process and a like result, but we observe a like process and result where there appears to be nothing whatever of intrinsic interest in the subject, that is to say, where the thought is merely conventional, a complimentary expression of courtly homage or an expression of friendship and esteem. To say of a fair lady: "She seemed in every act of hers to be a Goddess descended from heaven," is not a subtle figure, but it is so turned and so inspired with rhythm by Ariosto that we assist at the manifestation of the Goddess as she moves majestically along, witnessing the astonishment of those present and seeing them kneel devoutly down, as the little drama unrolls itself:

[1] As two fair generous leopards issuing simultaneouly from the slips return full of shame and repentance as though weighed down by the disgrace of having vainly pursued the lusty goats or stags which had tempted them to the chase: So returned the two damsels sighing when they saw the Pagan was saved.

Julia Gonzaga, che dovunque il piede
volge e dovunque i sereni occhi gira,
non pur ogn' altra di beltà le cede,
ma, come scesa dal ciel Dea, l'ammira.[1] . . .

To rattle off a list of mere names with a view to affording honourable mention, and without varying any of them beyond the addition of some slight word-play, is an exercise even less subtle; but Ariosto arranges the names of contemporary painters as though upon a Parnassus, according to the greatest among them the most lofty place, in such a manner that those bare names each of them resound (owing to the mastery of the many stresses in the verse), so as to seem alive and endowed with sensation:

E quei che fùro a' nostri dì, o sono ora,
Leonardo, Andrea Mantegna, Gian Bellino,
duo Dossi, e quel ch' a par sculpe e colora,
Michel, più che mortale, Angel divino. . . .[2]

The " reflections " of Ariosto, which were held to be " commonplaces " by De Sanctis, " not profound and original observations," have by

[1] Wherever Julia Gonzaga sets her foot or turns her serene gaze, not only does she excel all in beauty but compels adoration like a Goddess.

[2] And the painters who lived in former days as well as those still with us: — Leonardo, A. Mantegna, Gian Bellino, the two Dossi and Michael who sculptures and portrays with more than mortal skill.

others been described as "banal" and "contradictory." But they are reflections of Ariosto, which should not be meditated upon but sung:

> Oh gran contrasto in giovanil pensiero,
> desir di laude, ed impeto d' Amore!
> Nè, chi più vaglia, ancor si trova il vero,
> che resta or questo or quello superiore. . . .[1]

It could be said of the irony of Ariosto, that it is like the eye of God, who looks upon the movement of creation, of all creation, loving all things equally, good and evil, the very great and the very small in man and in the grain of sand, because he has made it all, and finds in it nought but motion itself, eternal dialectic, rhythm and harmony. From the ordinary meaning of the word "irony" has been accomplished the passage to the metaphysical meaning assumed by it among Fichtians and Romantics. We should be ready to apply their theory to the inspiration of Ariosto, save that these critics and thinkers confused with irony what is called humour, strangeness and extravagance, that is

[1] Oh powerful contrast in the breast of youth aflame with desire for valorous renown and the passion of love; nor can one say which is the more delectable, since each lays claim alternately to superiority.

to say, extra-aesthetic facts, which contaminate and dissolve art. Our theory on the contrary is less pretentious and exaggerated, confining itself rigorously within the bounds of art, as Ariosto confined himself within the bounds of art, never diverging into the clumsy or humouristic, which is a sign of weakness: his irony was the irony of an artist, sure of his own strength. This perhaps is the reason or one of the reasons why Ariosto did not suit the taste of the dishevelled Romantics, who were inclined to prefer Rabelais to him and even Carlo Gozzi.

To weaken all orders of sentiment, to render them all equal in their abasement, to deprive beings of their autonomy, to remove from them their own particular soul, amounts to converting the world of spirit into the world of *nature:* an unreal world, which has no existence save when we perform upon it this act of conversion, and in certain respects, the whole world becomes nature for Ariosto, a surface drawn and coloured, shining, but without substance. Hence his seeing of objects in their every detail, as a naturalist making minute observations, his description that is not satisfied with a single trait which suffices as inspiration for other artists, hence his lack of passionate impatience

with its inherent objections to certain material. It may seem that the figure of St. John is drawn in the way it is, as a jest:

> Nel lucente vestibulo di quella
> felice casa un Vecchio al Duca occorre,
> Che'l manto ha rosso e bianca la gonnella,
> che l'un più al latte, l'altro al minio opporre;
> i crini ha bianchi e bianca la mascella
> di folta barba ch'al petto discorre. . . .[1]

But the beauty of Olympia is portrayed in a like manner, forgetful of the chastity of the lady, which might have seemed to ask a different sort of description or rather veiling:

> Le bellezze d' Olimpia eran di quelle
> che son più rare; e non la fronte sola,
> gli occhi e le guancie, e le chiome avea belle,
> la bocca, il naso, gli omeri e la gola. . . .[2]

Finally, Medoro is described in the same way, Medoro whose brave and devoted heart and youthful heroism might seem to ask in its

[1] An aged man goes to encounter the Duke along the bright vestibule of that fortunate house: the sage is clad in red cloak and white robe, the former white as milk, the latter vermilion, vivid as a rose. His hair is white and his chin snowy with the thick beard flowing over his chest.

[2] Olympia's loveliness was of rarest excellence: not only was she fair of face with forehead, eyes, cheeks glowing amidst the hair which waved over her shoulders: all else was perfection.

turn a less attentive observation of its fresh youthfulness:

> Medoro avea la guancia colorita,
> e bianca e grata ne la età novella.[1] . . .

The very numerous similes between the personages and the situations in which they find themselves and the spectacles afforded by the life of animals or the phenomena of nature, also form an almost prehensible and palpable part of this conversion of the human world into the world of nature. We shall not give details of it, for this has already been done in an irritatingly patient manner by a German philologist, whose cumbrous compilation effectually precludes one from desiring to dwell even for a moment upon Ariosto's similes, comparisons and metaphors.

This apparent naturalism, this objectivism, of which we have demonstrated the profoundly subjective character, has led to the erroneous statement, already met with, as to Ariosto's form consisting of indifference and chilly observation, directed to the external world. He has been coupled with his contemporary Machiavelli in this respect. Machiavelli examined

[1] Medoro's cheek showed white and red in the fresh flourish of youth.

history and politics with a sagacious eye, describing — as they say — their mode of procedure and formulating their laws, to which he gave expression in his prose with analogously inexorable objectivity and scientific coldness. It is true that both did in a certain but in a very remote sense, destroy a prior spiritual content and naturalised in different fields and with different ends (Machiavelli destroyed the mediaeval religious conception of history and politics). But this judgment of Machiavelli amounts to nothing more than a brilliant or principal remark, for Machiavelli, as a thinker, developed and explained facts with his new vigorous thought, and as a writer gave an apparently cold form to his severe passion. Ariosto's naturalistic and objective tendency is also to be regarded as nothing more than a metaphor, because Ariosto reduced his material to nature, in order to spiritualise it in a new way, by creating spiritual forms of Harmony.

From the opposite point of view and arising out of what we have just said, we must refrain from praising Ariosto for his "epicity," for the epic nobility and decorum which Galilei praised so much in him, or for the force and coherence of his personages, so much admired

by the old as well as by new and even recent critics. How could there be epicity in the *Furioso,* when the author not only lacked the ethical sentiments of the epos and when even that small amount, which he might be said to have inherited, was dissolved with all the rest in harmony and irony? And how could there be true and proper characters in the poem, if characters and personages in art are nothing but the notes of the soul of the poet themselves, in their diversity and opposition? These become embodied in beings who certainly seem to live their own proper and particular lives, but really live, all of them, the same life variously distributed and are sparks of the same central power. One of the worst of critical prejudices is to suppose that characters live on their own account and can almost continue living outside the works of art of which they form a part and in which they in no wise differ nor can be disassociated from the strophes, the verses and the words. Since there is no free energy of passionate sentiments in the *Furioso,* we do not find there characters, but figures, drawn and painted certainly, but without relief or density, portrayed rather as general or typical than individual beings.

The knights resemble and mingle with one another, though differentiated by their goodness or wickedness, their greater polish or greater rudeness, or by means of external and accidental attributes, often by their names alone; in like manner the women are either amorous or perfidious, virtuous and content with one love, or dissolute and perverse, often distinguished merely by their different adventures or the names that adorn them. The same is to be said of the narratives and descriptions (typical and non-individual, or but little individual, is the madness of Orlando, to compare which with Lear's is a rhetorician's fancy), and of natural objects, landscapes, palaces, gardens, and all else. Reserves have been and can with justice even be made as to the coherence of the characters taken as a whole and forming part of a general scheme, for Ariosto's personages take many liberties with themselves, according to the course of the events with which they find themselves connected, or rather according to the services which the author asks of them.

Such warnings as these are indispensable, because, if some readers realise their expectation of finding objectively described and cohe-

rent characters in Ariosto and consequently praise him for creating them, others with like expectations equally unfounded are disappointed and consequently blame him. Thus for De Sanctis Ariosto's feminine characters have seemed to be inferior to those of Dante, of Shakespeare and of Goethe: but this is an impossible comparison, because Angelica, Olympia, and Isabella, although they certainly lack the passionate intensity of Francesca, Desdemona and Margaret, yet the latter for their part lack the harmonious octaves in which the first trio lives and has its being, consisting of just these octaves. And what is more, neither trio suffers from the imperfections, which are imperfections only in the light of imperfect critical knowledge and consequent prejudice, but not real imperfections and poetical contradictions in themselves. De Sanctis also blamed Ariosto for his lack of sentiment for nature, as though it were a defect; but what is called sentiment for nature (as for that matter the great master De Sanctis himself taught) does not depend upon nature, but rather upon the attitude of the human spirit, upon the feelings of comfort, of melancholy or of religious terror, with which

man invests nature and finds them where he has placed them; but this attitude was foreign to the fundamental attitude of Ariosto, and were there to be by chance some reference to it in the poem, were some note of sentiment to sound there, we should immediately be sensible of the discord and impropriety. To Lessing, another objective critic, the portrayal of the beauties of Alcina seemed to be a mistake and to exceed the limit of poetry, to which De Sanctis replied that this materiality which Lessing blamed was the secret of the poetry, because the beauty of the magician Alcina required a material description, since it was fictitious in its nature. This blame was unjust, and although the answer to it was ingenious, yet it was perhaps not perfectly correct, for we have already seen that Ariosto always described thus both true and imaginary beauties, Olympias and Alcinas. The true answer seems to be the one already given, that it would be useless to seek for features of energy in Ariosto, lively portraits dashed off in a couple of brush strokes, for these things presuppose a mode of feeling that he lacked altogether or, at any rate suppressed. Those "laughing fleeting" eyes, which are all Sylvia, "le doux

sourire amoureux et souffrant," which are the whole of the spiritual sister-soul of the *Maison du Berger,* do not belong to Ariosto, but to Leopardi and to De Vigny.

There are two ways in which the *Furioso* should not be read: the first is the way in which one reads a work of rhythmic and lofty moral inspiration, like the *Promessi Sposi,* tracing, that is to say, the development of a serious human affection, which circulates in and determines every part alike, even to the smallest detail; the second is that suitable for such works as *Faust,* where the general composition, which is more or less guided by mental concepts, does not at all coincide with the poetical inspiration of the separate parts. Here the poetical should be separated from the unpoetical parts, and the poetically endowed reader will neglect the one to enjoy the other. In the *Furioso,* this inequality of work is absent or only present to a very slight extent (that is to say, to the extent that imperfection must ever be present in the most perfect work of man) and it is as equally harmonious as the *Promessi Sposi;* but it lacks that particular form of passionate seriousness, to be found throughout Manzoni's work and in stray passages of Goethe's. The

Furioso should therefore be read in a third manner, namely by following a content which is ever the same, yet ever expressed in new forms, whose attraction consists in the magic of this ever-identical yet inexhaustible variety of appearances, without paying attention to the material element of the narratives and descriptions.

As we see, this too amounts to accepting with a rectification a common judgment on the *Furioso,* which may be said to have accompanied the poem from the moment of its first appearance: namely, that it is a work devoid of seriousness, being of a light, burlesque, pleasing and frivolous sort. It was described as "*ludicro more*" by Cardinal Sadoleto, when according the license for printing the edition of 1516 in the name of Leo X, although he added to this, perhaps translating the declaration of the poet himself, "*longo tamen studio et cogitatione, multisque vigiliis confectum.*" Bernardo Tasso, Trissino and Speroni, and other suchlike grave pedantic personages, did not fail to blame Ariosto for having dedicated his poem to the sole end of pleasing. Boileau looked upon it simply as a collection of *fables comiques,* and Sulzer called it a "poem with the

sole end of pleasing, not directed by the reason"; and even to-day are to be found its merits and defects noted down to credit and debit account in many a scholastic manual; on the credit side stand the perfection of the octave, the vivacity of the narrative, the graceful style, to the debit account lack of profound sentiment, light which shines but does not warm and failure to touch the heart. We accept and rectify this judgment with the simple observation that those who regard the poem thus see clearly enough everything that is on a level with their own eyes, but do not raise them to regard what is above their heads and is the principal quality of the *Furioso,* owing to which the frivolity of Ariosto reveals itself as profound seriousness of rare quality, profound emotion of the heart, but of a noble and exquisite heart, equally remote from the emotions of what is generally looked upon as life and reality.

Apart, but not separated from, nor alien to, nor indifferent: and in respect to this we must resume and develop the analysis already begun by setting readers on their guard against the easy misunderstanding of the "destruction," which we have already spoken of as brought about by the tone and the irony of Ari-

osto. This must not be looked upon as total destruction and annihilation, but as destruction in the philosophic sense of the word, which is also conservation. Were this otherwise, what could be the function of the varied material or emotional content, which we have examined in the poem? Are the stars stuck into the sky like pin-heads in a pin-cushion (Don Ferrante would sarcastically enquire)? The eloquence of other's but not Ariosto's poetry, arises from a total indifference of sentiment and an absence of content: theirs is the rouge on the corpse, not the rosy cloud that enfolds and adorns the living. Such eloquence produces soft and superficially musical versification of the *Adone,* not the octave of the *Furioso;* and to quote Giraldi Cinzio once more, the lover of Ariosto (who gave the advice to readers not to confuse the "facility" of the *Furioso* with verses "of sweet sound but no feeling"), the eight hundred "stanzas," by one of the composers of that time, which Giraldi once had to read, "which seemed to be collections made among the flowery gardens of poetry, so full were they of beauty from stanza to stanza, but put together, were vain things, seeming, so far as sense is concerned, to have been born of the

soil of childishness," because their author was " intent only upon the pleasure that comes from the splendour and choice of words, and had altogether neglected the dignity and assistance afforded by sensibility."

Had Ariosto while in the act of composition not been keenly stirred in the various ways described, by the varied material employed in his poem, he would have lacked the impetus, the vivacity, the thought, the intonation, which were afterwards reduced and tempered by the harmonious disposition of his soul. He would have been a cold writer of poetry, and no one ever succeeded in writing poetry coldly. This was the case, as it seems to me, with the *Cinque Canti,* which he excluded from the *Furioso* and for which he substituted others. In them the cunning of Ariosto's hand is everywhere to be found in the descriptive passages and transitions, as are also all the elements of the everyday world, stories of war, knightly adventures, tales of love (the love of Penticone for the wife of Otto and that of Astolfo for the wife of Gismondo), satirical tales (the foundation of the city of Medea, with the sexual law which she imposed upon it), astonishing fancies (such as the knights imprisoned in the body of the

whale, where they have their beds, their kitchen and their tub), copious moral and political reflections (on jealousy, ambition, wicked men, mercenary soldiers); yet we feel nevertheless that Ariosto wrote them in an unhappy moment, when Minerva was reluctant or averse: the poet did not take sufficient interest and lacked the necessary heat. And is there no part of the *Furioso* itself that languishes? It would seem so, not indeed in the forty cantos of the first edition, which originated in his twelve-year-old poetical springtime, but in the parts which were added later, all of them (as could be shown) more or less intellectualistic of origin, and therefore (save the episode of Olympia) not among the most read and most popular. The most intellectualistic of all is the long delay introduced toward the end of the poem, the double betrothal of Bradamante and the contest in courtesy between Leone and Ruggiero, where the tone becomes here and there altogether pedestrian. It is true that philologists who have given themselves to art have discovered progress in Ariosto in just these languid parts, and above all in the *Cinque Canti,* where he has lost his bearings and is out of tune. Here they suppose him to have be-

come " serious," to join hands with no less a personage than Torquato Tasso.

The process of " destruction " effected upon the material may possibly be rendered clear to those who do not appreciate philosophical formulas or find them too difficult, by means of the comparison with what in the technique of painting is called " concealing a colour," which does not mean its cancellation, but its toning down. In such an equally distributed toning down, all the sentiments which go to form the web of the poem, not only preserve their own physiognomy, but their reciprocal proportions and connections; so that although they certainly appear in the " transparent polished glasses " and in the " smooth shining waters " of the octaves, pale as " pearls on a white forehead " to the sight, yet they retain their distinctness and are more or less strong according to the greater or less strength which they possessed in the soul of the poet. The comic, at once lowered and raised, nevertheless remains comical, the sublime remains sublime, the voluptuous voluptuous, the reflective reflective, and so on. And sometimes it happens that Ariosto reaches the boundary, which if he were to pass, he would abandon his own tone, but he never

does abandon it, because he always refrains from passing the boundary. Everyone remembers the most emotional words and passages of the *Furioso*: Medoro, who, when surrounded and surprised by his enemies, makes a sort of tower of himself, using the trees as a shield, and never abandoning the body of his lord, Zerbino, who feels penetrated with pity and stays his hand as he looks on his beautiful countenance, when on the point of slaying him; Zerbino, who when about to die, is desperate at leaving his Isabella alone, the prey of unknown men, while she bursts into tears and speaks sweet words of eternal faithfulness; Fiordiligi, who hears the news, or rather divines the death of her husband . . . We always catch our breath, and something — I know not what — comes into our eyes, as we repeat these and similar verses. Here is Fiordiligi, who shudders as she feels the presentiment:

> E questa novità d' aver timore
> le fa tremar di doppia tema il core.[1]

The fatal news comes to hand: Astolfo and Sansonetto, the two friends who happen to be where she has remained, hide it from her

for an hour or so, and then decide to betake themselves to her that they may prepare her for the misfortune that has befallen:

> Tosto ch'entrano, e ch'ella loro il viso
> Vide di gaudio in tal vittoria privo,
> Senz' altro annunzio sa, senz' altro avviso,
> Che Brandimarte suo non è più vivo. . . .[2]

Another moment of the same narrative, where suffering appears to resume its strength and to grow upon itself, is that in which Orlando, who is awaited, enters the temple where the funeral of Brandimarte is being celebrated: Orlando, the friend, the companion, the witness of his death:

> Levossi, al ritornar del Paladino,
> Maggiore il grido e raddoppiossi il pianto.[3]

Before such words and images as these, De Sanctis used to say to his pupils, when explaining to them the *Furioso*: "See how much heart Ariosto had!" But he always kept telling

[1] The novel feeling of fear caused her heart to tremble, doubly terrified.

[2] As she saw them enter without joyous exultation over so great a victory, with no announcement or any direct word of it, she was aware her Brandimarte had been slain.

[3] On the return of the Paladin, the cry arose more loudly and the wail redoubled.

them this truth also: that "Ariosto never pushes situations to the point of painfulness," forbidden to him by the tone of his poetry; and he used to show them how Ariosto used sometimes to make use of interruptions, sometimes of graceful similitudes, or reflections, or devices of style, in order to restrain the painfulness ready to break through. Those critics who for instance are shocked by the octaves on the name of "Isabella" are too exigent, or ask too much, and what they ought not to ask (this name of Isabella was destined by God to adorn beautiful, noble, courteous, chaste and wise women from this time forth, and was originally intended as homage from Ariosto to the Marchesana of Mantua, Isabella of Este). With these octaves he concludes the narrative of the sacrifice of her life made by Isabella to keep faith with Zerbino; they do not understand that those octaves and the *Proficiscere* which precedes them ("Go thou in peace, thou blessed soul") and the very account of the drunken bestiality of Rodomonte, and prior to that, the semi-comic scene of the saintly hermit who presides over the virtue of Isabella, "like a practised mariner and is quite prepared to offer her speedily a sumptuous meal of spiritual

food," the hermit whom Rodomonte seizes by the neck and throws three miles into the sea, are all words and representations so accentuated as to produce the effect of allowing Isabella to die without plunging the *Furioso* into tragedy with its correspondingly tragical catharsis; for the *Furioso* has its own general and perpetually harmonious catharsis, which we have now made sufficiently clear.

It is precisely owing to the action of this sentimental and passionate material, in spite of and through its effectual surpassing, that the varied colouring arising from it enters the poem and confers upon it that character of humanity, which led us to declare at the outset of our analysis that when we define Ariosto as the *Poet of Harmony,* we proposed only to indicate where the *accent* of his work falls, but that he is the poet of Harmony and also of something else, of harmony developed in a particular world of sentiments, and in fact that the harmony to which Ariosto attains, is not harmony in general, but an *altogether Ariostesque Harmony.*

CHAPTER VI

HISTORICAL DISASSOCIATIONS

From these last words, there can be no difficulty in seeing what must be our opinion as to the confrontations and comparative judgments instituted between Ariosto and Pulci or Boiardo, and even Cieco da Ferrara, and all the other Italian poets of chivalry. These have sometimes been extended so as to include poetical humourists, such as Folengo and Rabelais, or burlesque writers like Berni, Tassoni, Forteguerri, or neoepical poets, like Tasso and Camoens, and finally to Cervantes, that direct and fully conscious ironist of chivalry. This is as perfectly admissible as it is natural that classes of " poems of chivalry " or " narrative poems " or " romances," should be formed, when once rhetoricians and writers of treatises have invented the genus and that these should be disposed in a series under such headings, thus forming a sort of artificial history, with no real foundation beyond the accidents of certain abstract literary forms, which are really representative of certain social tendencies and institutions. And it is equally, indeed more admis-

sible, because relating to more nearly connected problems, that these documents afforded by poems of chivalry should be made use of among other documents in the investigation of the gradual dissolution of the ideal of chivalry in the first period of modern society. Salvemini has not neglected to do this in a temperate manner, in his monograph relating to "knightly dignity" in the commune of Florence. But the aesthetic judgment, which they strive to deduce from these comparisons, is inadmissible and illegitimate: when for instance they bestow the palm on this or that poet for having better observed than others the "genus" or a particular "species" and "variety" of the genus; or because chivalry or anti-chivalry has been better represented by one than by another. We can explain the fact that De Sanctis was sometimes entangled in this sociological net, in spite of his exquisite sense of individuality and poetry, when we consider the condition of studies in his time and his philosophical origins; but it is none the less true that the judgments which he pronounced upon this matter, deviate from true and proper aesthetic criticism, and carry with them the bad effects of every deviation.

Having ourselves refused to be among those whose feet are caught in the insidious net of Caligorante, we shall have nothing further to say as to comparisons with Ariosto, because the poet of the *Furioso* has always come out of those maladroit confrontations and the arbitrary judgments of merit which result from them, crowned above all others with the sign of victory, or at least unconquered by any other, and admitting but a very few as his equals. The preference accorded by romantic German men of letters to Boiardo (recently revived to some extent in Italy by Panzini) belongs rather to the domain of anecdote than to the history of criticism: Boiardo is looked upon by them as the poet of grand heroic dreams, while Ariosto is a mere citizen poet; or Boiardo again is lauded for having better represented the logical form of the Italian poem of chivalry, prescribed according to a chemical combination drawn up in the philological laboratory of the anti-Ariostesque Professor Rajna, who is in other respects a most worthy and well-deserving person. But there is no denying that the peculiar beauty of Ariosto has often injured Boiardo, Pulci, Tasso and other poets, who have been illegitimately compared with

him; and therefore, without talking of Tasso — who has now won his case, although he numbered a Galilei among the ranks of those who under-estimated him when making the above-mentioned confrontation,— it will not be inopportune to cast a rapid glance upon Pulci and Boiardo.

Looking at Pulci in Pulci and not at Ariosto, since to place one physiognomy on the top of another is not a good way of seeing, what do we find? What is the *Morgante?* It is above all a whimsicality, one of those works, born of a caprice or a bet, to which the author neither devotes himself after the necessary previous meditations, nor works at with the scrupulosity of the artist, who expends his powers and employs his utmost endeavour to do the best he can everywhere. But the occasion or the inspiration is never the substance of a work, which on the contrary always consists of what the author really brings to it in the course of his labour; and the mention of the occasional origin of the *Morgante* only avails here to account for its ill-digested and undoubtedly chaotic nature. Nor is it to the purpose to recall what certainly seems to have been Pulci's intention, namely, to satisfy in his

own way a wish of the pious Lucrezia Tornabuoni, by composing or re-writing a Christian poem of chivalry, for this in its turn only explains certain superficialities and extrinsicalities, such as the general plan of the poem and the parts of it possessing religious tone, which are successful to the extent that they could be successful with such a brain as Pulci's. A commencement will have been made towards a proper understanding of the substance of the *Morgante,* its proper and intrinsic inspiration, by referring it first to the curiosity with which educated Florentine citizens observed and reproduced the customs and the psychology of the people of the city and the surrounding districts, productive of the poetry of Politian, of Lorenzo and of Pulci himself, author of the *Beca di Dicomano,* each with its various popular appeal. That inspiration contains something both of the sympathetic and of the ironical, as we observe in all poetry based upon popular themes and use of dialect, in the German romantic *Lieder* and *Balladen* and in the dialect literature of the Italy of to-day (one feels inclined to call the *Morgante* " dialect " and not " Italian ") : and in Pulci there vibrated a sympathetic-ironic chord, peculiar to himself and

therefore naturally not exactly the same as in Lorenzo, or still less in Politian. But it did not vibrate pure and clear, being prevented from doing so, not so much owing to initial eccentricity and to the intention above-mentioned, as to the accumulation of other inspirations, arising in the fertile spirit of Pulci. For Pulci had in mind, in addition to the reconstruction of a sympathetic-ironic popular poem of the popular story-tellers, something that might be called a "Picaresque romance," understanding thereby not only tales of the sort to be found in Spanish literature, but also certain other tales of Boccaccio and a great part of Folengo's *Baldus*. Picaresque romance asked in its turn sympathy and irony, but of a different sort to the preceding, no longer sympathy for popular ingenuity, but for cleverness, trickiness, for an irony, which should no longer be simply that of superior culture, but also of superior morality; and this too was in some measure and in his own way in Pulci; but he often spoilt this disposition of mind by inadvertently passing, like a person lacking refinement of education, from Picaresque romance to Picaresque intonation, from the representation of a blackguard to the blackguard himself. And there is something

else also in the *Morgante*: the imaginings and caprices of Pulci himself, his own personal moral opinions, religious or philosophical; things that are sometimes thought about even by those who do not think much about them, and which, owing to this casual hasty thinking, become nevertheless opinions or semi-opinions. Finally the *Morgante* is a skein formed of strands of different colour and make, some of them thicker or thinner than others: it is a poem that is not in tune with a single dominant inspiration, and if we take one of those elements that we have described and transport it to the principal place, we immediately have the feeling that we are depriving the complex nature of the work of its vigour. Nevertheless the *Morgante* must be looked upon as one of the most richly endowed works of our literature, where we meet at every step with delightful figures and traits of expression: Morgante, Margutte, Fiorinetta, Astarotte, Farfarello, Archbishop Turpin, certain touches of character in Orlando, and especially in Rinaldo, and also in Antea, together with certain descriptions, anecdotes and acute remarks. Margutte, plunged deep in vice, but quite shameless and aware that he cannot be other than what

nature made him, is also human, incapable of treachery, capable of affection for Morgante and of enduring his all-consuming voracity; so that when his companion dies, he never ceases recalling him to mind, and talking about him even with Orlando:

> E conta d'ogni sua piacevolezza,
> E lacrimava ancor di tenerezza.[1]

Rinaldo, ardent and furious for revenge, seeks to slay Carlo Magno, who has been hidden from him; but after a few days Orlando leads him to believe that the Emperor has died of desperation, and tells him that he has appeared to him in vision, whereupon Rinaldo changes countenance and begins to wish him alive again, to feel pity for him, to repent him of his fury, so that in this way peace and reconciliation are effected. After a great battle, the conquered as they leave the field, recognise their dead ones where they lie, and we hear them lamenting a father, a brother or a friend:

> Eravi alcun che cavava l'elmetto
> al suo figliolo, al suo cognato, o padre;
> poi lo baciava con pietoso affetto,
> E dicea: "Lasso, fra le nostre squadre

[1] Saying how delightful he was and still weeping for tender recollection.

non tornerai in Soria più, poveretto;
che dirén noi alla tua afflitta madre,
o chi sarà più quel che la conforti?
Tu ti riman cogli altri al campo morti." [1]

And this is an apology, by means of which Orlando explains to Rinaldo that he has remarked his new affection, and that it is of no use that he should try to deceive him with words:

Rispose Orlando: — Noi sarem que' frati
che mangiando il migliaccio, l'un si cosse;
l'altro gli vede gli occhi imbambolati,
e domando quel che la cagion fosse.
Colui rispose: "Noi sián due restati
a mensa, e gli altri sono or per le fosse,
ché trentatré fummo e tu lo sia:
Quand' io vi penso, io piango sempre mai."
Quell' altro, che vedea che lo 'ngannava,
finse di pianger, mostrando dolore;
e disse a quel che di ciò domandava:
"E anco io piango, anzi mi scoppia il core,
che noi sián due restati"; e sospirava,
"Ed è già l'uno all' altro traditore."

[1] Sometimes one would remove the helmet from his son, his cousin, or his father, kissing him with pious affection, and saying "alas, poor fellow, never again will he return to our ranks in Soria; what shall we say to his afflicted mother, who among us can comfort her? But thou remainest with the others who lie dead on the field."

Così mi par che faccian noi, Rinaldo:
che nol di tu che'l migliaccio era caldo?"

And here is an octave in which Pulci makes it psychologically clear why King Carlo allowed himself to be led astray and deceived by Gano:

Molte volte, anzi spesso, c'interviene
che tu t'arrecchi un amico e fratello,
e ciò che fa ti par che facci bene,
dipinto e colorito col pennallo.
Questo primo legame tanto tiene,
che, s' altra volta ti dispiace quello,
e qualcha cosa tì parà molesta,
sempre la prima impression pur resta.[2]

[1] Orlando answered: — We shall be like the friars one of whom burnt himself in eating his gruel; the other seeing his eyes watering asked the reason. His neighbour replied: "Here we are, two of us remained sitting at table, while the others are in the tomb; well thou knowest that we were thirty-three; it always makes me weep to think of it." The other, who saw the deception, in his turn made belief to lament and grieve and when asked the reason: "Yea, I also weep; my heart indeed is bursting to think that we two remain"; then sighing he continued, "And that one of us two is betraying the other. We seem to be doing much the same thing, Rinaldo: why won't you confess that the gruel was hot?"

[2] It often happens that a friend becomes like a brother to you, and whatever he does seems to be so well done as to deserve being made a picture. This first bond holds so firmly that when he finally does something you do not like — injures you in some way — nevertheless the first impression remains the same.

" These are not the octaves of Ariosto ": we have said as much. Certainly they are not, just as the octaves of Ariosto are not those of Pulci, and Ariosto, whatever trouble he might have taken, could never have attained to the inventions, the emotions, the clevernesses and the accents of the *Morgante,* which are just as inimitable in their way as are the graces of the *Furioso.* And it is really unjust and almost odious that the reader, face to face with the treasures of fresh and original poetry, which Pulci throws without counting into his lap, should pull a wry face and ungratefully remark that Pulci's poetry is not that other poetry which he is now thinking about, and that it should be abolished, or made perfect by the other poetry!

Almost the same thing is to be repeated about the author of the *Innamorato,* who has also been tormented, condemned and executed by means of a comparison with the author of the *Furioso,* sometimes conducted with such a refinement of cruelty that the strophes of the one are printed facing the strophes of the other, and selected as bearing upon similar situations, so that every word and syllable may be weighed; as though the strophes

of a poet are not to be considered solely in themselves and in the poem of which they form part, and to be condemned, if occasion arise for condemnation, within that circle to which are confined the real conditions of judgment. Boiardo, to one who reads him without any sort of preconception and abandons himself to the simple impressions of reading, immediately shows himself to be altogether different from what some critics maintain, the pedantic singer of chivalry taken seriously, who gives way now and then to involuntary laughter and to a harsh intonation which should be toned down and softened by the skill of an Ariosto. He is quite other also than the epic bard, which some people have imagined him to be; he could not be epic, because he had no national sentiment, no feeling for class or religion, and the marvellous in him is all fancy, a marvel of the fairies; nor was he a pedant, for he obviously follows his own spontaneous inclinations, without any secondary purpose. No, Boiardo was on the contrary a soul passionately devoted to the primitive and the energetic, his was the energy of the lance-thrust, of the brand wielded, but also the energy of a proud will, of ferocious courage, of intransigent honour, of

marvellous devices. And it is owing just to this energy, which has a value of its own, that he lives to unite poetically the cycles of Charlemagne and of Arthur, the Carlovingian and the Breton traditions, arms and adventures and love, both of them primitive cycles, the second being remarkable for the extraordinary nature of its adventures and the violence of its loves; whereas, if that heroism had continued to be full and substantial, it would have been difficult to make it a theme for erotic treatment, representing a different and opposed sentiment. To ask of him delicacy of treatment in the representation of his knights, or delicacy of thoughts and words in his treatment of women and love, and in general, beauty of sentiment, is to ask of him what is external to his fundamental motive. To be astonished that he sometimes laughs or smiles, is to be astonished at what happens every day among the people (and there are traces of it in the ingenuous epic) when they are listening to the recital of great deeds, which do not forbid an occasional comic remark. To lament his supposed neglect of art, his lack of polish of language and versification, is to censure him as a grammarian who employs pre-established models

or dwells upon minute details to which he attributes sovereign importance. How on the other hand can it be forgotten, when praise of his rich fancy and robust frankness of style and composition is opposed to censures or interlarded among them, that we must explain whence came to him these merits, for they are not to be snatched, but are born only of the soul. Whence came they, if not from true poetical inspiration and from his already mentioned passion for the energetic and the primitive? Hence the admiration aroused by his vast canvases, his vivid narratives: — Angelica, who by merely appearing at Carlo's banquet, makes everyone fall in love with her, and whom even the Emperor himself cannot refrain from admiring, though with discretion, lest he should compromise his gravity, Angelica, whom the greatest champions of Christianity and Paganism follow with admiration, refusing herself to all and loving only him who alone abhors her; — the solemn council of war, held by Agramante previous to entering France, with the speeches of the kings who surround him, courageous or prudent, the sudden appearance of the youthful Rodomonte, who dominates all with his tremendous energy; — the joyful cour-

age of Astolfo, never disconcerted by headlong mishaps, whom fortune succours by furnishing him with a lance, by means of which, to the astonishment of all, he accomplishes prodigies, while he himself remains unastonished; — Brunello, as to whose doings one would like to apply Vico's phrase about "heroic thieving," Brunello, who wanders about the earth, stealing the most carefully guarded objects, with an audacious dexterity and so comic an imagination, Brunello, revelling in his joyous virtuosity and vainly-pursued over the whole world by Marfisa of the viper's eye, which spirts venom, Marfisa who wishes to put him to death; but he flies from her, turning from time to time in his flight to laugh in her face and make gestures of mockery; — Then again there are the colloquies of Orlando and Agricane, during the pauses in their bitter duel, which must end in the death of one of them; Rinaldo's caustic reply to Orlando, who has reproved him for wishing to carry away the golden couch from the fairy's garden; and that other no less caustic repartee of the courageous highway robber to Brandimarte; and many and many another most beautiful passage? — Yet the *Innamorato,* notwithstanding its poetical abundance, has never

been numbered among really classical works, so that after the vogue which for ephemeral reasons it enjoyed in its own day, it has not received and does not receive the affection and homage of any but those who love what is little loved and prize what is pure, spontaneous and rude. The poem does not conclude in itself; it is not satisfied with itself: there is a break somewhere in the circle: the representation of the energetic and primitive, which is a sort of formal epicity, has something in it of the monotonous and arid, and the pleasure derived from it has something of the solitary and sterile. Like the charger that sniffs the battle, so says Boiardo:

> Ad ogni atto degno e signorile,
> Qual se raconti di cavalleria,
> sempre se allegra l'animo gentile,
> come nel fatto fusse tuttavia,
> manifestando fuore il cor virile. . . .[1]

That is well, but the manly heart is not slow to express a certain feeling of delusion, when it recognises that the images in question are all body, without depth of soul, and without the guidance and inspiration of a superior spirit. He says somewhere else:

[1] The gentle soul rejoices at every worthy, noble deed recounted of knighthood, as it does when the deed was accomplished, which revealed the manly heart.

Già molto tempo m'han tenuto a bada
Morgana, Alcina e le incantazioni,
Nè ve ho mostrato un bel colpo di spada,
E pieno il cel de lancie e de tronconi. . . .[1]

But there are too many lances that meet and clash, too many limbs flying about without our ever seeing the cause, the meaning or the justification of all that fighting — even Boiardo himself becomes melancholy, when he thinks of those blows exchanged in a spiritual void, exclaiming in one of those frequent purely spontaneous epigrams, which invest his noble person with sympathy:

Fama, seguace degli imperatori,
Ninfa, che e' gesti a' dolci versi canti,
che dopo morte ancor gli uomini onori,
e fai coloro eterni, che tu vanti,
ove sei giunta? a dir gli antichi amori,
e a narrar battaglie de' giganti;
mercè del mondo, che al tuo tempo è tale,
che più di fama o di virtù non cale.
Lascia a Parnaso quella verde pianta,
che da salvivi ormai perso è il cammino,
e meco al basso questa istoria canta
del re Agramante, il forte Saracino. . . .[2]

[1] Morgana, Alcina and their incantations have long held me in their chains, so that I have been unable to show you aught of fine sword play, the sky full of lances and limbs. . . .

[2] Where art thou gone, O fame that followest emperors and singest their brave deeds in gentle verse, thou that hon-

Pulci and Boiardo then, not to mention others, are to be placed neither above nor below Ariosto, for they are not even related to him. Proof of this is to be found in the fact that thought has gone to other artists, to Ovid for example, in the search for his parallel in literature among the Latins, to Petrarch and to Politian among Italians, or to architects like Bramante and Leon Baptista Alberti, and yet more to painters, like Raphael, Correggio and Titian, comparisons having been instituted with all of these and with others whom it is unnecessary to mention. Now as regards quality of artistic inspiration, affinity is certainly more intrinsic than are relations established from the use of similar abstract material; yet it is itself abstract and extrinsic, because it always accepts one or certain aspects of inspiration, not the full inspiration. Thus, for example, when a comparison is drawn between Ariosto and Ovid, who was a story-teller, lacking altogether

orest men after death and conferrest eternity upon those thou vauntest? This is the fault of the world. Thou art gone to sing of ancient loves and to tell of the battles of the giants, thanks to this world of ours that cares no longer for courage or for fame. Leave upon Parnassus that growth of green, since none knows now the upward path that leadeth thither, and sing here below with me this history of King Agramante, the mighty Saracen. . . .

in religious feeling for mythological fables and attracted to them solely by their beauty and variety, we must immediately hasten to add that with the exception of this side, which they share in common, Ariosto is different and superior to the Latin poet in every other, for Ovid had not a delicate taste in art, being merged altogether in his pleasing and delightful themes. He improvised and overflowed, owing to his incapacity for firm design and lack of control: he would be better described as the model of the luxurious Italian versifiers of the seventeenth century than as the model of Ariosto, whose art was most chaste. If again he be superficially compared with Politian, the comparison breaks up immediately, because the *Stanze* are inspired by the voluptuousness of the sensible world, contemplated in all its fugitive brilliance and with that trembling accompaniment of anxiety and suffering, inseparable from it, while Ariosto soars above the pathos of voluptuousness. To note affinities is of avail in a work introductory to the general study of literature, and to draw comparisons and point out contrasts and successive approximations may also serve as a useful aid to the accurate description of an artist's special character. But

we do not propose to supply here such a didactic introduction, for the use of such a method is superfluous, as we have already described Ariosto's characteristics in the manner proposed. We shall not therefore form a group of artists, as related to him in this or that respect, for such cannot be expected of us, nor has it for us any special attraction.

Observations as to affinities have another use also, as providing a basis for sparkling and resonant metaphors, as when it is observed of an artist that he is the " Raphael of poetry," of another that he is " the Dante of sculpture," or of a third that he is " the Michael Angelo of sound," or as was said (by Torquato Tasso, perhaps as a witticism, and certainly with little truth), that Ariosto is " the Ferrarese Homer." We already possess many pages of magnificent metaphors to the honour and glory of the author of the *Furioso,* nor do we intend to depreciate their merit; but the present writer begs to be excused from the labour of increasing their number, since he is in general little disposed to oratory and has allowed what slight gift of the sort he might have possessed to flow away and lose itself, while conversing with so unrhetorical and so conversational a poet as was Ludovico Ariosto.

PART II

WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

CHAPTER VII

THE PRACTICAL PERSONALITY AND THE POETICAL PERSONALITY

To state at the outset, that the practical personality of Shakespeare is not the object of study for the critic and historian of art, but his poetical personality; not the character and development of his life, but the character and development of his art, will perhaps seem to be superfluous, but as a matter of fact it will aid us in proceeding more rapidly.

We do not aim at forbidding the natural curiosity, which leads to the enquiry as to what sort of men in practical life were those whom we admire as poets, thinkers and scientists. This curiosity often leads to delusion, because there is nothing to be found behind the poet, the philosopher, or the man of science, which can arouse interest, though it is sometimes fruitful. It would certainly be agreeable to raise that sort of mysterious veil that surrounds Shakespeare. We should like to know what sort of

passions, what ethical, philosophical and mental experiences were his, and above all what he thought about himself — whether, as appeared to those who rediscovered him a century or so later, he were really without feeling the greatness of his genius and of his own work. For what reason, too, if there were a special reason, did he not take the trouble to have his plays printed, but exposed them to the risk of being lost to posterity? Was it due to the ingenuousness and innocence of the poet, or to proud indifference on the part of a man, who disdains the world's applause and the mirage of glory, because he is completely satisfied with the greatness of his work? Or was it due to simple indolence, or to a settled plan, or to the web of events? Did he suppose, as has been suggested, that those plays, written for the theatre, would have continued ever to live in the theatre, under the care of his companions in art, in accordance with his intentions and in a manner suitable to their merit? But it is clear that these and such like questions concern the biography, rather than the artistic history of Shakespeare, which gives rise to an altogether different series of researches.

We do not however wish to assert that these

two series of different questions are without relation: even different things have some relation to one another, which resides in their diversity itself and is connected above them. The critic and historian of art would certainly find it advantageous for the studies that he was about to undertake, to know the chronology, the circumstances, the details, the compositions, the recompositions, the recastings and the collaborations of the Shakespearean drama. He would thus avoid the obligation of vexing his mind as to certain interpretations, and of remaining more or less perplexed for a greater or lesser space of time, before certain peculiarities, discordances and inequalities, doubtful, that is to say, as to whether they be errors in art, or art forms of which it is difficult to seize the hidden connection. But he would gain nothing more from this advantage (with the conjoined admonition, to beware of the prejudices that such information is apt to cause). His judgment would of necessity be founded, in final analysis, upon intrinsic reasons of an artistic nature, arising from an examination of the works before him. The chronology that he will succeed in fixing, will not be a real or material chronology, but an ideal and an

aesthetic one, for these are two forms of chronology which only coincide approximately and sometimes altogether diverge from one another. Were the authenticity of the works all clearly settled, the critic would be preserved from proclaiming that certain works or parts of works are Shakespeare's, when they are really, say, Greene's or Marlowe's, which is an inexactitude of nomenclature, as also is the treating of Shakespeare's work as being by someone else or anonymous. But this onomastic inexactitude is already corrected by the presumption that the critic has his eye fixed, not on the biographical and practical personage of Shakespeare, but on the poetical personage. He is thus able to face with calmness the danger, which is not a danger and is extremely improbable, of allowing to pass under the colours of Shakespeare a work drawn from the same or a similar source of inspiration, which stands at an equal altitude with others, or of adding another work to those of inferior quality and declining value assigned to the same name, because he is differentiating aesthetic values and not title-deeds to legal property.

As we have said, it has not seemed superfluous to repeat these statements, because in

the first place, the silent and tenacious, though erroneous conviction, as to the unity and identity of the two histories, the practical and the poetical, or at least the obscurity as to their true relation, is the hidden source of the vast and to a large extent useless labours, which form the great body of Shakespearean philology. This in common with the philology of the nineteenth century in general, is unconsciously dominated by romantic ideas of mystical and naturalistic unity, whence it is not by accident that Emerson is found among the precursors of hybrid biographical aesthetic, and the romanticizing Brandes among its most conspicuous supporters. These labours are animated with the hope of obtaining knowledge of the poetry of Shakespeare in its full reality, by means of the discovery of the complete chronology, of biographical incidents, of allusions, and of the origin of his themes. The ranks of the seekers are also swollen by those who are animated with like hopes and wish to exhibit their cleverness in the solution of enigmas, or are urged by the professional necessity of producing dissertations and theses. Unfortunately, the documents and traditions relating to the life of Shakespeare are very

few. All or nearly all, relate to external and insignificant details. We are without letters, confessions or memoirs by the author, and also without authentic and abundant collections of facts relating to him. Although almost every year there appears some new *Life of Shakespeare,* it is now time to recognise with resignation and clearly to declare that it is not possible to write a biography of Shakespeare. At the most, an arid and faulty biographical chronicle can be composed, rather as proof of the devotion of posterity, longing to possess even a shadow of that biography, than as genuinely satisfying a desire for knowledge. Owing to this lack of documents, the above-mentioned philological literature consists, almost altogether, of an enormous and ever increasing number of conjectures, of which the one contests, impugns, or varies the other, and all are equally incapable of nourishing the mind. It suffices to glance through a few pages of a Shakespearean annual or handbook, to hear of the "Southampton theory," the "Pembroke theory," and of other theories, in relation to the *Sonnets;* that is to say, whether the person concealed beneath the initials W. H. in the printer's dedication, is the Earl of Southamp-

ton, or the Earl of Pembroke, or a musician of the name of Hughes, or even William Harvey, the third husband of Southampton's mother, or the retail bookseller, William Hell, or an invention of the printer, or a joke of the poet, who should thus indicate himself (William Himself) ; and so on, with the " Fitton theory," the " Davenant theory," and the like, that is to say, whether the " dark lady," celebrated in some of the sonnets, be a court lady of the name of Mary Fitton, or the hostess by whom Shakespeare is said to have become the father of the poet Davenant (and one of the critics has dared admit that he spent fifteen years in research and meditation on this point alone), or the French wife of the printer Field, or finally a conventional and imaginary personage of Elizabethan sonneteering, which was based upon the manner of Petrarch. And in the same way as with the *Sonnets,* there have been conjectures of the most varied sorts as to Shakespeare's marriage, his relations with his wife, the incidents of his family and of his profession. Passing to the plays, there are and have been discussions without apparent end, as to whether *Titus Andronicus* be an original work, or has been patched up by him; as to

whether *Henry VI* be all of it his, or only a part, or revised and enlarged by him; as to which portions of *Henry VIII* and of *Pericles* are his and which Fletcher's, or whether by other hands; as to whether *Timon* be a sketch finished by others or a sketch by others finished by Shakespeare; whether and to what extent there persists in *Hamlet* a previous *Hamlet* by Kyd or by another author; whether certain of the so-called "apocryphas," such as *Arden of Feversham* and *Edward III,* are on the contrary to be held to be authentic. In like manner, the difficulties connected with the chronology are great and conjectures numerous. The *Dream,* for instance, is by some placed in the year 1590, by others in 1595, *Julius Caesar* now in 1606, now in 1599, *Cymbeline* in 1605 and 1611, *Troilus and Cressida,* by some in 1599, by others in 1603, by others still in 1609, by yet others resolved into three parts or strata, form 1592 to 1606, and 1607, with additions by other hands. For the majority, the *Tempest* belongs to the year 1611, but is by others dated earlier, and as regards *Hamlet* again, in its first form, there are some who believe that it was composed, not by any means in 1602, but between 1592 and 1594. And so on, without

advantage being taken of the few sure aids offered by stylistic or metrical measurements, as one may prefer to call them. Now conjectures are of use as heuristic instruments, only in so far as it is hoped to convert them into certainties, by means of the documents of which they aid in the search and the interpretation. But when this is not possible, they are altogether vain and vacuous, and consequently, were they convertible into certainties, would not give the solution or the criterion of solution of the critical problems relating to the poetry of Shakespeare. When they are not to be so converted and remain mere vague imagining, they do not even supply the practical and biographical history, which others delude themselves with the belief that they can construct piecemeal by means of them. Hence it has happened that careful writers, who have wished to give the character and life of Shakespeare, as far as possible without hypotheses and fancies, have been obliged to retail a series of general assertions, in which all individualisation is lost, even if Shakespeare be pronounced good, honest, gentle, serviceable, prudent, laborious, frank, gay, and the like.

But the majority convert the less probable

conjectures into certainties, and proceed from conjecture to conjecture and from assertion to assertion, finally producing, under the title, *Life of Shakespeare,* nothing but a romance, which, however, always turns out to be too colourless to be called artistic. A rapacious hand is stretched out to seize the poetical works themselves, with the view of writing this sort of fiction since (to quote the author of one of these unamusing fictions, Brandes) it cannot be admitted that it is impossible to know by deducing them from his writings, the life, the adventures, and the person of a man who has left about forty plays and poems. And it is certainly possible to deduce all these things from the poetical writings, but the life, and the poetical adventures and personages, not the practical and biographical; save in the case (which is not that of Shakespeare,) where definitely informative, autobiographical statements and excursions are to be found among the poems, that is to say, passages that are not poetical, but prosaic. In every other instance, the poetical emotion does not lead to the practical, because the relation between the two is not *deterministic,* from effect to cause, but *creative,* from material to form, and therefore in-

commensurable. The moment it is raised to the sphere of poetry, a sentiment that has really been experienced is plucked from its practical and realistic soil, and made the motive of composition for a world of dreams, one of the infinite possible worlds, in which it is as useless to seek any longer the reality of that sentiment, as it is vain to seek a drop of water poured into the ocean, and transformed from what it was previously by ocean's vast embrace. One feels almost inclined to repeat as warning that strophe from the *Sonnets,* where the poet said of his mistress to his friend:

"Nay, if you read this line, remember not
The hand that writ it; for I love you so,
That I in your sweet thoughts would be forgot,
If thinking on me then should make you woe."

For this reason, when we read in Brandes's book (which we select for quotation here, because it has been widely circulated), such statements as that Richard III, the deformed dwarf, whom we feel to be superior in intellect, adumbrates Shakespeare himself, obliged to adopt the despised profession of the actor, but full of the pride of genius, it is not a case of rejecting

or accepting his statements, but of simply looking upon them as so many conjectures founded upon air and as such, devoid of interest. This criterion can also be applied in the following cases: that the pitiful death of the youthful Prince Arthur, in *King John,* shows traces of the loss of one of his sons, sustained by the author at the moment when he was composing that drama; that the riotous youth of Henry V is a symbol of the youth of Shakespeare during his first years in London; that Brutus, in *Julius Caesar,* has reference to the persons of Essex and Southampton, protectors of the poet and unsuccessful conspirators against the queen; that Coriolanus, disdainful of praise, is Shakespeare in the attitude that it suited him to take up towards the public and the critics; that the feeling of King Lear, appalled with ingratitude, is that of the poet, appalled at the ingratitude he experienced at the hands of his colleagues, of the impresarii and of his pupils; and finally that Shakespeare must have written those terrible dramas in the nocturnal hours, although he most probably worked as a rule in the early morning; together with many other fancies of a similar sort; it is not a case of accepting or of confuting them, but of just taking them for

what they are, conjectures based upon air, and as such of no interest.

The like may be said of another volume, which has also been much discussed, that of Harris. Here, in a view based upon the inspection of his lyrics and dramas, he is represented as sensual and neuropathic, almost affected with erotic mania, weak of will, attracted and tyrannised over during almost the whole of his life, by a fascinating and faithless dark lady, named Mary Fitton. Hence the origin of his most poignant tragedies, and the mystery that conceals his last years, when he withdrew to Stratford, by no means with the intention of there enjoying the peace of the country as a *foenerator Appius,* but because, ruined in body and soul, he wished there to nurse his ills, or rather to die there, as soon afterwards he did.

The period of the great tragedies, especially, has been connected with circumstances in the private life of the author and with events in English public life. This too may or may not be true: Shakespeare may or may not have been extremely excitable, both in personal and practical matters; he may on the other hand have remained perfectly calm and watched the tossing sea from the shore, with that tone of

feeling proper to artists, described by psychologists as *Scheingefühle,* a feeling of appearance and dream. No value also is to be attributed to conjectures as to the models that Shakespeare sometimes had before him: for Shylock in the shape of some adventurer of his time, or for Prospero in the person of the Emperor Rudolph II, who was interested in science and magic, and the like, because the relation between art and its model is incommensurable. In reading the works of Shakespeare, one is sometimes inclined to think (as for that matter in the case of other poets), that some affection or incident of the life of the author is to be found in the words of this or that character, as for example in *Cymbeline,* where Posthumus says,

> " Could I find out
> The woman's part in me! But there's no motion
> That tends to vice in man, but I affirm
> It is the woman's part! "

or in those others of *Troilus and Cressida:*

> " Lechery, lechery; still, wars and lechery; nothing else holds fashions: a burning devil take them! "

in the same way as some have suspected a personal memory in the case of Dante, in the

Francesca episode of the reading and inebriation. But there is nothing to be done with this suspicion and the thought that suggested it. Nor is there anything to be built upon in those rare passages, where it may seem that the poet breaks the coherence and aesthetic level of his work, in order to lay stress upon some real or practical feeling of his own, by over-accentuation; because, even if we admit that there are such passages in Shakespeare, it always remains doubtful whether for him, as for other poets, the true motive for this inopportune emphasis, is to be found in the eruption of his own powerful feelings, or rather in some other accidental motive.

We may also save ourselves from wonder and invective of the "Baconian hypothesis," by means of this indifference of the poetical work towards biography. This hypothesis maintains that the real author of the plays, which pass under the name of Shakespeare, was Francis Bacon. We are likewise preserved from those others of more recent date and vogue, which maintain that the author was Roger, fifth Earl of Rutland, or that Rutland collaborated with Southampton, or that there really existed a society of dramatic authors

(Chettle, Heywood, Webster, etc.) with the final revision entrusted to Bacon, or finally (the latest discovery of the sort) that he was William Stanley, sixth Earl of Derby. A thousand or more volumes, opuscules and articles have been printed to deal with these conjectures, and although — to the severe eye of the trained philologist — they may justly seem to be extravagant, yet they retain the merit of being a sort of involuntarily *ironic treatment* of the purely philological method and of its abuse of conjecture.

But even if we grant the unlikely contention that in the not very great brain of the philosopher Bacon, there lodged the brain of a very great poet, from which proceeded the Shakespearean drama, nothing would thereby have been discovered or proved, save a singular marvel, a joke, a monstrosity of nature. The artistic problem would remain untouched, because that drama remains always the same; Lear laments and imprecates in the same manner, Othello struggles furiously, Hamlet meditates and wavers before the problem of humanity and the action that he is called upon to take, and in the same manner, all are enwrapped in the veil of Eternity.

It is a good thing to shake off this weight of erroneous philology (another philology exists alongside of it, which is not erroneous, since it preserves the probably genuine text, and interprets the vocabulary and the historical references with a genuine feeling for art), not only because, whether or no it attain the end of biography, it distracts attention from the right and proper object of artistic criticism, but also because it employs the biography, true or false, for the purpose of clouding and changing the artistic vision. Confounding art and document, it transports into art whatever it has discovered or believes itself to have discovered by means of research, turning the serene compositions of the poet into a series of shudders, cries, restless motions, convulsions, ferocious springs, manifestations, now of sentimental rapture, now of furious desire.

We know that it is necessary to make an effort of abstraction, to forget biographical details concerning the poets, in those cases where they abound, if we wish to enjoy their art, in what it possesses of ideality, which is truth. We know, too, that poets and artists have always experienced dislike and contempt for those gossip-mongers, who investigate and re-

cord the private occurrences of their lives, in order to extract from them the elements of artistic judgment. This is the reason why a poet's contemporaries and his fellow-countrymen and fellow-townsmen are said not to be good judges and that no one is a poet or prophet among his familiars and in the place of his birth.

The advantage of the lack of a bar to artistic contemplation, one of the good consequences of this lack of biographical detail relating to Shakespeare, is thrown away by these conjecturers, who, like the mule of Galeazzo Florimonte, bring stones to birth that they may stumble upon them.

We can observe the re-immersion of Shakespearean poetry in psychological materiality in the already mentioned book of Brandes (and also to some extent in the more subtle and ingenious work of Frank Harris) and in the case of Brandes, the readjustment of values that is its consequence, as with *King Lear* and *Timon,* both documents of misanthropy induced by ingratitude; and even the sinking of values into non-values, when he fails to effect his psychological reduction, even by means of those extravagant methods, as in the case of *Macbeth,*

where he declares that this play, which is one of the dramatic masterpieces, appears to him to possess but "slight interest," because he does not feel "the heart of Shakespeare beating there," that is to say, of the Shakespeare endowed with certain practical objects and interests by his imagination.

This error is also to be found in the so-called "pictures of the society of the time," by means of which another group has striven to interpret the art of Shakespeare. These are not less extrinsic and disturbing than the others, assuming that they are composed with like historical ignorance. Taine, for instance, having got it into his head that the English of the time of Elizabeth were *"des bêtes sauvages,"* describes the drama of the time as a reproduction *"sans choix"* of all *"les laideurs, les bassesses, les horreurs, les détails crus, les moeurs déréglées et féroces"* of that time, and the style of Shakespeare as *"un composé d'expressions forcenées,"* in such wise that when one reads the famous *Histoire de la littérature anglaise,* it is difficult to say whether poets or assassins are passing across the stage, whether these be artistic and harmonious contests, or dagger-thrust struggles. The opinion of

Goethe is opposed to all these deformations, to the Shakespeare who moans and shrieks on the wind of the wild passions of his time, to that other Shakespeare who reveals the wounds of his own sickly soul with bitter sarcasm and disgust. In the conversations with Eckermann, he gives as his impression that the plays of Shakespeare were the work "of a man in perfect health and strength, both in body and spirit"; he must indeed have been healthy and strong and free, when he created something so free, so healthy and so strong as his poetry.

In a calmer sphere of considerations, those who make the personages and the action of the plays depend upon the political and social events of the time commit a similar deterministic error — upon the victory over the Armada, the conspiracy of Essex, the death of Elizabeth, the accession of James, the geographical discoveries and colonisation of the day, the contests with the Puritans, and the like.

Others err in tracing the different forms of the poetry to the course of his reading, to the Chronicle of Holinshed, to Italian novels, to the Lives of Plutarch, and especially to the *Essais* of Montaigne (where Chasles and others of more recent date have placed the

origin of the new great period of his poetical work); others again have found it in the circumstances of the English stage of the time, and in the various tastes of the "reserved" and "pit" seats, as in the so-called "realistic" criticism of Rümelin.

The poetry, then, should certainly be interpreted historically, but in the proper sense, disconnected, that is to say from a history that is foreign to it and with which its only connection is that prevailing between a man and what he disregards, puts away from him and rejects, because it either injures him or is of no use, or, which comes to the same thing, because he has already made sufficient use of it.

CHAPTER VIII

SHAKESPEAREAN SENTIMENT

Everyone possesses at the bottom of his heart, as it were, a synthetic or compendious image of a poet like Shakespeare, who belongs to the common patrimony of culture, and in his memory the definitions of him that have been given and have become current formulae. It is well to fix the mind upon that image, to remember these formulae, and to extract from them their principal meanings, with the view of obtaining, at least in a preliminary and provisory manner, the characteristic spiritual attitude of Shakespeare, his poetical sentiment.

The first observation leaps to the eye and is generally admitted: namely, that no particular feeling or order of feelings prevails in him; it cannot be said of him that he is an amorous poet, like Petrarch, a desperately sad poet like Leopardi, or heroic, as Homer. His name is adorned rather with such epithets as *universal* poet, as perfectly *objective,* entirely *imper-*

sonal, extraordinarily *impartial.* Sometimes even his *coldness* has been remarked — a coldness certainly sublime, " that of a sovran spirit, which has described the complete curve of human existence and has survived all sentiment " (Schlegel).

Nor is he a poet of *ideals,* as they are called, whether they be religious, ethical, political, or social. This explains the antipathy frequently manifested towards him by apostles of various sorts, of whom the last was Tolstoi, and the unsatisfied desires that take fire in the minds of the right thinking, urging them always to ask of any very great man for something more, for a supplement. They conclude their admiration with a sigh that there should really be something missing in him — he is not to be numbered along those who strive for more liberal political forms and for a more equable social balance, nor has he had bowels of compassion for the humble and the plebeian. A certain school of German critics (Ulrici, Gervinus, Kreyssig, Vischer, etc.), perhaps as an act of opposition to such apparent accusations (I would not recommend the reading of these authors, whom I have felt obliged to peruse owing to the nature of my task) began to rep-

resent Shakespeare as a lofty master of morality, a casuist most acute and reliable, who never fails to solve an ethical problem in the correct way, a prudent and austere counsellor in politics, and above all, an infallible judge of actions, a distributor of rewards and punishments, graduated according to merit and demerit, paying special attention that not even the slightest fault should go unpunished. Now setting aside the fact that the ends attributed to him were not in accordance with his character as a poet and bore evidence only to the lack of taste of those critics; setting aside that the design of distributing rewards and punishments according to a moral scale, which they imagine to exist and praise in him, was altogether impossible of accomplishment by any man or even by any God, since rewards and punishments are thoughts altogether foreign to the moral consciousness and of a purely practical and judicial nature; setting aside these facts, which are generally considered unworthy of discussion and jeered at in the most recent criticism, as the ridiculous survivals of a bygone age, even if we make the attempt to translate these statements into a less illogical form,

and assume that there really existed in Shakespeare an inclination for problems of that sort, they shew themselves to be at variance with simple reality. Shakespeare caressed no ideals of any sort and least of all political ideals; and although he magnificently represents political struggles also, he always went beyond their specific character and object, attaining through them to the only thing that really attracted him; life.

This *sense of life* is also extolled in his work, which for that reason is held to be eminently *dramatic,* that is to say, animated with a sense of life considered in itself, in its eternal discord, its eternal harshness, its bitter-sweet, in all its complexity.

To feel life potently, without the determination of a passion or an ideal, implies feeling it unilluminated by faith, undisciplined by any law of goodness, not to be corrected by the human will, not to be reduced to the enjoyment of idyllic calm, or to the inebriation of joy; and Shakespeare has indeed been judged in turn not religious, not moral, no assertor of the freedom of the will, and no optimist. But no one has yet dared to judge him to be irreligious,

immoral, a fatalist, or a pessimist, for these adjectives are seen not to suit him, as soon as they are pronounced.

And here too were required the strange aberration of fancy of a Taine, his singular incapacity for receiving clear impressions of the truth, in order to portray the feeling of Shakespeare towards man and life as being fundamentally irrational, based on blind deception, a sequence of hasty impulses and swarming images, without an autonomous centre, where truth and wisdom are accidental and unstable effects, or appearances without substance. These are simply exercises in style, repeated with variants from other writers; they do not even present a caricature of the art of Shakespeare, since even for this, some connection with fact is necessary. Shakespeare, who has so strong a feeling for the bounds set to the human will, in relation to the Whole, which stands above it, possesses the feeling for the power of human liberty in equal degree. As Hazlitt says, he, who in some respects is "the least moral of poets," is in others "the greatest of moralists." He who beholds the unremovable presence of evil and sorrow, has his eye open and intent in an equal degree upon

the shining forth of the good, the smile of joy, and is healthy and virile as no pessimist ever was. He who nowhere in his works refers directly to a God, has ever present within him the obscure consciousness of a divinity, of an unknown divinity, and the spectacle of the world, taken by itself, seems to him to be without significance, men and their passions a dream, a dream that has for intrinsic and correlative end a reality which, though hidden, is more solid and perhaps more lofty.

But we must be careful not to insist too much upon these positive definitions and represent his sentiment as though it were one in which negative elements were altogether overcome. The good, virtue, is without doubt stronger in Shakespeare than evil and vice, not because it overcomes and resolves the other term in itself, but simply because it is light opposed to darkness, because it is the good, because it is virtue. This is because of its special quality, which the poet discerns and seizes in its original purity and truth, without sophisticating or weakening it. Positive and negative elements do really become interlaced or run into one another, in his mode of feeling, without becoming reconciled in a superior harmony. Their natural

logic can be expressed in terms of rectitude, justice and sincerity; but their logic and natural character also finds its expression in terms of ambition, cupidity, egoism and satanic wickedness. The will is accurately aimed at the target, but also, it is sometimes diverted from it by a power, which it does not recognise, although it obeys it, as though under a spell. The sky becomes serene after the devastating hurricane, honourable men occupy the thrones from which the wicked have fallen, the conquerors pity and praise the conquered. But the desolation of faith betrayed, of goodness trampled upon, of innocent creatures destroyed, of noble hearts broken, remains. The God that should pacify hearts is invoked, his presence may even be felt, but he never appears.

The poet does not stand beyond these struggling passions, attraction and repugnance, love and hate, hope and despair, joy and sorrow; but he is beyond being on the side of one or the other. He receives them all in himself, not that he may feel them all, and pour tears of blood around them, but that he may make of them his unique world, the Shakespearean world, which is the world of those undecided conflicts.

What poets appear at first sight more different than Shakespeare and Ariosto? Yet they have this in common, that both look upon something that is beyond particular emotions, and for this reason it has been said of both of them, more than once, that "they speak but little to the heart." They are certainly sentimental and agitated by the passions to a very slight degree; the "humour" of both has been referred to, a word that we avoid here, because it is so uncertain of meaning and of such little use in determining profound emotions of the spirit. Ariosto veils and shades all the particular feelings that he represents, by means of his divine irony; and Shakespeare, in a different way, by endowing all with equal vigour and relief, succeeds in creating a sort of equilibrium, by means of reciprocal tension, which, owing to its mode of genesis, differs in every other respect from the harmony in which the singer of the *Furioso* delights. Ariosto surpasses good and evil, retaining interest in them only on account of the rhythm of life, so constant and yet so various, which arises, expands, becomes extinguished and is reborn, to grow and again to become extinguished. Shakespeare surpasses all individual emotions, but he does

not surpass, on the contrary, he strengthens our interest in good and evil, in sorrow and joy, in destiny and necessity, in appearance and reality, and the vision of this strife is his poetry. Thus the one has been metaphorically called "imaginative"; the other "realistic," and the one has been opposed to the other. They are opposed to one another, yet they meet at one point, not at the general one of both being poets, but at the specific point of being cosmic poets, not only in the sense in which every poet is cosmical, but in the particular sense above explained. Let us hope that it is not necessary to recommend that this should be understood with the necessary reservations, that is to say, as the trait that dominates the two poets in a different way and does not exclude the other individual traits of feature, above all not that which belongs to all poetry whatsoever. The limits set to every critical study, which should henceforth be known to all, are laid down by the impossibility of ever rendering in logical terms the full effect of any poetry or of other artistic work, since it is clear that if such a translation were possible, art would be impossible, that is to say, superfluous, because admitting of a substitute. Criticism,

nevertheless, within those limits, performs its own office, which is to discern and to point out exactly where lies the poetical motive and to formulate the divisions which aid in distinguishing what is proper to every work.

For the rest, if Ariosto has often been compared to contemporary painters, with the object of drawing attention to his harmonic inspiration, Ludwig has been unable to abstain from making similar comparisons for Shakespeare. He found the most adequate image for his dramas in the portraits and landscapes of Titian, of Giorgione, of Paul Veronese, as contrasting with the amiability of Correggio, the insipidity of the Caracci, the affected manner of Guido and of Carlo Dolce, the crudity of the naturalists Caravaggio and Ribera. In Shakespeare, as in those great Venetians, there is everywhere "existence," life upon earth, transfigured perhaps, but devoid of restlessness, of aureoles and of sentimentalisms, serene even where tragic.

This sense of strife in vital unity, this profound sense of life, prevents the vision from becoming simplified and superficialised in the antitheses of good and evil, of elect and reprobate beings, and causes the introduction of

conflict, in varying measure and degree, in every being. Thus the battle is fought at the very heart of things. Hence the aspect of mystery that surrounds the actions and events portrayed by Shakespeare, which is not to be understood in the general sense that every vision of art is a mystery, but rather in the special sense of a course of events of which the poet not only does not possess (and could not possess) the philosophical explanation, but never discovers the reposeful term, peace after war, the acceptance of war as a means to a more lofty peace. For this reason is everywhere diffused the terror of the Unknown, which surrounds on every side and conceals a countenance that may be more terrible than terrible life itself, in the development of which human beings are involved — a countenance terrible for what it will reveal, and perhaps sublime and ecstatic, giving in its very terribleness, terror and rapture together. The mystery lies not only in the occasional appearance of spectres, demons, witches, in the poetry, but in the whole atmosphere of which they form only a part, assisting by their presence in a more direct determination. This mystery was well expressed by the first great critics who penetrated into the

world of Shakespearean poetry, Herder and Goethe, to the second of whom belongs the simile of the Shakespearean drama as "open books of Destiny, in which blows the wind of emotional life here and there stripping their leaves in its violence." In Shakespeare's musicality we are everywhere sensible of a voluptuous palpitation before the mystery which at times reflects upon itself and supplies the link between music and love, music and sadness, music and unknown Godhead.

We must insist upon the word "sentiment," which we have adopted for the description of this spiritual condition, in order that it may not be mistaken for a concept or mode of thought or philosopheme, which occurs when the word "conception" or "mode of conceiving life" is taken in a literal and material manner as applied to Shakespeare and in general to the poets — when, for instance, it is asked by what special quality does Shakespeare's "conception of tragedy" differ from Greek and French tragedy, and the like, as though in such a case, it were a question of concepts and systems. Shakespeare is not a philosopher: his spiritual tendency is altogether opposed to the philosophic, which dominates both sentiment and the

spectacle of life with thought that understands and explains it, reconciling conflicts under a single principle of dialectic. Shakespeare, on the contrary, takes both and renders them in their vital mobility — they know nothing of criticism or theory — and he does not offer any solution other than the evidence of visible representation. For this reason, when he is characterised and receives praises for his "objectivity," his "impersonality," his "universality," and those who do this are not satisfied even with their incorrect description of the real psychological differences noted above, but proceed to claim a philosophical character for his spiritual attitude, it is advisable to reject them all, confronting his objectivity with his poetic subjectivity, his impersonality with his personality, his universality with his individual mode of feeling. The cosmic oppositions, in imagining which he symbolises reality and life, not only are not philosophical solutions for him in his plays, but they are not even problems of thought; only rarely do they tend to take the form of bitter interrogations, which remain without answer. Equally fantastic and arbitrary are the attempts to compose a philosophical theory from the work of Shakespeare who

is alternately, theistic, pantheistic, dualistic, deterministic, pessimistic and optimistic, by extracting it from his plays in the same manner as that employed in the case of the philosophy implied in a historical or political treatise; because there is certainly a philosophy implied in these latter cases, embodied in the historical and political judgments which they contain. In the case of Shakespeare, however, which is that of poets in general, to extract it means to place it there, that is, to think and to draw conclusions ourselves under the imaginative stimulus of the poet, and to place in his mouth, through a psychological illusion, our own questions and answers. It would only be possible to discuss a philosophy of Shakespeare if, like Dante, he had developed one in certain philosophical sections of his poems; but this is not so, because the thoughts that he utters fulfil no other function than that of poetical expressions, and when they are taken from their contexts, where they sound so powerful and so profound, they lose their virtue and appear to be indeterminate, contradictory or fallacious.

It is quite another question as to whether his sentiment was based upon what are called mental or philosophical *presumptions* and as to

what these, properly speaking, were; because, as regards the first point, it must be at once admitted that a sentiment does not appear without a basis of certain mental presumptions or concepts, that is to say, of certain convictions, affirmations, negations and doubts. As regards the second point, the legitimacy of the enquiry will be admitted, and it will also be noted that this forms one of several historical enquiries, relating to Shakespeare in his poetry, to which belongs the place unduly usurped by ineptitudes and superficialities on the theme of his private affairs; his domestic relations, his business transactions, and his pretended love intrigues with Mary Fitton and the hostess Madam Davenant.

It is also true that the researches into the mental presumptions of Shakespeare have often strayed into the external and the anecdotic, as is the case with such problems as the religion that he followed and his political opinions. Stated in this way, they likewise sink to the level of biographical problems, indifferent to art. That Shakespeare belonged to the Anglican and not to the Catholic confession (as some still maintain, and in 1864 Rio wrote a whole book on the subject), and opposed Puri-

tanism in one quality or the other; that he supported Essex in his conspiracy, or on the contrary was on the side of Queen Elizabeth, has nothing to do with the mental presuppositions immanent in his poetry. He may have been impious and profane in active practical life as a Greene or a Marlowe, or a devout papist, worshipping with secret superstition, like an adept of Mary Stuart, and nevertheless he may have composed poetry with different presuppositions, upon thoughts that had entered his mind and had there become formed and dominated in his spirit, without for that reason having changed the faith previously selected and observed. The research of which we speak does not concern the superficial, but the profound character of the man; it is not concerned with the congealed and solidified stratum, but with the tide that flows beneath it, which others would call the unconscious in relation to the conscious, whereas, it would be more exact to invert the two qualifications. Presuppositions are the philosophemes that everyone carries with him, gathering them from the times and from tradition, or forming them anew by means of his own observations and rapid reflections. In poetical works, they form the condition re-

mote from the psychological attitude, which generates poetical visions.

In this depth of consciousness, Shakespeare shows himself clearly to be outside, not only Catholicism, but also Protestantism, not only Christianity, but every religious, or rather every transcendental and theological conception. Here he also resembles the Italian poet of the Renaissance, Ariosto, though reaching the position by different ways and with different results. His sentiment would have appeared in an altogether different guise, if a theological conception, such as the belief in an eternal life, in a judging God, in rewards and punishments beyond this world, in the view that earthly life is a trial and a pilgrimage, had been lively and active in him. He knows no other than the vigorous passionate life upon earth, divided between joy and sorrow, with around and above it, the shadow of a mystery.

It is with natural wonder, then, that we read of Shakespeare, especially among German authors, as a spirit altogether dominated by the Christian ideas proper to the Reformation, whereas, with regard to Christianity, he was altogether lacking, both in the theology of Judaic-Hellenic origin and in the tendency to ascet-

icism and mysticism. On the other hand we cannot admit the opposite statement that he was a pagan, in the somewhat popular sense of self-satisfied hedonism, because it is not less evident that his moral discernment, his sense of what is sinful, his delicacy of conscience, his humanity, bear a strong imprint of Christian ethics. Indeed, it is precisely owing to this lofty and exquisite ethical judgment, united to the vision of a world, which moves by its own power or anyhow by some mysterious power, frequently opposing or overthrowing or perverting the forces directed to the good, that this tragic conflict arises in him. To this double presupposition must be added, as inference, a third, the negation, the scepticism, or the ignorance of the conception of a rational course of events and of a Providence that governs it. Not even does he accept inexorable Fate as sole master of men and Gods; nor the determinism of individual character as another kind of Fate, a naturalistic Fate, as some of his interpreters have believed; he remains unaffected by the hard Asiatic or African dualistic idea of predestination; on the contrary, he recognizes human spontaneity and liberty, as forces that prove their own reality in the fact itself, though

he nevertheless permits liberty and necessity to clash and the one sometimes to overpower the other, without establishing a relation between the two, without suspecting their identity in opposition, without discovering that the two elements at strife form the single river of the real, and therefore failing to rise to the level of the modern theodicy, which is History. Our wonderment bursts forth anew, in observing the emphatic and insistent statements of such writers as for instance Ulríci as to the historicity of the thought and of the tragedies of Shakespeare, where just what is altogether absent is the historical conception of life, which was possessed by Dante, though in the form of the mediaeval philosophy of history. And since historicity is both political and social ideality, Shakespeare must have been and is wanting, as has been said, in true political faith and passion. He has however been credited with this by publicists and political polemists like Gervinus, who have desired to count so great a name among their number, have imagined him possessed with the passion for it and even believed that it was crowned in him with doctrinal wisdom.

It is difficult to decide by what ways and

means these presuppositions were formed in his inmost soul, for with this question we re-enter the biographical problem as to his education, the company he kept, his reading, his experiences; and upon all these subjects little or no exact information is available. Did he observe the fervour of life which prevailed in the England of his day with sympathetic soul and vigilant eye? Did he lend an ear to discussions upon theological and metaphysical questions and carry away from them a sense of their emptiness? Did he frequent the youth of the universities, which just at that time gave several university wits to literature and to the drama? Did he read the *Laus Stultitiae* of Erasmus, moral and religious dialogues and treatises, the English humanists, the Platonicians, the ancient and modern historians, as he certainly read Montaigne at a later date? Did he read Machiavelli and the other political writers of Italy, and those who had begun to sketch the doctrine of the temperament and the passions, such as Huarte and Charron, did he know Bruno, or had he heard of him and of his doctrines? Or did the influence of these men and books reach him by various indirect paths, at second or third hand, through con-

versation, or as by a figure of speech we say, from his environment? And what part of those doubts, negations and beliefs of his, was due to his vivacity and certainty of intuition, or to his own continuous and steady rumination in himself, rather than to the course of his studies? But even if we possessed abundant notes on this subject, we should still remain without much information, because the processes of the formation of the individual escape for the most part the observation of others and frequently even the memory of him in whom they have actually occurred, and the facility with which they are forgotten proves that what is really important to preserve, is not these, but their result.

And what is here of importance is the relation of these mental presuppositions with the life of the time, with the general culture of the period, with the historical phase through which the human spirit was then passing. In these respects, Shakespeare was truly, as he has appeared to those who have best understood him, a man of the Renaissance, of that age, which, with its navigation, its commerce, its philosophies, its religious strifes, its natural science, its poems, its pictures, its statues, its

graceful architecture, had set earthly life in full relief, and no longer permitted it to lose its colours, become pallid and dissolve in the rays of another world external to it, as had happened through the long period of the Middle Ages. But Shakespeare did not belong to the pleasure-seeking, joyous and pagan Renaissance, which is but a small aspect of the great movement, but rather to that side of it which was animated with new wants, with new religious tendencies, with the spirit of new philosophical research, full of doubts, permeated with flashes from the future. These flashes, which appeared only in the great thinkers, who were not yet able to arrest them and make of them distributors of a calm and equable light, were also irreducible to a radiant centre in its greatest poet, in whom philosophy served as a presupposition and did not form the essence of his mental life. It is therefore vain to seek in Shakespeare for what neither Bruno nor Campanella attained, nor even Descartes and Spinoza at a later date, namely the historical concept, of which we have already spoken, and it is also vain to talk of his Spinozistic or Shellingian pantheism.

Shakespeare nevertheless has assumed in

the past and sometimes assumes even in our eyes, the appearance of a philosopher and of a master, or a precursor of the loftiest truths, which have since come to light. It is a fact that modern idealistic and historical philosophy has not experienced equal attraction towards any other poet, recognising in him the soul of a brother. How can this be? The answer is contained in what we have been noting and establishing. Shakespeare's mental presuppositions, which rejected the Middle Ages and were on a level with the new times, seeking and failing to find unity and harmony and above all that vigorous feeling of his for the cosmic strifes, breaking out from them and rising to the sphere of poetry, seems to offer material already prepared and to some extent also shaped to the dialectician, for he sometimes almost suggests the right word to the moralist, the politician, the philosopher of art. He might also be called a "pre-philosopher." owing to this power of stimulation that he possesses, and this appellation would have the further advantage of making it well understood that there is no use attempting to make of him a philosopher. And precisely because it is impossible to extract a definite and particular doc-

trine from his pre-philosophy and poetry, can many of different kinds be extracted, according to diversity of minds and the progress of the times. Hence, if some have maintained that the logical complement of that poetical vision is speculative idealism, dialectic, anti-ascetic morality, romantic aesthetic, realistic politics, the historical conception of the real, and have maintained this with reason, basing their views upon doctrines which they believed to be true, and have justly thought that the logical complement of beauty is truth; others have possibly arrived at pessimistic conclusions from that vision and assertion of conflicts; and others have striven and are striving to effect the restauration of some of the presumptions that are negated or are absent, such as faith in another world and in divine and transcendental justice. This latter position has been maintained as well as it possibly could have been, with the aid of much research, by an Italian mind of the first order, Manzoni, who was both a severe Catholic and a fervent Shakespearean. He found in the profundity of Shakespeare the profoundest morality, and remarked that " the representation of profound sorrows and indeterminate terrors," as given by Shakespeare,

"comes near to virtue," because "when man comes inquisitively forth from the beaten path of things known and from the accidents that he is accustomed to combat, and finds himself in the infinite region of possible evils, he feels his weakness, the cheerful ideas of defence and of vigour abandon him. Then he thinks that virtue only, a clear conscience, and the help of God alone can be of some succour to his mind in that condition." And thus he concluded with characteristic certainty: "Let everyone look into himself after reading a tragedy of Shakespeare, and observe whether he does not experience a similar emotion in his own soul."

CHAPTER IX

MOTIVES AND DEVELOPMENT OF SHAKESPEARE'S POETRY

I

The "Comedy of Love"

What we have hitherto described as the sentiment of Shakespeare corresponds to the Shakespeare carven in the general consciousness, that which is Shakespeare in an eminent degree, almost, we might say, a symbol of his greater self, the poet of the great tragedies (*Othello, Macbeth, King Lear, Julius Caesar, Antony and Cleopatra, Hamlet*) and of the tragic portions of those that are less intense and less perfect. But the work that bears his name is far more varied in tones and personalities and in order to prepare the way for the passage of more particular characteristics, we must distinguish (and here the students of Shakespeare have always been industrious) the various configurations and degrees, or

sources of inspiration of the poet, and make of them groups, which may then be arranged in a series of relations, an ideal succession.

On casting the eye over the rich extent of his works, the attention is at once drawn to certain of them, whose fresh, smiling colours indicate that their principal and proper theme is love. Not the love that becomes joined to other graver passions and unified with them, forms a complex, as in the *Othello,* or in *Antony and Cleopatra,* thus acquiring a profoundly tragic quality, but love and love alone, love considered in itself. These passions then are to be found rather in the *comedy of love* than in the tragedies or dramas: in love, regarded certainly with affectionate sympathy, but also with curiosity, instinct with softness and tenderness, indeed, one might almost say, with the superiority of an expert mind and thus with delicate irony. The mind that accompanies this amorous heart, observes the caprices and illusions, recognising their inevitability and their necessity, but yet knowing them for what they are, imaginings, however irresistible and delicious they be, caprices, though noble and beautiful, weaknesses, deserving of indulgence and of gentle treatment, because human, and

belonging to man as he passes through the happy and stormy season of youth. This mode of experiencing love is something that manifests itself only episodically in the Greek, Latin and medieval poets. With them we find love represented, sometimes as a pleasant, a sensual strife, or as a furious blind passion, fearless of death, or as a spiritual cult of lofty and superhuman beauty. Sometimes indeed, as in the comedy of Menander and its long suite of descendants and posterity among the Latins and the Italians, it gives rise to a general and rather cold psychological simplification, in which love is not found to differ much from any other passion or desire, such as avarice, courage or greed. In the form we have described, it belongs entirely to the mode of feeling of the Renaissance, to one of those attitudes which the antiascetic and realistic view of human affairs developed and bequeathed in a perfected form to modern times. Here we must again note the similarity between Shakespeare and Ariosto, for both painted the eternal comedy of love in the same manner.

That love is sincere, yet deceives and is deceived; it imagines itself to be firm and con-

stant, and turns out to be fragile and fleeting; it claims to be founded upon a dispassionate judgment of the mind and upon luminous moral choice, whereas, on the contrary, it is guided in an altogether irrational manner by impressions and fancies, fluctuating with these. Sometimes, too, it is represented as repugnance and aversion, whereas it is really irresistible attraction; it is content to suppress itself with deliberate humbleness before works and thoughts that are more austere, but reappears on the first occasion, more vehement, tenacious and indomitable than ever.

" In his men, as in his women," says Heine, with his accustomed grace, when talking of the Shakespearean comedy, " passion is altogether without that fearful seriousness, that fatalistic necessity, which it manifests in the tragedies. Love does in truth wear there, as ever, a bandage over his eyes and bears a quiver full of darts. But these darts are rather winged than sharpened to a deadly point, and the little god sometimes stealthily and maliciously peeps out, removing the bandage. Their flames too rather shine than burn; but they are always flames, and in the comedies of Shakespeare, love always preserves the character of truth."

Of truth, and for this reason, none of these comedies descends altogether to the level of farce, not even those that most nearly approach it, such as *Love's Labour Lost, The Taming of the Shrew,* nor even *The Comedy of Errors,* where some element of human truth always leads us back to the seriousness of art. Still less is there satire there, intellectual and angular satire, constructor of types, exaggerates in the interest of polemic; always we find there suavity of outline, the soft veil of poetry. Even in the most feeble, as *The Two Gentlemen of Verona,* we enjoy the fresh love scenes, mingled with the saltatory course of the narrative, the abundant dialogues, the misunderstandings and the verbal witticisms. Even in those that are developed in a somewhat mechanical and superficial manner, which we should now describe as being *à thèse,* there is vivacity, joking, festivity, and an eloquence so flowery (for instance in the scene where Biron defends the rights of youth and of love) that it has almost lyrical quality.

In this last comedy there is a king and his three gentlemen, who, in order to devote themselves to study and to attain to fame and immortality, have sworn to one another that they

will not see a woman for three years. All three of them fail of this and fall in love almost as soon as the Princess of France arrives with her three ladies. These ladies, when they have received the most solemn declarations of love from the four of them, each one faithless to himself, punish them in their turn for their levity by condemning them to wait for a certain period, before receiving a reply to their offers. Thus it was that Angelica, in the Italian poems of chivalry, succeeded in setting the hearts of the most obdurate cavaliers aflame with love, even of those who held severest discourse. She made them all follow the queen of love, whom no mortal could resist.

In the *Taming of the Shrew,* Petruchio the male, who knows what he wants and wants his own ease and comfort, hits immediately upon the right line of conduct, a line that is, however, altogether spiritual, because based upon psychological knowledge and volitional resolve. He espouses the terrible Catherine and reduces her to lamblike obedience, afraid of her husband, no longer able not only to say, but even to think, anything save what he has forced her

to think. Yet who can tell that she does not love him who maltreats and tyrannises over her?

In *Twelfth Night,* we behold the Duke vainly sighing for the beautiful widow Olivia, and the love that suddenly blossoms in her for the intermediary sent by the Duke, a woman dressed as a man; while the steward Malvolio, the Puritan, the pedantic Malvolio, is urged on to the most ridiculous acts, by hope and the illusion of being loved. Finally, fortune in this case making the single beloved into two, a man and a woman (in a more modest but identical manner to that in the adventure of Fiordispina with Bradamante and Ricciardetto) brings about a happy ending for all.

In *All's Well,* the Countess of Roussillon, receives the discovery that poor Helena, the orphan child of the family doctor, is in love with her son, rather with benevolence than with hostility and reflects:

"Even so it was with me when I was young:
If we are nature's, these are ours; . . .
By our remembrance of days foregone,
Such were our faults though then we thought them none."

The amorous couples of princesses, exiles or fugitives, and of exile and fugitive gentlemen, wander about the forest of Arden, in *As You Like It,* alternating and mingling with the couples of rustic lovers.

Perhaps the best example of this "comedy of love" is the fencing of the two unconscious lovers, Beatrice and Benedick, in *Much Ado About Nothing.* This young couple seek one another only to measure weapons, to sneer and to fence, with the fine-pointed swords of biting jest and disdain, they believe themselves to be antipathetic, disbelieve one another; yet the simplest little intrigue of their friends suffices to reveal each to each as whole-heartedly loving and desiring the adversary. The union of the two is sealed, when they find themselves united in the same sentiment to defend their friend, who has been calumniated and rejected, thus discovering that their perpetual following of one another to engage in strife, had not concealed the struggle, which implies affinity of sex, but the spiritual affinity of two generous hearts.

Benedick. And, I pray thee now, tell me for which of my bad faults didst thou first fall in love with me? . . .

And the other, speaking with tenderness and ceasing to carry on the pinpricking:

"Suffer love,— a good epithet!
I do suffer love indeed, for I love thee against my will."

A light touch permeates the treatment of these characters and suffices to animate them and make them act. The dramatic or indeed tragic situations, which at times arise, are treated as it were with the implied consciousness of their slight gravity and danger, which shall soon be evident and dispel all the apprehensions of those who doubt. They sometimes consist of nothing but an external action or occurrence, suited to the theatre, and more frequently a decorative background. Parallelism of personages and symmetry of events also abound in these plays, suitable to the merry teaching that pervades them.

The quintessence of all these comedies (as we may say of *Hamlet* in respect of the great tragedies) is the *Midsummer Night's Dream*. Here the quick ardours, the inconstancies, the caprices, the illusions, the delusions, every sort of love folly, become embodied and weave a world of their own, as living and as real as that of those who are visited by these affec-

tions, tormented or rendered ecstatic, raised on high or hurled downward by them, in such a way that everything is equally real or equally fantastic, as you may please to call it. The sense of dream, of a dream-reality, persists and prevents our feeling the chilly sense of allegory or of apology. The little drama seems born of a smile, so delicate, refined and ethereal it is. Graceful and delicate to a degree is also the setting of the dream, the celebration of the wedding of Theseus and Hippolyta and the theatrical performance of the artisans, for these are not merely ridiculous in their clumsiness; they are also childlike and ingenuous, arousing a sort of gay pity: we do not laugh at them: we smile. Oberon and Titania are at variance owing to reciprocal wrongs, and trouble has arisen in the world. Puck obeys the command of Oberon and sets to work, teasing, punishing and correcting. But in performing this duty of punishing and correcting, he too makes mistakes, and the love intrigue becomes more complicated and active. Here we find a resemblance to the rapid passage into opposite states and the strange complications that arose in Italian knightly romances, as the result of drinking the water from one of two

opposite fountains whereof one filled the heart with amorous desires, the other turned first ardours to ice. In Titania, who embraces the Ass's head and raves about him, caressing and looking upon him as a graceful and gracious creature, the comedy creates a symbol so ample and so efficacious as rightly to have become proverbial. Puck meanwhile, astonished at the effect upon men of the subtle intoxication that he has been himself distributing, exclaims in his surprise "Lord, what fools these mortals be!"; and Lysander, one of the madmen who are constantly passing from one love to another, from one thing to its opposite, is nevertheless perfectly convinced that

> "The will of man is by his *reason* sway'd;
> And *reason says* you are the *worthier* maid."

Yet the individual reality of the figures appears through this exquisite version of the eternal comedy, as though to remind us that they really belong to life. Helena follows the man she loves, but who does not love her, like a lapdog, which, the more it is beaten, the more it runs round and round its master; she trembles at the outbreak of furious jealousy in her little friend Hermia, who threatens to put out

her eyes, believing her to be capable of it, when she remembers the time when they were at school together:

> " O, when she's angry, she is keen and shrewd!
> She was a vixen when she went to school;
> And though she be but little she is fierce."

When we read *Romeo and Juliet,* after the *Dream,* we seem not to have left that poetical environment, to which Mercutio expressly recalls us, with his fantastic embroidery around Queen Mab, above all, when we consider the style, the rhyming and the general physiognomy of the little story. All have inclined to suave and gentle speech and metaphor, when speaking of *Romeo and Juliet.* For Schlegel it was scented with " the perfumes of springtide, the song of the nightingales, the freshness of a newly budded rose." Hegel too found himself face to face with that rose: " sweet rose in the valley of the world, torn asunder by the rude tempest and the hurricane." Coleridge too speaks of that sense of spring: " The spring with its odours, its flowers and its fleetingness." All have looked upon it as the poem of youthful love and have remarked that the play reaches its acme in

the two love scenes in the garden at night, and in the departure after the nuptial night, in which some have seen the renovation of the traditional forms .of love poetry, "the epithalamium," "the dawn." This play is not only closely connected with the *Dream,* but also with the other comedies of love; Romeo passes there with like rapidity, indeed suddenness to the personages of those comedies from love of Rosalind to love of Juliet. At the first sight of Juliet he is conquered and believes that he then loves for the first time:

"Did my heart love till now? Forswear it, sight!
For I ne'er saw true beauty till this night."

Saintly Friar Laurence, a mixture of astonishment, of being scandalised and of good nature, sometimes almost plays there the part of Puck. When he learns that Romeo no longer loves Rosalind, about whom he had been so crazy; he says:

"So soon forsaken! Young men's love there lies
Not truly in their hearts, but in their eyes.
Jesu Maria!"

When Juliet enters her cell, the friar remarks with admiration her lightsome tread, which

will never wear out the pavement, and reflects that a lover "may bestride the gossamer that idles in the wanton summer air, and yet not fall; so light is vanity." Is it tragedy or comedy? It is another situation of the eternal comedy: the love of two young people, almost children, which surmounts all social obstacles, including the hardest of all, family hatred and party feud, and goes on its way, careless of these obstacles and as though they had no importance for their hearts, no existence in reality. And in truth those obstacles seem to yield before their advance, or rather their winged flight, like soft clouds. Certainly, those obstacles reappear solidly enough later on, asserting their value and taking their revenge, so much so, that the young lovers are obliged to separate and Romeo goes into exile. But it will be only for a little while, for Friar Laurence has promised to interest himself in their affairs, to obtain the pardon of the Prince, to reconcile the parents and the other relations, and to obtain sanction for their secret marriage. And if nothing of all this happens, if the subtle previsions and the acuteness of Friar Laurence turn out to be fallacious, if a sequence of misunderstandings makes them lose

their way and take a wrong turning, if the two young lovers perish, it is the result of chance, and the sentiment that arises from it is one of compassion, of compassion not divorced from envy, a sorrow, which, as Hegel said, is " a dolorous reconciliation and an unhappy beatitude in unhappiness." This too then is tragedy, but tragedy in a minor key, what one might call the tragedy of a comedy.

> " A greater power than we can contradict
> Hath thwarted our intents."

But that power is not the mysterious power, something between destiny and providence and moral necessity, which weighs upon the great tragedies; rather is it Chance, which Friar Laurence hardly succeeds in dignifying with the words of religion:

> " So hath willed it God."

There is a metaphor which is repeated in the terrible accents of *King Lear,* and which is itself able to reveal the difference between the two tragedies. Romeo, whose life has been spared and who has been sent into exile, thinks that what has been done for him, is torture rather than pardon, because Paradise is only where Juliet lives:

> " And every cat, and dog,
> And little mouse, every unworthy thing,
> Live here in heaven, and may look on her;
> But Romeo may not! "

Juliet, who is preparing to drink the medicine that may be poisonous, is the shy and timid young girl of Leopardi's *Amore e Morte,* who " feels her hair stand on end at the very name of death," but when she has fallen in love " dares meditate at length on steel and on poison." The very sepulchral cave shines, and Romeo after having stabbed Paris at the feet of Juliet, whom he believes to be dead, feels that he is a companion in misfortune and wishes to bury him there " In a triumphant grave."

> " A grave, O no, a lantern, slaughtered youth,
> For here lies Juliet, and her beauty makes
> This vault a feasting presence full of light."

Such words of admiration for love and for the youthful lovers are found in other poets, for instance in Dante's words for Beatrice: " Death, I hold thee very sweet: Thou must ever after be a noble thing, since thou hast been in my lady."

If we find love in rather piteous guise in *Romeo and Juliet,* comedy reappears in the

wise Portia, bound to the promise of allowing her fate to be decided by means of a guess, because although she submits to selection by chance, she has already chosen in her heart, not among the dukes and princes of the various nationalities, indeed of various continents, who are competing for her hand, but a youthful Venetian, something between a student and a soldier, half an adventurer, but courteous and pleasing in address, who has contrived to please, not only mistress, but maid, which shows, in this agreement of feminine choice, where feminine taste really lies. "By my troth, Nerissa, my little body is a-weary of this great world" (she sighs, with gentle coquettishness toward herself), perhaps with that languor, which is the desire of loving and of being loved, the budding of love; weary, as those amorous souls feel, weary, who vibrate with an exquisite sensibility. And indeed she is most sensible to music and to the spectacles of nature; and the music that she hears in the night causes her to stay and listen to it, and it seems to her far sweeter than when heard in the daytime. Nocturnal moonlight gives her the impression of a day that is ailing, of a rather pallid day when the sun is hidden.

In the *Merchant of Venice,* there is also the couple of Jessica and Lorenzo, those two lovers who do not feel the want of moral idealisation, nor, one would be inclined to say, any solicitude for the esteem of others. The man steals without scruple from the old Jew his daughter and his jewels, and the girl has not even a slight feeling of pity for the father, both alike plunged in the happy egotism of their pleasure. Jessica is unperturbed, sustaining and exchanging epigrams with her husband and the salacious jesting and somewhat insolent familiarity of the servant Lancellotto, though abandoning herself all the time to ecstasy, a sensual ecstasy, for she too is sensible to music and attains by means of it to a melancholy of the only sort that she is capable of experiencing, namely, the sensual.

There is malice, almost mockery, though tempered with other elements, in the portrayal of these loves of the daughter of Shylock. But in those of Troilus and Cressida, we meet at once with sarcasm, a bitter sarcasm. The same background, the doings of the Trojan war, which in other comedies has the superficial charm of a decoration, is here also a decora-

tion, but treated with sarcasm and bitterness. Thersites fills the part of the cynic among the Greek warriors, in the relations between Troilus and Cressida, as does Pandarus in Troy. The hastening of the last scenes should be noted, the large amount of fighting, the tumult: the world is dancing as in a puppet show, while the story of Troilus and Cressida is drawing to its close, amid the imprecations of the nauseated Troilus and the grotesquely burlesque lamentations of Pandarus. Another great artist of the Renaissance comes to mind, in relation to this play: not Ariosto, but Rabelais. The theme is still, however, the comedy of love, but a comedy bordering on the faunesque, the immoral, the baser instinct, upon lust and feminine faithlessness. Pandarus is ever the go-between; he laughs and enjoys himself, for he is an expert at this sort of business, a battle-stained warrior, as it were, bearing traces of that long amorous warfare, if not in his soul, in his old bones; he is the living destruction of love, of the credulous, sensual cupidity of man and of the non-credulous, frivolous vanity of woman. His too is the obsession of love-making: he is unable to ex-

tricate himself from it, taking an almost devilish delight in involving those who have recourse to him. Troilus does not displease Cressida, on the contrary, he pleases her greatly, yet she fences with him, because she is already in full possession of feminine wisdom and philosophy. She knows that women are admired, sighed after and desired as angels, while being courted, but once they have said yes, all is over. She knows that the true pleasure lies *in the doing,* in the act and not in the fact, in the becoming, not in the become. She knows that in yielding, she is committing a folly, by breaking the law, which is known to her, but she puts everything she now undertakes upon Pandarus: "Well, uncle, what folly I commit, I dedicate to you." How different is her union with her lover, to that of Romeo and Juliet! There is an ironic-comic solemnity in the rite performed by the pander uncle and in the oaths of constancy and loyalty, which all three of them exchange, while the uncle intones: "Say amen," and the two reply, "Amen," and are then pushed into the nuptial chamber by the profane priest. How different too is "the dawn," their separation in the morning!

"But that the busy day,
Waked by the lark, hath raised the ribald crows
And dreaming night will hide our joys no longer,
I would not from thee."

Whereupon the uncle begins to utter improper epigrams and plays upon words, which the impatient Cressida repays, by sending him to the devil. Cressida begins the new intrigue with Diomede, as soon as she is face to face with him alone, in spite of this scene and the numerous oaths that preceded and followed it. She is perfectly aware that she is betraying her love for Troilus and that she has no excuse for doing so. She gives to Diomede the gift of Troilus and when he asks her to whom it belongs, she replies:

"'Twas one that lov'd me better than you will,
But now you have it, take it."

Here we find consciousness of her own feminine levity, looked upon not merely as a natural force dragging her after it, but almost as a right, as the exercise of a mission or vocation. Cressida can even be sentimental, as she abandons herself to another!

"Troilus farewell, one eye yet looks on thee;
But with my heart the other eye doth see.
Ah! poor our sex!"

Troilus is meanwhile indignant, not from a sense of injured morality, for that sort of love does not admit of such a thing: he is mad with masculine jealousy. "Was Cressida here?" . . . and further on: "Nothing at all, unless that they were she . . ."

The figures of Ferdinand and Miranda bring us back to love, youthful and pure, all the more pure, because it reveals itself, not in the midst of a great court or city, but in a desert island. The young man comes there shipwrecked, cut off from the world that once was his, born as it were anew; the maiden has been brought up in solitude. Yet her love is awakened at first sight, in the beautiful phrase of Marlowe, which Shakespeare was so fond of quoting: "Who ever loved that loved not at first sight?" It is love, law of beings as of things, which returns eternally new and fresh as the dawn, making his Goddess appear to the youth, her God to the maiden, each to each as beings without their equal upon earth:

"I might call him
A thing divine, for nothing natural
I ever saw so noble." "Most sure, the goddess,
On whom these airs attend," says Ferdinand.

The choice is soon made, firm, resolute and determined. When Prospero tells her that there are men in the world, compared with whom, the youth she admires would seem a monster, Miranda replies:

> " My affections
> Are then most humble; I have no ambition
> To see a goodlier man."

All noble things that can be imagined surround and elevate their loves: misfortune, compassion, chaste desire, virginal respect. These things, though infinitely repeated in the world's history seem new, as the two live through them, " surprised withal," surprised and ravished at the mystery, which in them is celebrated once more.

2

The Longing For Romance

Another motive, related to the preceding, may be described as the longing for romance, but this expression must be taken with all due limitations.

Amorous damsels don the travesty of masculine attire, in order to follow their faithless or cruel lovers, to escape persecution, or to per-

form wondrous deeds; brothers, or brothers and sisters, who resemble one another, are taken for one another, and thus form a centre for the most curious adventures; with like objects in view, princes travesty themselves as shepherds; gentlemen are discovered in forests with bandits and are themselves bandits; children of royal blood, ignorant of their origin, live like peasants, yet are moved by inclinations, which make them impatient of their quiet, humble lives, urging them on to great adventures; sovereigns move, disguised and unknown, among their subjects, listening to the free speech around them and observant of everything; rustic or city maidens become queens and countesses, or are discovered to be of royal stock; brothers, who are enemies, become reconciled; those who are innocent and having been wrongfully accused and condemned, are believed to have died or been put to death, survive, to reappear at the right moment, thus gratifying the long-cherished hopes of those who had once believed them guilty and had mourned their loss.

Strange rules and compacts are imposed, strange understandings come to, such as the winning of husband or wife upon the solution

of an enigma, or upon the discovery of some object; then there is the bet as to the virtue of a woman, won with a trick by the punster or by the perfidious accuser; the betrothed or unwilling husband, finally obtained by the substitution of another person; there are miraculous events, dreams, magical arts, work of spirits of earth and sky . . . Men and women are tossed from land to sea, from city to forest and desert, from court to country, from a civil and cultured, to a rustic and simple life. These latter situations are peculiar to romance in the form of the idyll, which is really the most romantic of romanticisms, though it may seem to be the opposite. This is so true that even Don Quixote, when he saw the way closed for the time being to the performance of chivalrous feats of knight errantry, thought of retiring to the country, there to pasture herds and to pipe songs to the beloved, in the company of Sancho Panza.

Several of Shakespeare's plays derive both plot and material from suchlike things and persons, as for instance, *As You Like It, Twelfth Night, All's Well That Ends Well, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale, Pericles, The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Much Ado About*

Nothing, The Merchant of Venice, Measure for Measure. These plays may be said to be altogether or in part, of literary origin, or suggested by books, in a sense different from that in which Shakespeare treated the other plays, where, although not bookish, he gathered his raw materials from the English chroniclers, from ancient historians, or Italian novelists, breathing upon it a new spirit and thus making of it something altogether new to the world. Here on the other hand, he found the spirit itself, the general sentiment, in the literature of his time. Italy had worked upon the ancient poetry of Greece and Rome, upon Hellenistic and Byzantine romances, upon mediaeval romances, upon poems and plays, novels and comedies, and with Italy was also Spain, whose *Amadigi* and *Diane* were known throughout Europe. The genesis of these themes and of his attraction towards them, is to be sought, therefore, rather in the times than in Shakespeare himself, and for this reason we shall not delay our progress, to show how the play of sentiment within made dear to him that wandering away in imagination to the idyllic life of the country, far from pomp and artifice, the deceits and the delusions of

courts; though this idyllic life itself became in its turn refined and artificial at his hand, a pastoral theme. It is important to note, too, that all the above-mentioned material of situations and adventures had already been fashioned and arranged for the theatre, in the course of the second half of the century. This was especially due to the Italian theatre of improvisation or of "art," as it was called. This literature, so often of a most romantic and imaginative kind, has had but little attention at the hand of investigators into Shakespeare's sources of inspiration.

Both material derived from books and literary inspiration combine to throw light upon certain of Shakespeare's works, which have given great trouble to the historians of his art. It is quite natural that writers should draw upon what they have done before and should execute variations upon it, particularly in their earlier years, but also later in the course of their lives, when they have afforded far greater proofs of their capacity. Shakespeare was no exception to this, any more than the great contemporary poet of *Don Quixote,* who was also the author of the *Galatea* and of *Persiles y Sigismunda. The Comedy of Errors,* as we

know, consists of a motive from Plautus, repeated and rearranged innumerable times by the dramatists of the Renaissance. In treating this theme, Shakespeare rendered it on the one hand yet more artificial, while on the other, he endowed it with a more marked tendency towards the romantic, and notwithstanding the frivolity and frigidity of misunderstandings arising from identity of appearance, he yet revived them here and there according to his wont with a touch of the reality of life. The intrigue of the Menecmi, or of very close resemblance, pleased him so much that he introduced it in *Twelfth Night,* where the pair are of different sex. This variation was first employed by Cardinal Bibbiena in his *Calandria,* but the Cardinal made use of it to increase the lubricity of the intrigue, while Shakespeare drew from it a theme for most graceful poetic inspiration.

One would think that the tragic theme of *Titus Andronicus* (which many critics would like to say was not by Shakespeare, but dare not, because here the proofs of authenticity are very strong), was also born of a love for literary models, for the tragedy of horrors, so common in Italy in those days of the *Canaci*

and the *Orbecchi,* which were rather imitations of Seneca than of Sophocles and Euripides, and had already inspired plays to the predecessors of Shakespeare, with slaughter for their theme. What more natural then, than that Shakespeare as a young man should strike this note? The splendid eloquence with which he adorned the horrible tale is Shakespearean.

His two poems, *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece,* are to be attributed to this same literary taste for favorite models. These poems received much praise from contemporaries, but are so far from the "greater Shakespeare," that they might almost appear not to be his, always, that is to say, if the greater Shakespeare be turned into a rigidly historical and conventional personage. Their literary origin is evident, not only to those who know well the English literature of the period of the Renaissance (when Marlowe was composing *Hero and Leander*), but yet more to those versed in the Italian literature of the same period, where the themes of the two little poems were in great favour. As regards the first of these, Giambattista Marino, who was destined to expand it into a long and celebrated poem, was already born at Naples. Shake-

speare here flaunts his virtuosity like our Italian composers of melodious and voluptuous octaves, revelling in a wealth of flowery image phrase, in his abundant, rhetorical capacity and in a formal beauty which contains something of aesthetic voluptuousness.

The *Sonnets* are also based upon Italian models, where we find exhortations addressed to admired youth set upon a pinnacle, similar to those that passed between Venus and Adonis. The beautiful youth, posing as Adonis, and treated like him, became very common in our lyric poetry of the time of Marino, in the seventeenth century, as were also love sonnets addressed to ladies, possessing some peculiar characteristic, such as red hair or a dark complexion, or even something different or unfamiliar in their beauty, such as too lofty or too diminutive a stature.

Notwithstanding this literary tendency in his inspiration, Shakespeare does not cease to be a poet, because he is never altogether able to separate himself from himself, everywhere he infuses his own thoughts and modes of feeling, those harmonies, peculiar to himself, those movements of the soul, so delicate and so profound. This has endowed the *Sonnets* with

the aspect of a biographical mystery, of a poem containing some hidden moral and philosophical sense. When we read verses such as these:

The canker-blooms have full as deep a dye
As the perfumed tincture of the roses,
Hang on such thorns, and play as wantonly
When summer's breath their masked buds discloses.
But, for their virtue only is their show,
They live unwoo'd and unrespected fade;
Die to themselves. Sweet roses do not so;
Of their sweet deaths are sweetest odours made. . . .

we feel the commonplace of literature, revived with lyric emotion. Note too in the *Sonnets* their pensiveness, their exquisite moral tone, their wealth of psychological allusions, in which we often recognise the poet of the great plays. Sometimes there echoes in them that malediction of the chains of pleasure, which will afterwards become *Anthony and Cleopatra*[1]; at others we hear Hamlet, tormented and perplexed; yet more often we catch glimpses of reality as appearance and appearance as reality, as in the *Dream* or the *Tempest*. The truth is that the soul of Shakespeare, poured into a fixed and therefore inadequate mould,

[1] See Sonnet CXXIX: "The expense of spirit in a waste of shame."

his lyrical impulse confined to the epigrammatic, cause the poetry to flow together there, but deny to it complete expansion and unfolding. To note but one example, the celebrated sonnet LXVI ("Tired with all these for restful death I cry"), is in the manner of Hamlet, but developed analytically, by means of enumerations and parallelisms, and in obedience to literary usage, and is obliged to terminate on the cadence of a madrigal, in the last rhymed couplet. The soft, flexible verse of the early *Venus and Adonis* is also free of Marino's cold ingenuity, of his external sonority and melody, and is inspired rather with a sense of voluptuousness, a grace, an elegance, which recall at times the stanzas of Politian:

> The night of sorrow now is turned to day;
> Her two blue windows faintly she upheaveth,
> Like the fair sun, when in his fresh array
> He cheers the morn, and all the earth relieveth:
> And as the bright sun glorifies the sky,
> So is her face illumined with her eye.

In Shakespeare is nothing of the cold literary exercise; he takes a vivid interest even in the play of fancy, in the bringing about of marvellous coincidences, of unexpected meetings, in the romantic and the idyllic. He loves all

these things, composing them for his own enjoyment and fondling them with the magic of his style. He cannot of course make them what they are not, he cannot change their intimate qualities into something different from what they are; he cannot destroy their externality, since they came to him from without. What he can and does put into them is above all their attractiveness as images. For this reason, the poetry that we find here is of necessity rather superficial and tenuous, far more so than the poetry of the love dramas, where his powers have a wider scope for observation, for reflexion and for meditation upon human affections.

What has been said above as to the inventions and fables, which serve as a decorative background to certain of the comedies of love, is also applicable to these romantic and idyllic plays, in which the decorative background takes the first place and becomes the principal theme. For the rest, it goes without saying that the plots or decorations referred to are also to be included (as has been done) in the present argument, because it turns upon the different motives of Shakespeare's poetry, not upon the works that are materially distinct,

where several motives usually meet and are sometimes so very loosely connected, as to form no more intimate a unity than the rather capricious one, of general tone.

A sense of *unreality* is therefore diffused upon the romantic plays, not of falsity, but just of unreality, such as we experience in the play of fancy, when we recount a fairy tale, well aware that it is a fairy tale, yet greatly enjoying the passage to and fro before us of the prince, the beauty, the ogre and the fairy. A proof of this is to be found in the summary treatment of the characters and the turning-points or crises of the action, the easy pardoning and making of peace, and the bizarre expedients adopted to bring the intrigue to an end. Instances of the second sort are the adventure of the lion in the Forest of Arden the reconciliation of the two enemy brothers in *As You Like It,* the dream of Posthumus in *Cymbeline,* the advent of the bear and the shipwreck in the *Winter's Tale,* and the like. And as regards summary treatment, where could we find a more off-hand Iago than the Hyacinth of *Cymbeline,* guilty of the most audacious and perverse betrayals, as though by chance, yet later on, when he confesses his sins, he is

forgiven and starts again, so far as we can see, a gentleman and perfect knight. We do not speak of Posthumus, of Cloten, of King Cymbeline and of so many personages in this and others of the romantic plays. The wicked turn out to be all the more harmless, the greater their wickedness; the good are good *nunc et semper,* without intermission, exactly as introduced at the beginning of the play; the most desperate situations, the most terrible passes, are speedily and completely overcome, or one foresees that they will be overcome. Here romance has no intention whatever of ending unhappily or in pensive sadness; it wishes to stimulate the imagination, but at the same time to keep it agile and happy and to leave it contented. Indeed, in those rare cases when we do meet with painful or terrible motives, which are not easily overcome in the course of the imaginative development of the work, we are sensible of being slightly jarred, and this is perhaps the reason for that " displeasure," which such fine judges as Coleridge note in *Measure for Measure,* so rich, nevertheless, in splendid passages, worthy of Shakespeare. Not only does this comedy verge upon tragedy, but here and there it becomes immersed in it, vainly

attempting to return to the light romantic vein and end like a fairy story, with everyone happy.

Another element which adds to the imaginative unreality and the gay lightsomeness of the romantic dramas, is to be found in the clown, the burlesque incidents, which abound in all of them: Malvolio and Uncle Toby in *Twelfth Night,* Parolles in *All's Well,* the watch in *Much Ado* and so on. Certain personages also, who might seem to be characters, such as the melancholy Jacques in *As You Like It* or Autolycus in the *Winter's Tale,* are treated rather as character studies.

These comedies excel in the weaving of intricate incidents, they are replete with grace and winsomeness, melodious with songs inspired by idyllic themes. They are far superior in emotional quality, as is the rustic, woodland, pastoral poetry of Shakespeare, to that of Italy and of Spain, not only to the *Pastor Fido,* but also to the *Aminta,* because Shakespeare succeeds in grafting his gay and gentle heart upon his artificial and conventional models. Take for instance in *As You Like It* the scenes in the third act, between Rosalind and Celia, Rosalind and Orlando, Corin and Touchstone,

and in general, the whole life led by the young men and maidens, the shepherds and gentlemen, in that idyllic Forest of Arden; or the open air banquet, in the *Winter's Tale,* at which the king surprises his son on the point of marrying Perdita; or in *Cymbeline,* Hyacinth's contemplation of the chaste and tender beauty of the sleeping Imogen; and in the same play, all the scenes among the mountains between Bellario and the two refugee sons of the king, Guiderio and Arviragus.

They correspond to that most beautiful utterance in exquisite verse of Tasso's Hermione Among the Shepherds. His thoughts come back in such lines as the following:

> " O, this life
> Is nobler than attending for a check,
> Richer than doing nothing for a bribe,
> Prouder than rustling in unpaid for silk:
> Such gain the cap of him that makes 'em fine. . . ."

or

> " Come, our stomachs
> Will make what's homely savoury: weariness
> Can snore upon the flint, when rusty sloth
> Finds the down pillow hard. Now, peace be here,
> Poor house that keepest thyself! "

But Shakespeare can rise yet higher, to that most tender of songs by the two brothers over Imogene, whom they believe to be dead.

3

Shakespeare's Interest in Practical Action

The third conspicuous aspect of Shakespeare's genius corresponds to what are known as the "historical plays." Only here and there do we find a critic who takes them to be the loftiest form of Shakespearean poetry, while the majority on the other hand hold them to be merely a preparatory form for other poetry, and the general view (always worthy consideration) is that they are less happy or less intense than the "great tragedies."

It is also said of them that they represent the period of the "historical education," which Shakespeare undertook, with a view to acquiring a full sense of real life and the capacity for drawing personages and situations with firmness of outline. One critic has defined them as a series of "studies," studies of "heads," of "physiognomies," of "movements," taken from historical life or reality, in order to form

the eye and the hand, something like the sketch-books and collections of designs of a future great painter.

The defect of such critical explanations lies in continuing to conceive of the artistic process as something mechanical, and the unrecognised but understood presumption of some sort of "imitation of nature." Had Shakespeare intended to educate himself "historically," by writing the historical plays, (assuming, but not admitting, that to run through the English chronicles, and even Plutarch's lives, can be called historical education), he would have developed and formed his historical thought and become a thinker and a critic, he would not have conceived and realised the scenes and personages of the plays. Neither Shakespeare nor any other artist can ever attempt to reproduce external nature or history turned into external reality (since they do not exist in a concrete form) even in the period of first attempts and studies; all he can do is to try to produce and recognise his own sentiment and to give it form. We are thus always brought back and confined to the study of sentiment, or, as in the present case, to the sentiment which inspired what are known as the historical plays.

Among these are to be numbered all those that deal with English history, *The Life and Death of King John, Richard II, Henry IV, V, VI,* and *Richard III,* setting aside for certain reasons *Henry VIII,* but including among the plays from Roman history (or from Plutarch as they are also called), *Coriolanus,* while *Julius Caesar* and *Anthony and Cleopatra* are connected with the great tragedies. The historical quality of the material, in like manner, with every other material determination, is not conclusive as to the quality of the poetic works, and is therefore not independently valid in the estimation of the critic, as a criterion for separation or conjunction. A reconsideration of the plays mentioned above and their prominent characteristics, does not lead to accepting them as a kind of "dramatised epic," or as "works which stand half way between epic and drama" (Schlegel, Coleridge), not that there is any difficulty in the appearance of epic quality in the form of theatrical dialogue, but just because epic quality is absent in those dramas. It would indeed be strange to see epic quality appearing in an episodic manner in an author, during the period of youth alone. Epicity, in fact, means feeling for human strug-

gles, but for human struggles lit with the light of an aspiration and an ideal, such as one's own people, one's own religious faith and the like, and therefore containing the antitheses of friends and foes, of heroes on both sides, some on the side finally victorious, because protected by God or justice, others upon that which is to be discomfited, subjected, or destroyed. Now Shakespeare, as has already been said and is universally recognized, is not a partisan; he marches under no political or religious banner, he is not the poet of particular practical ideals, *non est de hoc mundo,* because he always goes beyond, to the universal man, to the cosmic problem.

Commentators have, it is true, laboured to extract from these and others of his plays, the ideals which they suppose him to have cultivated, concerning the perfect king, the independence and greatness of England, the aristocracy, which in their judgment was the mainstay and glory of his country. They have discovered his Achilles (in the double form of "Achilles in Sciro" and of "Achilles at Troy") in Prince Henry, and his *pius Aeneas,* in the same prince become Henry V, who, grown conscious of his new duties, resolutely

and definitely severs himself, not from a Dido, but from a Falstaff. They have discovered his paladins in the great representatives of the English aristocracy, and as reflected in the Roman aristocracy, by a Coriolanus, and on the other hand the class which he suspected and despised, in the populace and plebeians of all time, whether of those that surrounded Menenius Agrippa or who created tumult for and against Julius Caesar in the Forum, or those others who bestowed upon Jack Cade a fortune as evanescent as it was sudden. Finally, his Trojans or Rutulians, enemies of his people, are supposed by them to be the French. But if the epic ideal had possessed real force and consistency in the mind of Shakespeare, we should not have needed industrious interpreters to track it down and demonstrate it. On the other hand, it is clear that the author of *Henry VI,* in treating as he did Talbot and the Maid of Orleans, and the author of *Henry V,* in his illustration of the struggles between the English and the French and the victory of Agincourt, restricted himself to adopting the popular and traditional English view, without identifying that with his spiritual self, or taxing it as

his guide to the conception of the English and Roman plays.

Nor is there any value in another view, to the effect that Shakespeare in these plays set the example and paved the way for what was afterwards called historical and romantic drama. Had he sought this end, he would not only have required some sort of political, social and religious ideal, but also historical reflection, the sense of what distinguishes and gives character to past times in respect to present, and also that nostalgia for the past, which both Shakespeare and the Italian and English Renaissance were altogether without. About two centuries had to elapse before an imitator of Shakespeare, or rather of some of his external forms and methods, arose, in the composer of *Goetz von Berlichingen.* He had assimilated the new historical curiosity and affection for the rude and powerful past, and there provided the first model of what was soon afterwards developed as historical romance and drama, especially by Walter Scott.

Whoever tries to discover the internal stimulus, the constructive idea, the lyrical motive, which led Shakespeare to convert the Chronicles of Holinshed and the Lives of Plutarch into

dramatic form, when his possession of the epic ideal and nostalgia for the past have been excluded, finds nothing save an interest in and an affection for practical achievement, for action attentively followed, in its cunning and audacity, in the obstacles that it meets, in the discomfitures, the triumphs, the various attitudes of the different temperaments and characters of men. This interest, finding its most suitable material in political and warlike conflicts, was naturally attracted to history and to that especial form of it, which was nearest to the soul and to the culture of the poet of his people and of his time, English and Roman history. This material had already been brought to the theatre by other writers and was in this way introduced to the attention and used by the new poet. A psychological origin of this sort explains the vigour of the representations, which Shakespeare derived from history, incomprehensible, if as philologists maintain, he had simply set himself to cultivate, a "style" that was demanded in the theatre and known as *chronicle plays,* or had there set himself a merely technical task, with a view to attaining dexterity.

That psychological interest, too, in so far as

separated from a supreme end or ideal, towards which actions tend, or rather in so far as it remains uncertain and vague in this respect, limiting itself to questions of loss or gain, of success or failure, of living or dying, is not a qualitative, but a *formal* interest. It can also be called political, if you will, but political in the sense of Machiavelli and the Renaissance, in so far as politics are considered for themselves, and therefore only formally. Hence the impression caused by the historical plays of Shakespeare, of being now "a gallery of portraits," now "a series of personal experiences," which the poet is supposed to have achieved in imagination.

It is certain that their richness, their brilliancy, their attraction, lie in the emotional representation of practical activity. Bolingbroke ascends the throne, by the adoption of violent and tortuous means, knowing when to withdraw himself and when to dare. Later he recounts to his son how artfully he composed and maintained the attitude, which caused him to be looked upon with sympathy and reverence by the people, affecting humility and humanity, but preserving at the same time the element of the marvellous, so that his presence, *like a robe*

pontifical, was *ne'er seen but wondered at.* He causes the blood of the deposed king to be shed, while protesting after the deed his great grief *that blood should sprinkle me to make me grow,* and promising to undertake a voyage of expiation to the Holy Land. Facing him is the falling monarch, Richard II, in whose breast consciousness of his own sacred character as legitimate sovereign and of the inviolable dignity attached to it, the sense of being to blame, of pride humiliated, of resignation to destiny or divine decree, of bitterness, of sarcasm towards himself and towards others, succeed, alternate and combat one another, a swarm of writhing sentiments, an agony of suffocated passions.

" O, that I were as great
As is my grief, or lesser than my name!
Or that I could forget what I have been!
Or not remember what I must be now!
Swell'st thou, proud heart? I'll give thee scope to beat. . . ."

Elsewhere we find the same inexorable conqueror, Bolingbroke, as Henry IV, triumphant on several occasions against different enemies, now infirm and approaching death, raving from lack of sleep, and envying the meanest of his sub-

jects, blindly groping in the vain shadows of human effort, as once his conquered predecessor, and filled with terror, as he views the whole extent of the universe and the

> "Revolution of the times
> Make mountains level, and the continent,
> Weary of solid firmness, melt itself
> Into the sea! . . .
> And changes fill the cup of alteration
> With divers liquors! O, if this were seen,
> The happiest youth,— viewing his progress through
> What perils past, what crosses to ensue,—
> Would shut the book and sit him down and die."

And hearing of some friends becoming estranged and of others changing into enemies, he is no longer indignant nor astonished:

> "Are these things then necessities?
> Then let us meet them as necessities."

Henry V meditates upon the singular condition of kings, upon their majesty, which separates them from all other men and by thus elevating, loads them with a weight equal to that which all men together have to carry, while taking from them the joys given to others, and depriving them of hearing the truth or of obtaining justice.

He feels himself to be more than a king in those moments when he tears off his own kingly mask and mirrors himself in his naked reality as man. Facing the enemies who are drawn up on the field of battle and ready to attack him, he murmurs to himself the profound words:

> "Besides they are our *natural consciences,*
> And preachers to us all; admonishing
> That we should dress us fairly for our end."

Death reigns above all else in these dramas, death, which brings every great effort to an end, all torment of burning passion and ambition, all rage of barbarous crimes, and is therefore received as a lofty and severe matron; in her presence, countenances are composed, however ardently she has been withstood, however loudly the brave show of life has been affirmed. Death is received thus by all or nearly all the men in Shakespeare, by the tortured and elegiac Richard II, by the great sinner Suffolk, by the diabolic Richard III, down to the other lesser victims of fate. The vileness of the vile, the rascality of rascals, the brutal stupidity of acclaiming or imprecating crowds, are felt and represented with equal intensity, without once

permitting anything of the struggle of life to escape, so vast in its variety.

The personages of these plays arise like three-dimensional statues, that is to say they are treated with full reality, and thus form a perfect antithesis to the figures of the romantic plays. These are superficial portraits, vivid, but light and vanishing into air; they are rather types than individuals. This does not imply a judgment of greater or lesser value or a difference in the art of portraying the true; it only expresses in other words and formulas the different sentiment that animates the two different groups of artistic creations, that which springs from delight in the romantic and that due to interest in human action. A Hotspur, introduced upon the scene of the romantic dramas, would break through them like a statue of bronze placed upon a fragile flooring of boards and painted canvas. He is the true "formal" hero, volitional, inrushing, disdainful, impatient, exuberant; we walk round him, admiring his lofty stature, his muscular strength, his potent gestures. He is like a splendid bow, with its mighty string drawn tight to hurl the missile, but wherefore or whither it will strike, we cannot tell. He is all

rebellion and battle, yet his wit and satire is worthy of an artist; he loves, too, with a pure tenderness. But wit and satire and the words of love, alike, bear even the imprint and are hastened by impetuosity, as of a man engaged in conversation between one combat and another, still joyful and hot from the battle that is over, already hot and joyful for that which is to begin. "Away, away, you trifler," he says to his wife, "you that are thinking of love. Love! I love thee not,

I care not for thee, Kate: this is no world
To play with mammets and to tilt with lips:
We must have bloody noses and cracked crowns,
And pass them current too. Gods me, my horse!
What say'st thou, Kate? What would'st thou have with me?"

His parallel (perhaps slightly inferior artistically), is the Roman Coriolanus, as brave, as violent and as disdainful as he, a despiser of the people and of the people's praise; he too rushes over the precipice to death and is also a "formal" hero, because his bravery is not founded upon love of country, or upon a faith or ideal of any kind, one might almost say that it was without object or that its object was itself. Nor, on the other hand, is Coriolanus

a superman, in the sense suggested by the works of some of the predecessors and contemporaries of Shakespeare. He is not less tenderly demonstrative towards his mother or his silent wife (*"my gracious silence"*), than is Hotspur to Kate, or when, yielding to a woman's prayers, he stays the course of his triumphant vengeance. It would be tedious to record all the personages of indomitable power that we meet with in these historical dramas, such as the bastard Faulconbridge, in *King John,* and most popular of all, though not the most artistically executed, Richard III, replete with iniquity, who clears the way by dealing death around himself without pity, and dies in the midst of combat with that last cry of desperate courage, "A horse, a horse! My kingdom for a horse!" At their side stand, not less powerfully delineated, and set in relief, those queens Constance and Margaret: deprived of their power and full of maledictions, terrible in their fury, they are either ferocious or shut themselves up in their majestic sorrow. Queen Constance, when she sees herself abandoned by her protectors in the face of her enemies, who have become their allies, says, as she lets herself fall to the ground:

> "Let kings assemble; for my grief's so great
> That no supporter but the huge firm earth
> Can hold it up: here I and sorrows sit;
> Here is my throne: bid kings come bow to it."

This gallery of historical figures is most varied; we find here not only the vigorous and proud, the sorrowful and troubled, but also the noble and severe, like Gaunt, the touching, like the little princes destined to the dagger of the assassins, Prince Arthur and the sons of Edward IV, down to the laughing and the credulous, to those who defy prejudice to wallow in debauch.

Sir John Falstaff is the first of these latter, and it is important not to misunderstand him, as certain critics have done, especially among the French. They have looked upon him as a jovial, comic type, a theatrical buffoon, and have compared him with the comic theatrical types of other stages, arriving at the conclusion that he is a less happy and less successful conception than they, because his comicality is exclusively English, and is not to be well understood outside England and America. But we must on the other hand be careful not to interpret the character moralistically, as an image of baseness, darkly coloured with the poet's con-

tempt, as one towards whom he experienced a feeling of disgust. Falstaff could call himself a " formal " hero in his own way: magnificent in ignoring morality and honour, logical, coherent, acute and dexterous. He is a being in whom the sense of honour has never appeared, or has been obliterated, but the intellect has developed and become what alone it could become, namely, *esprit,* or sharpness of wit. He is without malice, because malice is the antithesis of moral conscientiousness, and he lacks both thesis and antithesis. There is in him, on the contrary, a sort of innocence, the result of the complete liberty of his relation toward all restraint and towards ethical law. His great body, his old sinner's flesh, his complete experience of taverns and lupanars, of rogues male and female, complicates without destroying the soul of the boy that is in him, a very vicious boy, but yet a boy. For this reason, he is sympathetic, that is to say, he is sympathetically felt and lovingly depicted by the poet. The image of a child, that is to say of childish innocence, comes spontaneously to the lips of the hostess, as she tells of how he died: " Nay, sure, he's not in hell: he's in Arthur's bosom, if ever man went to Arthur's bosom.

'A made a fine end, and went away, an it had been any Christom child. . . ."

Shylock the Jew also finds a place in the historical gallery, for the very reason that he is a Jew, "the Jew," indeed, a historical formation, and Shakespeare conceives and describes him with the characteristics proper to his race and religion, one might almost say, sociologically. It has been asserted that for Shakespeare and for his public Shylock was a comic personage, intended to be flouted and laughed at by the pit; but we do not know what were the intentions of Shakespeare and as usual they matter little, because Shylock lives and speaks, himself explaining what he means, without the aid of commentaries, even such as the author might possibly have supplied. Shylock crying out in his desperation: "My daughter! O my ducats! . . ." may have made laugh the spectators in the theatre, but that cry of the wounded and tortured animal does not make the poetical reader laugh; he forms anything but a comic conception of that being, trampled down, poisoned at heart and unshakeable in his desire for vengeance. On the other hand the pathetic and biassed interpretations of Shylock that have been given during the nineteenth cen-

tury, are foreign to the ingenuousness of a creation, without a shadow of humanitarianism or of polemic. What Shakespeare has created, fusing his own impressions and experiences in the crucible of his attentive and thoughtful humanity, is the Jew, with his firm cleaving to the law and to the written word, with his hatred for Christian feeling, with his biblical language, now sententious now sublime, the Jew with his peculiar attitude of intellect, will and morality.

Yet we are inclined to ask why Shylock, seen in the relations in which he is placed in the *Merchant of Venice,* arouses some doubt in our minds; he would seem to require a background which is lacking to him there. This background cannot be the romantic story of Portia and the three caskets, or of the tired and melancholy Antonio. The reader is not convinced by the rapid fall of so great an adversary, who accepts the conversion to Christianity finally imposed upon him. But apart also from the particular mixture of real and imaginary, of serious and light, which we find in the *Merchant of Venice,* it does not appear that the characters of the strictly historical plays find the ideal complement which they should find in the plays where they appear. The reason

for this is not to be found in the looseness and reliance upon chronicles for which they have so often been blamed, since this is rather a consequence or general effect of Shakespeare's attitude towards the practical life, described above. This attitude, as we have seen, lacks a definite ideal, is indeed, without passion for any sort of particular ideals, but is animated with sympathy for the varying lots of striving humanity. For this reason, it is entirely concentrated, on the one hand upon character drawing, and on the other is inclined to accept somewhat passively the material furnished by the chronicles and histories. On the one hand it is all force and impetus, while on the other it lacks idealisation and condensation. The marvelous Hotspur appears in the play, in order that he may confirm the glory of youthful Prince Hal, that is to say, that he may provide a curious anecdote of what was or appeared to be the scapegrace youth of a future sage sovereign; that is, he is not fully represented. Coriolanus runs himself into a blind alley; and even if the poet portrays with historical penetration, the patricians and plebeians of Rome, it would be vain to seek in the play for the centre of gravity of his feelings, of his pre-

dilictions, or of his aspirations, because both Coriolanus, the tribunes and his adversaries are looked upon solely as characters, not as parts and expressions of a sentiment that should justify one or other or both groups. Finally, Falstaff is sacrificed, because, like Hotspur, he has been used for the purpose of enhancing the greatness of the future Henry V; for this reason, he declines in prestige from the first to the last scenes of the first part of Henry IV, not to speak of the *Merry Wives of Windsor,* where we find him reduced to being a merely farcical character, flouted and thrashed. And when his former boon companion, Prince Hal, now on the throne, answers his advances, familiar and confidential as in the past, with hard, cold words, we do not admire the new king for his seriousness, because we are sensible of a lack of aesthetic harmony. Aesthetically speaking, Falstaff did not deserve such treatment, or at least Henry V, who inflicts it upon him, should not be given the credit of possessing an admirable moral character, which he does not possess, for it cannot be maintained that he is a great man, lofty in heart and mind, when he shows us that he has failed to understand Falstaff, and to grant him that indul-

gence to which he is entitled, after so lengthy a companionship. Falstaff's friends know that poor Sir John, although he has tried to put a good face on his cruel reception by his young friend, is unconsolable in the face of this inhuman estrangement, this chill repulse:

> "The king hath run bad humours in the knight,
> His heart is fracted and corroborate."

And Mistress Quickly, although a woman of bad character and a procuress, shows that she possesses a better heart and a better intellect than the great king, when she attends the dying Sir John with feminine solicitude. The narrative, of which we had occasion to quote the first phrase above, continues in the following pitiful strain:

"'A parted even just between twelve and one, even at the turning of the tide: for after I saw him fumble with the sheets, and play with flowers and smile upon his fingers ends, I knew there was but one way; for his nose was as sharp as a pen, and 'a babbled of green fields. 'How now, Sir John,' quoth I, 'what, man! be o' good cheer.' So 'a cried out 'God, God, God,' three or four times. Now I, to comfort him, bid him 'a should not think of God; I

hoped there was no need to trouble himself with any such thoughts yet. So 'a bade me lay more clothes on his feet: I put my hand into the bed and felt them, and they were as cold as any stone; then I felt to his knees, and so upward and upward, and all was as cold as any stone." And since the friends of the tavern have heard that he raved of sack, of his favourite sweet sack, Mistress Quickly confirms that it was so; and when they add that he raved of women, she denies it, thus defending in her own way the chastity of the poor dead man.

4

The Tragedy of Good and Evil

The three aspects, with which we have hitherto dealt, compose what may be called the *lesser* Shakespeare, in contradistinction to the *greater* Shakespeare, of whom we are about to speak. By "lesser," we do not wish to suggest that the works thus designated are artistically weak and imperfect, because there are among them some true masterpieces, nor that they are less perfect by comparison with others, because every true work of art is incomparable and contains in itself its proper perfection.

What is intended to be conveyed is that they are "less complex," in the same way as the sentiment of a mature or an old man is distinguished by complexity of experiences from that of a young man, which is not for that reason less genuine. There are major and minor works in this sense in the production of poets and of all artists; and in this sense the greater works themselves of the various historical epochs stand to one another in the relation of greater or less richness, although each one is an entire world and each is most beautiful and incomparable in itself. In the case of Shakespeare, the distinction has already been approximately made by the common accord of readers and critics. It is among things accepted and we have acted upon this assumption.

Whoever, for example, passes from the most excellent "historical plays" to *Macbeth,* is immediately sensible, not only of the diversity, but also of the greater complexity, proper to the new work which he has begun to study. In the former, we find a vision that might be described in general terms, as psychological or practical; in the latter, the vision is wider, it seems to be almost philosophical, yet it does not exclude the particular psychological or

practical vision of the former, but includes it within itself. In the historical plays, we find individuals, powerful yet limited, as we find them when we consider the social competition and the political struggles of the day; in the great plays, the characters are more than individuals; they represent eternal positions of the human spirit. In the former, the plot hinges upon the acquisition or loss of a throne, or of some other worldly object; in the latter, there is also this external gain or loss, but over and above it the winning or losing of the soul itself, the strife of good and evil at the heart of things.

Evil: but if this evil were so altogether and openly, if it were altogether base and repugnant, the tragedy would be finished before it had begun. But evil was called *greatness* for Macbeth: that greatness, which the fatal sisters had prophesied to him and the destined course of events immediately begins to bestow, pointing out to him that all the rest is both near and certain, provided that he does not remain passive, but extends his hand to grasp it. It shines before Macbeth, as a beautiful and luminous idea shines before an artist, assuming for this warlike and masterful man, the form

of power, supreme, sovereign power. Shall he miss the mark? Shall he fail of the mission of his being? Shall he not harken to the call of Destiny? The idea fascinates him: *nothing* now *is but what is not* in his eyes; it also fascinates and draws along with it his wife, his second self, who has instantly and with yet more irresistible violence, thrown herself into the non-existing, which creates itself and already exists.

"Thy letters," (she says), "have transported me beyond
This ignorant present, and I feel now
The future in the instant."

The idea, for her, is visible to the eye, it is "the golden circle," which "fate and metaphysical aid," appear already to have placed upon her brow. The two tremble together, as at the springs of being, in the abode of the mysterious Mothers. They are both doers and sufferers in a process of things, in the appearance of a new greatness: they tremble in that experience, at that creative moment of daring, which demands resolute dedication of the whole man.

But the obstacle towards the realisation of

their daring plan, is not a material obstacle, nor is it the cowardice that sometimes attacks the bravest; it is a good of a different sort, not less vigorous, but of a more lofty quality, gentle and serene, planted in the heart of Macbeth and called by the name of loyalty, duty, justice, respect for the being of others, human piety. Thus he feels himself thrown at once into confusion by the idea that has flashed before him, so great is the savage desire, which it has set alight in his breast, and such on the other hand the reverence which the other idea inspires into his deeper being, and against which he prepares for a desperate struggle. The supernatural challenge keeps undulating in his mind, now divine, now diabolical: *cannot be ill, cannot be good.* But his wife, in whom the power of desire displays itself as absolute and whose determination of will is rectilinear, knowing not struggle or only struggles speedily and completely suppressed, his wife, is ready to take his place, when he shows his weak side, or at the moments of his vacillation. In the logical clarity of vision that comes to her as the result of the clearness of view with which she contemplates the achievement of her end, she has discovered an element of danger. It is

concealed in the "milk of human kindness," circulating in the blood of Macbeth, whereby he would attain to greatness, without staining himself with crime. Having discovered the cause of the weakness, she applies the remedy. This does not consist in making a frontal attack upon his moral consciousness, or by negating it, but in exciting or strengthening the will for action, the will pure and simple, taking pleasure in itself alone, by making it feel the necessity of expressing in action what seems to it to be beautiful and delightful, and by making it ashamed of not knowing how to remain at the level of the desire which it has encouraged, of the plan that it has formed. Macbeth holds back troubled, because, though he is as bold as man can be in facing danger, he yet feels that the deed now required of him would take away from him the very character of man; but for his wife, that deed would make of him more than a man. The sophistry of the will, to the aid of which comes the conquering seduction of desire, exercises its irresistible action and the deed is accomplished.

It is accomplished, but with it, as Macbeth says to himself, nothing is accomplished or concluded: the same atrocious discord, which ap-

peared with the first thought of the crime, and which has accompanied its preparation and execution, continues to act, and Macbeth is never able to get the better of it, being incapable both of achieving insensibility to the pricks of conscience and at the same time of repentance. He persists in his attitude of the first moment, drunk with greatness, devoured with remorse. He neither can nor will go back, and does go forward; but he goes forward, increasing both the terms of the discord, the sum of his crimes, and the torment of his conscience. No way of salvation opens itself before him: neither the complete redemption of the good, nor the opposite redemption of the completeness of evil; neither the tears that relieve the ferocious soul, nor absolute hardening of the heart. If he had to blame anything for his course of crimes and torments, he would blame life itself, that *fitful fever,* that stupidity of life, which is

> "a tale
> told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> signifying nothing."

And if there is any image that attracts him from time to time, filling him with the suavity of desire, it is that of sleep, and beyond that, the great final, dissolving sleep, which Duncan,

whom he has slaughtered, already enjoys. Thus Macbeth consumes himself, and his other self, his wife, consumes herself also, in a different way, because what was in him an implacable call, to which he could do violence, but could not suppress, presents itself to his wife as the fascinating idea had presented itself to her, in sensible images, and therefore as an obscure rebellion of nature. For this reason, the woman from whose hand the dagger had fallen, when she faced the sleeping Duncan, who seemed to her to be her father, wanders in the night, vainly seeking to remove from her small hands the nauseating odour of blood, which, it seems to her, still clings to them. Both are already dead, before they die, owing to these bitter, long, continuous, internal shocks and corrosions. Macbeth receives the news of the death of her who was his wife, of her whom he had loved and who loved him, with the desolate coldness of one who has renounced all particular affections, and the life of the affections themselves. Yet he will not die like a "Roman fool," he will not slay himself, but will provoke death in battle, still seeking, not death, but victory. For even in his last moments, the internal conflict in him has not ceased, even in

those instants, the impulse for greatness rules him and urges him on. To kill himself would be to admit that he was wrong, and he does not admit to himself that he was wrong or right: his tragedy lies in this incapacity to hold himself right or wrong; it is the tragedy of reality contemplated at the moment of conflict and before the solution has been obtained. Therefore he dies austerely, representing a sacred mystery, covered with religious horror.

In *Macbeth,* the good appears only as revenge taken by the good, as remorse, punishment. It is not personified. The amiable king Duncan glides along on the outside of things, unsuspectful of betrayals, without an inkling of what is passing in the mind of Macbeth, whom he has rewarded and exalted. The honest Macduff, reestablisher of peace and justice, is a warrior pitted against a warrior. Lady Macduff and her son are innocent victims, who flee the knife of the murderers in vain. The boy with his childish logic expresses his wonderment that the good in the world does not choke the evil and replies to his mother, who says that the honest man must do justice upon wicked men and traitors: "Then the liars and swearers are fools; for there are liars and

swearers enow to beat the honest men and hang up them. . . ."

In *King Lear,* that tempestuous drama, which is nothing but a sequence of betrayals and horrible torments, goodness is impersonated and takes the name of Cordelia, shining in the midst of the tempest, as when the sky is dark and we look, not upon the darkness, but upon the single star that is scintillating there.

An infinite hatred for deceitful wickedness has inspired this work: egoism pure and simple, cruelty, perversity, arouse repugnance and horror, but do not directly lead to that tremendous doubt as to the non-existence of goodness, or still less as to its not being recognisable and separable from its contrary, since that moral deceit, which takes the appearance of rectitude, generosity, loyalty, and when it has realised its purpose, discovers itself as impure cupidity, aridity, hardness of heart, which alone were present throughout. Poor humanity, which has thus allowed itself to be deceived, enters into such a fury, when it has discovered its illusion, both against itself and against the world that has permitted so atrocious an illusion or delusion, as to reach the point of madness.

And humanity goes by the name of King Lear, proud, imperious, full of confidence in himself and in his own power and strength of judgment, quite sure that others will agree with his wishes, all the more so, since he is their benefactor and they owe him, not only obedience, but duty and gratitude. King Lear is a creation of pity and of sarcasm: pitiful in his cries of injured pride, of old age deserted, in the shadow of the madness that is falling upon him. He has been sarcastically, though sorrowfully, realised by his creator, because he was mad before he became mad, and the clown who keeps him company, has been and is more serious and clear-sighted than he. But the creative impulse of Shakespeare goes so deeply into the heart of reality, or rather it creates so great a reality, that he neglects everything suggestive of the obvious, vulgar side of things, as seen from an average and mediocre point of view. King Lear assumes gigantic proportions in his sorrow, in his madness, in his piteousness, in his sarcasm, because the passion that shakes him is gigantic. The figures of the two deceitful daughters who are opposed to him, are also gigantic, especially Goneril, to whom Regan, who is somewhat the younger, gives relief.

Goneril's are the guiding mind and the initiating will; she it is, who first counsels and instructs her sister, who first faces and dominates her father, and who first recognises her own equal in the iron will of the evil Edmund, loving him and despising her own husband, so weak in his goodness, strives with her sister for the loved one, finally slaying her sister and immediately afterwards, herself. Regan has here and there a fugitive moment, not of piety, but of hesitation and almost of suggestion, and shows herself to be the less strong, just because she always allows herself to be led by the other. Each of them, although both are thus powerfully individuated, express the same force of egoism without scruples, untamed and extreme in its boundlessness. Their personalities are concentrated, felt and expressed, with the whole-hearted hatred of an expert.

Yet we come to think that in this tragedy the inspiration of love — of immense love — is equal to or greater than the inspiration of hate. Perhaps intensity of hatred, making more intense the attraction of goodness, helped to create the figure of Cordelia, which is not a symbol or allegory of abstract goodness, but is all compact of goodness, of a need for purity,

for tenderness, for adoration, which has here thrown its real and unreal appearance, an appearance which has poetical reality. Cordelia is goodness itself in its original well-spring, limpid and shining as it gushes forth: she represents moral beauty and is therefore both courageous and hesitating, modest and dignified, ready to disdain contests, where they are of no avail, but also ready to fight bravely, when to do so is of service. Hers is a true and complete goodness, not simply softness, mildness and indulgence. Words have been so misused for purposes of deceit that she has almost abandoned that inadequate means of communication: she is silent, when speech would be vain or would set her truthfulness on the same level as the lies of others. But since she has clear knowledge and a fine sense of her own self and its contrary, she does not allow herself to be confused or enticed by false splendours. *"I know you what you are,"* she says, looking her sisters in the eyes, as she takes leave of them. And since goodness is also sympathetic intelligence, she understands, pardons and lovingly assists her old father, so unjust and so wanting in understanding toward herself. And since goodness cannot adopt the

form of blind passion, even in the act of defence and offence, and even when it refuses to tolerate evil, is forced to bow to the law of severe resignation, which governs the world, and thus entrusts her with its best duty, so Cordelia does not burst into a rage against the wickedness of her sisters, when she hears how King Lear has been driven out and despised, but at once resigns herself to patience in the affliction, "like," as says one who has seen her at that moment, to

> "Sunshine and rain at once: her smiles and tears
> Were like a better day."

There are other personages in the play, who affirm the reality of good against the false assertion of it: the pure and faithful Kent, the loyal though unintelligent Gloucester, the brave Edgar, the weak but honest Duke of Albany, the husband of Goneril, who says:

> "Where I could not be honest,
> I never yet was valiant."

Finally the perfidious Edmund, when he sees himself near death, hastens to accomplish a good action and to pay homage to virtue. But all these belong to the earth: Cordelia is on the earth, earthly herself and mortal, but she

is made of celestial substance, of purest humanity, which is therefore divine. It has occurred to me to compare her with the Soul, whom Friar Jacob likened to the only daughter and heiress of the King of France, and whom her father, for that he loved her infinitely, had adorned "with a white stole," and her fame flew "to every land."

No greater spiritual triumph can be conceived than that of Cordelia, throughout the drama, from the first scene to the last, although she first appears as denied and rejected by her father, and later, when she comes with arms to the aid of the unfortunate Lear against the infernal sisters and the treacherous Edmund, is conquered, thrown into prison and there strangled by the hangman. Why? Why does not goodness triumph in the material world? And, why, thus conquered, does she increase in beauty, evoke ever more disconsolate desire, until she is finally adored as something sacred? The tragedy of King Lear is penetrated throughout with this unexpressed yet anguished interrogation, so full of the sense of the misery of life. The king, acquiring new sensibility in his madness, as though a veil had been withdrawn from before his eyes, sees and receives

for the first time in himself, suffering humanity, weeping and trembling, like a child, defenceless, ill-treated. The fool, who accompanies him, sings, along with much else, his prophecy to the effect that when calumnies cease, when kings are punished, and usurers and thieves give up their trade, then all the kingdom of Albion will be in great confusion. But the sorrow of sorrows is that of Lear, when, having found Cordelia, he dreams of being ever after at her side, adoring, and sees the prison transformed into a paradise: they will sing, he will kneel before her, they will pray, and tell one another ancient tales. But she is brutally slain before his eyes and her dead body lies in his arms, as he vainly strives to reanimate it, and he too dies, uttering the last cry of desperation:

> "Thou'lt come no more,
> Never, never, never, never!—"

In the tragedy of *Othello,* evil takes on another face, and here the sentiment that answers to it, is not condemnation mixed with pity, not horror for hypocrisy and cruelty, but astonishment. Iago does not represent evil done through a dream of greatness, or evil for the

egoistic satisfaction of his own desires, but evil for evil's sake, done almost as though through an artistic need, in order to realise his own being and feel it strong, dominating and destructive, even in the subordinate social condition in which he is placed. Certainly, Iago, in what he says, wishes it to be believed or makes himself believe that he is aiming only at his "own advantage," as Guicciardini would have said, and that he despises those who have different rule of conduct and manage to live honestly, the *honest knaves*. But the truth is that he does not obtain any material advantage for himself, and that the path he has selected was not necessary for that object and does not lead to it. Feelings of vengeance for injustices and affronts suffered lead to it still less, though at times he says they do, and wishes it to be believed or tries to believe it himself. What results from his acts is evil as an end in itself, arising from a turbid desire to prove himself superior to the rest of the world, to delude and to make it dance to the tune of his own mind, and in proof of this to bring it to ruin. The fact that he gives various reasons, with the object of justifying and of explaining his acts, demonstrates that he himself failed to under-

stand that peculiar form of evil which possessed his spirit. None of those about him suspect him: not Othello, a simple, impetuous soldier, who understands open strife and plotting, but both in war and between one enemy and another. He is quite unable to conceive this refined and intellectual degradation. Desdemona, too, a young woman newly married, rejoicing in the happiness of realized affection and disposed to find everyone about her good and to make everyone happy, is unsuspicious, as also is Cassio, who trusts Iago, as a brave and loyal comrade, and his wife, the experienced Emilia, who knows him from long habit. The epithets of "good Iago," of "honest Iago" ring through the whole play and are a bitter and ironical comment underlining the illusion that possesses them all. He is weaving, without reason, and as it were for amusement, a horrible web of calumnies, of moral and physical tortures and of death: a good and generous man, rendered blind and mad with jealousy and injured honour, is thus led to murder his innocent and beloved wife. Pity and terror arise together in the soul, as we see Othello poisoned drop by drop, excited, changed into a wild beast: one feels that in Desdemona

the warrior possessed all the sweetness and all the force of life, the happiness on which reposed all the rest, and that in her person he had found all that one can conceive as most noble, most gentle and most pure in the world. When he suspects that she has betrayed him, not only is he pierced with sensual jealousy, (this too there is, certainly), but injured in what he holds sacred, and therefore the death that he deals to Desdemona is not simply vengeance for the shame done him, but above all expiation and purification, as though he wished to purify the world of such impurity, and to cleanse her from a stain, which irremediably defiled her. "O, the pity of all this, Iago! O, Iago, the pity of all this!" He kisses her before he kills her, kissing his own ideal, which he lays at that moment in the sepulchre. But he still trembles with love, and perhaps hopes somehow to get her back and to be united with her forever, by means of that bloody sacrifice. Desdemona is not aware of the fury raging around her, sure as she is of her love and of Othello's. Owing to her very innocence, she affords involuntary incentives to the jealousy of Othello and easy occasion to the artifice of Iago. Her very unconsciousness makes her

fate the more moving. Such is the infamy of the crime thus accomplished against her, that the prosaic, shifty wife of Iago becomes sublime with indignation and courage, when she sees her dying, rising to poetic nobility and defying every menace. Transpierced by her husband, she falls at the side of her mistress and dying sings the willow song, which she had caught from the lips of Desdemona. Othello also dies, when the deceit has been revealed to him. The leader whom Venice had held in great honour and in whom she had reposed complete faith, charging him with commands and governments, is now nothing but a wretch deserving punishment. But in slaying himself, he returns in memory to what he was, substituting that image of himself for his present misery, and using the memory of the warrior that he was, to drive the sword deeper into his throat.

On the other hand, the rallying-point or centre of the whole play is not the ruin of the valiant Othello, not the cruel fate of the gentle Desdemona, but the work of Iago, of that demidevil, of whom one might ask in vain, why, as Othello asked, why he had thus noosed the bodies and souls of those men, who

had never nourished any suspicion of him?

"Demand me nothing; what you know, you know
From this time forth I never will speak word."

This was the answer to the poet from that most mysterious form of evil, when he met with it, as he was contemplating the universe: perversity, which is an end and a joy to itself.

5

The Tragedy of the Will

The tragedy of the good and evil will, is sometimes followed, sometimes preceded by another tragedy, that of the will itself. Here the will, instead of holding the passions in control — making its footstool of them — allows itself to be dominated by them in their onrush; or it seeks the good, but remains uncertain, dissatisfied as to the path chosen; or finally, when it fails to find its own way, a way of some sort, and does not know what to think of itself or of the world, it preys upon itself in this empty tension.

A typical form of this first condition of the will is voluptuousness, which overspreads a

soul and makes itself mistress there, inebriating, sending to sleep, destroying and liquefying the will. When we think of that enchanting sweetness and perdition, the image of death arises at the same instant, because it truly is death, if not physical, yet always internal and moral death, death of the spirit, without which man is already a corpse in process of decomposition. The tragedy of *Anthony and Cleopatra* is composed of the violent sense of pleasure, in its power to bind and to dominate, coupled with a shudder at its abject effects of dissolution and of death.

He moves in a world all kisses and caresses, languors, sounds, perfumes, shimmer of gold and splendid garments, flashing of lights or silence of deep shadows, enjoyment, now ecstatic, now spasmodic and furious. Cleopatra is queen of this world, avid for pleasure, which she herself bestows, diffusing around her its quivering sense, instilling a frantic desire for it into all, offering herself as an example and an incitement, but while conferring it on others, remaining herself a regal and almost a mystical personage. A Roman who has plunged into that world, spoke then of her, astonished at her power, demoniac or divine:

"Age cannot wither nor custom stale
Her infinite variety."

Cleopatra asks for songs and music, that she may melt into that sea of melody, which heightens pleasure:

"Give me some music; music, moody food
Of us that trade in love!"

She knows how to toy with men, keeping their interest alive by her denials:

"If you find him sad,
Say I am dancing; if in mirth, report
That I am sudden sick."

Her words express sensual fascination in its most terrible form:

"There is gold, and here
My bluest veins to kiss; a hand that kings
Have lipped, and trembled kissing."

All around her dance to the same tune and imitate the rhythmic folly of her life. Note the scene of the two waiting women, who are joking about their loves, their future marriages, and the manner of their deaths, with the soothsayer. Listen to the first words of Carminia, so mirthful and caressing in her playful coquetry: "Lord Alexas, sweet Alexas, most anything Alexas, almost most absolute Alexas,

where's the soothsayer that you praised so to the queen? O, that I knew this husband, which, you say, must charge his horns with garlands!" . . .

Anthony is seized and dragged into this vertiginous course of pungent pleasures, as soon as he appears. In his inebriation the rest of the world, all the active, real world, seems heavy, prosaic, contemptible and displeasing. The very name of Rome has no longer any power over him.

"Let Rome in Tiber melt, and the wide arch
Of the ranged empire fall! Here is my space.
Kingdoms are clay: one dungy earth alike
Feeds beast as man."

As he folds Cleopatra in his arms, he feels that they form a pair who make life more noble, and that in them alone it assumes real significance.

This feeling is not love: we have already called it by its proper name: voluptuousness. Cleopatra loves pleasure and caprice, and the dominion, which both of them afford her; she also loves Anthony, because he is, and in so far as he is, part of her pleasures and caprices, and serves her as an instrument of dominion. She

busies herself with keeping him bound to her, struggles to retain him when he removes himself from her, but she always has an eye to other things, which are equally necessary for her, even more so than he, and in order to retain them, she would be ready if necessary to give Anthony in exchange. Anthony too, does not love her; he clearly sees her for what she is, imprecates against her, and enfolds her in his embrace without forgiveness.

> "Shed not a tear; give me a kiss:
> Even this repays me."

Love demands union of some sort between two beings for an objective end, with the moral consent of both; but here we are outside morality, and even outside the will. We are caught in the whirlwind and carried along.

Anthony it is, who weakens and is conquered. He has lived an active life, which, in the present moment of folly, he holds of no account. He has known war, political strife, the government of States; he has even been brushed with the wing of glory and of victory. He tries several times to grasp his own past and to direct his future. He has not lost his ethical judgment, for he rec-

ognizes Cleopatra as she really is, bows reverently before the memory of Fulvia, and treats his new wife Octavia, whom also he will abandon, with respect. For a brief moment, he returns to the world he once knew, takes part in political business, comes to terms with his colleagues and rivals. It would seem that he had disentangled himself from the chain that bound him. But the effort is not lasting, the chain encircles him again; vainly and with ever declining power of resistance, he yields to that destiny, which is on the side of Octavius, the man without loves, so cold and so firm of will. Bad fortune dogs every step of the voluptuary: those that surround him remark a change in his appearance from what he was formerly. They see him betray this change by uttering thoughts that are almost ridiculously feeble, and making inane remarks. They are led to reflect that the mind of man is nothing but a part of his fortune and that external things conform to things internal. He himself feels that he is inwardly dissolving, and compares himself to the changing forms of the clouds, dissolved with a breath of wind, like water turning to water. Yet the man, who is thus in process of disaggregation, was once

great, and still affords flashes of greatness, bursting forth in feats of warlike prowess, accompanied with lofty speech and generous actions. His generosity confounds Enobarbus, who had deserted him and now takes his own life for very shame. Around him are yet those ready to die for sake of the affection that he inspires. Cleopatra stands lower or higher: she has never known nor has ever desired to know any life but that of caprice and pleasure. There is logic, will, consistency, in her vertiginous abandonment. She is consistent also in taking her own life, when she sees that she would die in a Roman prison, thus escaping shame and the mockeries of the triumphant foe, and selecting a death of regal voluptuousness. And with her die her faithful handmaids, by a similar death; they have known her as their queen and goddess of pleasure, and now as despising *this vile world* and a life no longer worthy of being lived, because no longer beautiful and brilliant. Carminia, before she slays herself, takes a last farewell of her mistress:

> "Downy windows close;
> And golden Phoebus never be beheld
> Of eyes again so royal! Your crown's awry;
> I'll mend it, and then play."

The tragedy of the will, which is most poetically lofty in *Anthony and Cleopatra,* is nevertheless morally a low form, that is to say, it is simple and elementary in its roughness, such as would manifest itself in a soldier like Anthony, the bloody, quarrelsome, pleasure-seeking, crapulous Anthony.

It shows itself in an atmosphere far more subtle with Hamlet. Hamlet, the hero so refined intellectually, so delicate in taste, so conscious of moral values, comes to the action, not from the Roman forum or from the battlefields of Gaul or Pharsalia, but from the University of Wittenberg. In *Hamlet,* the seductions of the will are altogether overcome; duty is no longer a condition, or a vain effort, but a spontaneous and regular attitude. The obstacle against which it strives is not external to it, it is no inebriation of the senses; it is internal, the will itself in the dialectic of its becoming, in its passage from meditation to purpose and from purpose to action, in its becoming will, true, concrete, factual will.

Hamlet has with reason often been recognised as a companion and precursor of Brutus in *Julius Caesar,* a play which differs from the "historical tragedies," more substantially even

than *Anthony and Cleopatra,* which is restricted to the practical activity. *Hamlet* attains to a more lofty significance. Here too we find a tragedy of the will in a man whose ethical conscientiousness is not internally troubled, for he lives upon a sublime plane; and here too the obstacle arises from the very bosom of the will. Brutus differs from Hamlet, in that he comes to a decision and acts; but his action is accompanied with disgust and repugnance for the impurity with which its accomplishment must be stained. He reproves, condemns and abhors the political end towards which Caesar is tending, but he does not hate Caesar; he would like to destroy that end, to strike at the soul of Caesar, but not to destroy his body and with it his life. He bows reluctantly to necessity and with the others decides upon his death, but requests that honours should be payed to Caesar dead, and spares Anthony contrary to the advice of Cassius, because, as he says, he is a priest bound to sacrifice the necessary victim; but he is not a butcher. Melancholy dogs every step toward the achievement of his end. He differs here from Cassius, who does not experience like scruples and delicacy of feeling, but desires the end, by whatever means. He

differs too from Anthony, who discovers at once the path to tread and enters it; cautious and resolute, he will triumph over him. He finds everywhere impurity: Cassius, his friend, his brother, behaves in such a way as to make him doubt his right to shed the blood of the mighty Julius, because, instead of that justice, which he has thought to promote and to restore by his act, he now sees only rapine and injustice. But if the spiritual greatness of Brutus shrouds him in sadness, it does not deprive him of the capacity for feeling and understanding human nature. His difference with Cassius comes to an end with his friend's sorrow, that friend who loves and admires him sincerely, and yet cannot be other than he is, hoping that his friend will not condemn too severely his faults and vices, but pass them over in indulgent silence. The reconciliation of the two is sealed when Brutus reveals his wounded heart, as he briefly tells his friend of Portia's death. He enfolds himself in his grief. Brutus is among those who have always meditated upon death and fortified themselves with the thought of it. His suffering is not limited to virtue forced into contamination; for he is haunted by doubt unexpressed. He feels that

man is surrounded with mystery, the mystery of Fate, or, as we should say, with the mystery surrounding the future history of the world; he seems to be anxiously asking of himself if the way that he has chosen and followed is the best and wisest way, or whether some evil genius has not introduced itself into his life, in order to drive him to perdition? He hears at night the voice of the evil genius amid the sounds and songs that should give rest and repose to his agitated spirit. He prepares himself to face the coming battle, with the same invincible sadness. It is the day that will bring to an end the work begun on the Ides of March. He takes leave of Cassius, doubtful if he will ever see him again, saying farewell to him for ever:

"If we do meet again, why, we shall smile;
If not, why then, this parting was well made."

O, if man could know the event of that day before it befell! But it must suffice to know that day will have an end, and that the end will be known. Mighty powers govern the world, Brutus resigns himself to them: they may have already judged him guilty or be about to do so.

Hamlet has generally been considered the tragedy of Shakespearean tragedies, where the poet has put most of himself, given us his philosophy, and with it the key to the other tragedies. But strictly speaking, Shakespeare has not put himself, that is to say his poetry, into *Hamlet,* either more or less than into any of the others; there is not more philosophy, as judge of reality and of life here than in the others; there is perhaps less, because it is more perplexed and vague than the others, and even the celebrated monologue (*To be or not to be*), though supremely poetical, is irreducible to a philosopheme or to a philosophic problem. Finally, it is not the key or compendium of the other plays, but the expression of a particular state of the soul, which differs from those expressed in the others. Those who read it in the ingenuous spirit in which it was written and conceived, find no difficulty about taking it for what it is, namely the expression of disaffection and distaste for life; they experience and assimilate that state of the soul. Life is thought and will, but a will which creates thought and a thought which creates will, and when we feel that certain painful impressions have injured and upset us, it sometimes happens that the

will does not obey the stimulus of thought and becomes weak as will; then thought, feeling in its turn that it is not stimulated and upheld by the will, begins to wander and fails to make progress: it tries now this and now that, but grasps nothing firmly; it is thought not sure of itself, it is not true and effective thought. There is, as it were, a suspension of the rapid course of the spirit, a void, a losing of the way, which resembles death, and is in fact a sort of death. This is the state of soul that Shakespeare infused into the ancient legend of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, on whom he conferred many noble aptitudes and gifts, and the promise or the beginning of a fervent life. He then interrupted and suspended Hamlet's beginning of life, and let it wander, as though seeking in vain, not only its proper task, but even the strength necessary to propose it to himself, with that firmness which becomes and is, indeed, itself action. Hamlet is a generous and gentle youth, with a disposition towards meditation and scientific enquiry, a lover of the beautiful, devoted to knightly sports, prone to friendship, not averse to love, with faith in the human goodness and in those around him, especially in his father and mother, and in all his

relations and friends. He was perhaps too refined and sensitive, too delicate in soul; but his life proceeded, according to its own law, towards certain ends, caressing certain hopes. In the course of this facile and amiable existence, he experienced, first the death of his father, followed soon after by the second marriage of his mother, who seems to have very speedily forgotten her first husband in the allurement of a new love. He feels himself in every way injured by this marriage, and with the disappearance of his esteem for his mother, a horrible suspicion insinuates itself, which is soon confirmed by the apparition of his father's restless ghost, which demands vengeance. And Hamlet will, nay must and will carry it out; he would find a means to do so warily and effectually, if he had not meanwhile begun to die from that shock to his sentiments. That is to say, he began to die without knowing it, to die internally: the pleasures of the world become in his eyes insipid and rancid, the earth and the sky itself lose their colours. Everything that is contrary to the ideal and to the joy of life, injustice, betrayal, lies, hypocrisy, bestial sensuality, greed of power and riches, cowardice, perversity and with them the nullity

of worldly things, death and the fearful unknown, gather themselves together in his spirit, round that horrible thing that he has discovered, the assassination of his father, the adultery of his mother; they tyrannise over his spirit and form a barrier to his further progress, to his living with that former warmth and joyous vigour, as indispensable to thought as it is to action. Hamlet can no longer love, for love is above all love of life; for this reason he breaks off the love-idyll that he had begun with Ophelia, whom he loved and whom in a certain way, he still loves infinitely, but as we love one dead, knowing her to be no longer for us. Hamlet can laugh no more: sarcasm and irony take the place of frank laughter on his lips. He fails to coördinate his acts, himself becoming the victim of circumstances, though constantly maintaining his attitude of contempt, or breaking out into unexpected resolves, followed by hasty execution.

Sometimes he still rises to the level of moral indignation, as in the colloquy with his mother, but this too is a paroxysm, not a coördinated action. Joy is needed, not only for love, but also for vengeance; there must be passion for the activity that is being exercised; but Hamlet

is in such a condition that he should give himself the same advice as he gives to the miserable Ophelia — to get her to a nunnery and there practice renunciation and restraint. But he is not conscious of the nature of his malady, and it is precisely for this reason that he is ill; instead of combating it by applying the right remedy, he cultivates, nourishes and increases it. At the most, what is taking place within him excites his astonishment and moves him to vain self-rebuke and equally vain self-stimulation, as we observe after his dialogue with the players, and after he has heard the passion, fury and weeping they put into their part, and when he meets the army led by Fortinbras against Poland.

"I do not know
Why yet I live to say 'This thing's to do';
Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means
To do't. Examples, gross as earth exhort me:
Witness this army, of such mass and charge,
Led by a delicate and tender prince;
Whose spirit with divine ambition puff'd,
Makes mouths at the invisible event,
Exposing what is miserable and unsure
To all that fortune death and danger dare
Even for an egg-shell. . . . O, from this time forth,
My thought be bloody or be nothing worth!"

Finally, he accomplishes the great vengeance, but alas, in how small a way, as though jestingly, as though it were by chance, and he himself dies as though by chance. He had abandoned his life to chance, so his death must be due to chance.

We too have termed the condition of spirit that ruins Hamlet, an illness; but the word is better applied to a doctor or a moralist, whereas the tragedy is the work of a poet, who does not describe an illness, but sings a song of desperate and desolate anguish, and so lofty a song is it, to so great a height does it attain, that it would seem as though a newer and more lofty conception of reality and of human action must be born of it. What was perdition for Hamlet, is a crisis of the human soul, which assumed so great an extension and complexity after the time of Shakespeare as to give its name to a whole historical period. Yet it has more than historical value, because, light or serious, little or great, it returns to live again perpetually.

6

Justice and Indulgence

It would be vain to seek among the songs of Shakespeare for the song of reconciliation, of quarrels, composed of inner peace, of tranquillity achieved, but the song of justice echoes everywhere in his works. He knows neither perfect saints, nor perfect sinners, for he feels the struggle at the heart of reality as necessity, not as accident, artifice, or caprice. Even the good, the brave and the pure have evil, impurity and weakness in them: "fragility" is the word he utters most often, not only with regard to women; and on the other hand, even the wicked, the guilty, the criminal, have glimpses of goodness, aspirations after redemption, and when everything else is wanting, they have energy of will and thus possess a sort of spiritual greatness. One hears that song as a refrain in several of the tragedies, uttered by foes over the foes whom they have conquered. Anthony pronounces this elegy over the fallen Brutus:

> "This was the noblest Roman of them all:
> All the conspirators, save only he,

Did that they did in envy of great Caesar;
He only in a general honest thought
And common good to all, made one of them.
His life was gentle and the elements
So mix'd in him that nature might stand up
And say to all the world 'This was a man.'"

Octavian, when he hears of the death of Anthony, exclaims:

"O Anthony!
. . . We could not stall together; but yet let me lament,
With tears as sovereign as the blood of hearts,
That thou, my brother, my competitor
In top of all design, my mate in empire,
Friend and companion in the front of war,
Unreconcilable should divide
Where mine his thoughts did kindle, that our stars
Unreconciliable should divide
Our equalness to this."

It is above all in *Henry VIII* that this feeling for justice widens into a feeling towards oneself and others. We find a particularly good instance of it in the dialogues between Queen Catherine and her great enemy Wolsey. When the queen has mentioned all the grave misdeeds of the dead man in her severe speech, Griffith craves permission to record in his turn all the good there was in him; and with so

persuasive an eloquence does he record this good, that the queen, when she has heard him, concludes with a sad smile:

> "After my death I wish no other herald,
> No other speaker of my living actions,
> But such an honest chronicler as Griffith.
> Whom I most hated living thou hast made me,
> With thy religious truth and modesty,
> Now in his ashes honour: peace be with him!"

One who feels justice in this way, is inclined to be indulgent, and in Shakespeare we find the song of indulgence, in the *Tempest*: a lofty indulgence, for his discernment of good and evil was acute, his sense alike for what is noble and for what is base, exquisite. He could never be of those who slip into some form of false indulgence, which lowers the standard of the ideal, in order to approach the real, cancelling or rendering uncertain, in greater or lesser measure, the boundaries between virtue and vice. Prospero it is, who is indulgent in the *Tempest,* the sage, the wise, the injured, the beneficent Prospero.

The *Tempest* is an exercise of the imagination, a delicate pattern, woven perhaps as a spectacle for some special occasion, such as a marriage ceremony, for it adopts the proce-

dure of some fanciful, jesting scenario from the popular Italian comedy. Here we find islands unknown, aerial spirits, earthly beings and monsters; it is full of magic and of prodigies, of shipwrecks, rescues and incantations; and the smiles of innocent love, the quips of comical creatures, variegate pleasantly its surface. We have already noted the traces of Shakespeare's tendency toward the romantic, and those echoes of the comedy of love, of Romeo and Juliet, who are not unfortunate but fortunate, when they are called Ferdinand and Miranda, with their irresistible impulse towards love and joy. But although the work has a bland tone, there are yet to be found in it characters belonging to tragedy, wicked brothers, who usurp the throne, brothers who meditate and attempt fratricide. In Caliban we find the malicious, violent brute, abounding in strength and rich in possibilities. He listens ecstatically to the soft music, with which the isle often resounds, he knows its natural secrets and is ready to place himself at the service of him who shall aid him in his desire for vengeance and shall redeem him from captivity. Henceforth Prospero has all his enemies in his power; he can do with them what he likes. But he is

not on the same plane with them, a combatant among combatants: meditation, experience and science have refined him: he is penetrated with the consciousness of humanity, of its instability, its illusions, its temptations, its miseries. Where others think they see firm foothold, he is aware of change and insecurity; where others find everything clear as day, he feels the presence of mystery, of the unsolved enigma:

> "We are such things
> As dreams are made of and our little life
> Is rounded with a sleep."

Will he punish? Finally, even his sprite Ariel, his minister of air, feels compassion for those downcast prisoners, and when asked by Prospero, does not withhold from him, that in his place he would be human.

> "And mine shall.
> Hast thou, which are but air, a touch, a feeling
> Of their afflictions, and shall not myself,
> One of their kind, which relish all as sharply,
> Passion as they, be kindlier moved than thou art?"

The guilty are pardoned, and finally Caliban, the monstrous Caliban, is pardoned also, promising to behave himself better from that moment onward. Prospero divests himself of

his magic wand, which gave him so absolute a power over his like, and while yet in his possession, caused him to incur the risk of behaving towards them in a more than human, perhaps an inhuman way.

Shakespeare can and does attain to indulgence towards men; but since in him the contest between good and evil, positive and negative, remains undecided, he is unable to rise to a feeling of cheerful hope and faith, nor, on the other hand, to submerge himself in gloomy pessimism. In his characters, the love of life is extraordinarily vigorous and tenacious; all of them are agitated by strong passions; they meditate great designs and pursue them with indomitable vigour; all of them love infinitely and hate infinitely. But all of them, almost without exception, also renounce life and face death with fortitude, serenity, and as though it were a sort of liberation. The motto of all is uttered by Edgar, in *King Lear,* in reply to his old father, Gloucester, who loses courage and wishes to die, when he hears of the defeat of the king and of Cordelia. Edgar reminds his father that men must face "their coming here even as their going hence," and that "*ripeness is all.*" They die magnificently,

either in battle, or offering their throats to the assassin or the executioner, or they transpierce themselves with their own hands, when nothing is left but death or dishonour. They know how to die; it seems as though they had all "*studied death,*" as says a character in *Macbeth,* when describing one of them.

And nevertheless the ardour of life never becomes lessened or extinguished. Romeo indeed admired the tenacity of life and the fear of death in him who sold him the poison; miserable, hungry, despised, suspected by men and by the law, as he was. In *Measure for Measure,* in the scene where Claudio is in prison and condemned, the usual order is inverted; first we have the prompt persuasion and decision to accept death with serenity, and a few moments later the will to live returns with furious force. The make-believe friar, who assists the condemned man, sets the nullity of life before him in language full of warm and rich imagery: it is troublous and such as "none but fools would keep," a constant heart-ache for the fear of losing it, a craving after happiness never attained, a falsity of affections, a crepuscular condition, without joy or repose; and Claudio drinks in these words and images, feel-

ing that to live is indeed to die, and wishes for death. But his sister enters, and when she tells him how she has been offered his life as the price of her dishonour, he instantly clutches hold again of life at that glimmer of hope, of hope stained with opprobrium, and dispels with a shudder of horror the image of death:

> "To die and go we know not where;
> To lie in cold obstruction and to rot;
> This sensible and warm motion to become
> A kneaded clod; 'tis too horrible!
> The weariest and most loathed worldly life
> That age, ache, penury and imprisonment
> Can lay on nature is a paradise
> To what we fear of death. . . ."

And in the same play the singular personage of Barnadine is placed before us, perfect in a few strokes, Barnadine, the criminal and almost animal, indifferent to life and death, but who yet lives, gets drunk and then stretches himself out and sleeps soundly, and when he is awakened and called to the place of execution, declares firmly, that he is not disposed to go there that day, so they had better leave him alone and not trouble him; he turns his shoulders on them and goes back to his cell, where they can come and find him, if they have any-

thing to say. Here too the feeling of astonishment at an eagerness for life, which does not exclude the tranquil acceptance of death, is accentuated almost to the point of becoming comic and grotesque.

7

Ideal Development and Chronological Series

It is clear that in considering the principal motives of Shakespeare's poetry and arranging them in series of increasing complexity, we have not availed ourselves of any quantitative criterion or rule of measurement, but have considered only the philosophical concept of the spirit, which is perpetual growth upon itself, and of which every new act, since it includes its predecessors, is in this sense more rich than they. We declare in the same way, that prose is more complex than poetry, because it follows poetry, assumes and dominates, while making use of it, and that certain concepts and problems imply and presuppose certain others; we further declare that a particular equality in poetry presupposes other poetry of a more elementary quality, and that a pessimistic song of

love or sorrow, presupposes a simple love-song.

Thus, in the succession of his works as we have considered them, which might be more closely defined and particularised, we have nothing less than the ideal development of Shakespeare's spirit, deduced from the very quality of the poetical works themselves, from the physiognomy of each and from their reciprocal relations, which cannot but appear in relations which are serial and evolutionary. The comedies of love and the romantic comedies have the vagueness of a dream, followed by the hard reality of the historical plays, and from these we pass to the great tragedies, which are dream and reality and more than dream and reality. The general line followed by the poet even offered the temptation to construct his development by means of the dialectic triad of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. But we do not recommend this course, or if followed, it should only be with the view of reaching and adopting a compendious and brilliant formula, without suppressing in any way the consciousness of complexity and variety of many effective passages, much less the positive value of individual expressions.

This development does not in any case co-

incide with the chronological order, because the chronological order takes the works in the order in which they are apprehensible from without, that is to say, in the order in which they have been written, acted or printed, and arranges them in a series that is qualitatively irregular, or in other words, chronicles them. Now this arrangement must not be opposed to or placed on a level with the other, as though it were the real opposed to the ideal development, for the ideal is the only truly real development, while the chronological is fictitious or arbitrary, and thus unreal; that is to say, in clear terms, it does not represent development, but simply a series or succession. To make this point yet more clear, by means of an example taken from common experience, we have all known men, who in their youth have practised or tried to practise some form of activity (music, versification, painting, philosophy, etc.) which they have afterwards abandoned for other activities, more suitable, because in them susceptible of richer development. These men, later on, in their maturity, or when old age is approaching, revert to those earlier occupations, and take delight in composing verses or music, in painting or in philosophis-

ing, returning, as they say, to their old loves. Such returns are certainly never pure and simple returns: they are always coloured to some extent by what has occurred in the interval. But they really and substantially belong to the anterior moment; the differences that we observe in them some part of that particular consideration which we have disregarded in considering the development of Shakespeare, while recommending it as a theme for special study. As we find in works which represent a return to the period of youth, echoes of the mature period, so in youthful works we sometimes find anticipations and suggestions of the mature period. This is the case with Shakespeare, not only in certain situations and characters of the historical plays, but also in certain effects of the *Dream,* the *Merchant of Venice* and *Romeo and Juliet.*

As the result of our argument, we cannot pass from the ideal to the extrinsic or chronological order, and therefore it could only indicate caprice, were we to conclude from the fact that *Titus Andronicus* represents a literary Shakespeare or a theatrical imitator, that it must chronologically precede *Romeo and Juliet,* or even *Love's Labour's Lost.* The same

applies to the argument that because *Cymbeline,* the *Winter's Tale* and *Pericles* are composed of romantic material similar to that of *All's Well,* of *Much Ado* and of *Twelfth Night* (where we find innocent maidens falsely accused and afterwards triumphant, dead women, who turn out to be alive, women dressed as men, and the like), that they must all have been written at the same time. The same holds good of the historical plays: we cannot argue from the fact that these plays represent a more complex condition of the soul than the love comedies and the romantic plays, that the historical plays are all of them to be dated later than the two groups above-mentioned; or that for the same reasons, *Hamlet,* the first *Hamlet,* could not by any means have been composed by Shakespeare in his very earliest period, about 1592, as Swinburne asserts, swears and takes his solemn oath is the case: and who knows but he is right?

In like manner, we cannot pass from the chronological to the ideal order, and since the chronology, documentary or conjectural, places *Coriolanus* after *Hamlet,* and also after *Othello, Macbeth, Lear* and *Anthony and Cleopatra,* must not, therefore, insist upon finding

in it profound thoughts, which it does not contain, or deny that it belongs to the period of the "historical plays" with which it has the closest connection. Again, although the chronology places *Cymbeline* and the *Winter's Tale,* as has been said, in the last years of Shakespeare's life, we must not insist upon finding profound meanings in those works, or talk, as some have done, of a superior ethic, a "theological ethic," to which Shakespeare is supposed at last to have attained, or dwell upon the gracious idyllic scenes to be found in them, weighing them down with non-existent mysteries, making out that the Imogens and Hermiones are beings of equal or greater poetic intensity than Cordelia, or Desdemona, or take Leontes for Othello, Jacques for Iago, whereas, in the eyes of those possessed of poetic sentiment, the former stand to the latter in the relation of little decorative studies compared to works by Raphael or Giorgione. Proof of this is to be found in the fact that the latter have become popular and live in the hearts and minds of all, while the former please us, we admire them, and pass on.

All that can be admitted, because comformable to logic and experience, is that the two

orders in general — but quite in general, and therefore with several exceptions and disagreements — big and little — correspond to one another. Indeed, if we take the usual chronological order, as fixed by philologists and to be found in all Shakespearean manuals and at the head of the plays, with little variation, we see that the first comedies of love and the tragedy of Romeo and Juliet, including the romantic element, which is common to all of them, belong to the first period, between 1591 and 1592. We next find the historical plays, the comedies of love and the romantic dramas, closely associated; then begins the period of the great tragedies, *Julius Caesar* and *Anthony and Cleopatra*; then again, — after a return to anterior forms with *Coriolanus, Cymbeline* and the *Winter's Tale,*— we reach the *Tempest,* which seems to be the last, or among the last of Shakespeare's works.

Biographers have tried to explain the last period of Shakespeare's poetry in various ways, sometimes as the period of his "*becoming serene,*" sometimes as that of his "*poetical exhaustion*" sometimes as "*an attempt after new forms of art*"; but with such utterances as these, we find ourselves among those con-

jectural constructions, which we have purposely avoided, if for no other reason than that so many people, who are good for nothing else, make them every day, and we do not wish to deprive them of their occupation.

The *biographical* character of that period can be interpreted, as we please, as one of repose, of gay facility, of weariness, of expectation and training for new works, and so on: but the *poetical* character of the works in question, is such as we have described, and such as all see and feel that it is. It is too but a biographical conjecture, however plausible,— but certainly most graceful and pleasing —, which maintains that the magician Prospero, who breaks his wand, buries his book of enchantments, and dismisses his aerial spirit Ariel, ready to obey his every nod, symbolizes William Shakespeare himself, who henceforth renounces his art and takes leave of the imaginary world, which he had created for his own delight and in obedience to the law of his own development and where till then he had lived as sovereign.

CHAPTER X

THE ART OF SHAKESPEARE

The motives of Shakespeare's poetry having been described, there is no occasion for the further question as to the way in which he has made of them concrete poetry, in other words, as to the *form* he gave to that affective content. Form and content cannot be separated from one another and considered apart. For this reason, everything remarked of Shakespeare's poetry, provided that it is something real and well observed, must be either a repetition applied to Shakespeare of the statement as to the characteristics, that is to say, the unique character of all poetry, or a description in language more or less precise, beneath the title of " formal characteristics," of what constituted the physiognomy of the sentiment or sentiments of Shakespeare, thus returning to that determination of motives, of which we have treated above. Still less can we engage in an enquiry as to the *technique* of Shake-

speare, because the concept of technique is to be altogether banished from the sphere of aesthetic criticism, technique being concerned solely with the practical purposes of extrinsication, such as for poetry would be the training of a reciter's voice, or the making of the paper and the type, with which it is printed. There is no trade secret in Shakespeare, which can be communicated, no "part" that "can be taught and learned" (as has been maintained); in the best sense "technique" has value as a synonym of artistic form and in that way returns to become part of the dilemma above indicated.

Easy confirmation of this fact is to be found in any one of the many books that have been written on the "form" or on the "technique" of Shakespeare. Take for example the most intelligent of all, that by Otto Ludwig, written with much penetration of art in general and of Shakespearean art in particular, which contains the words that have been censured above. There we read, that in Shakespeare "everything is individualised, and at the same time idealised, by means of loftiness and power: every speech accords with the sentiment that has called it forth, every action with the char-

acter and situation, every character and situation depends upon every other one, and both upon the individuality of the time; every speech and every situation is yet more individualised by means of time and place, even by means of natural phenomena; in such a way that each one of his plays has its own atmosphere, now clearer, now more dark."

But of what poetry that is poetry cannot this individuated idealisation be affirmed or demanded? We read in the same volume that Shakespeare "is never speculative, but always holds to experience, as Shylock to the signature on the bond." But what poetry that is poetry ever does abandon the form of the sensible for the concept or for reasoning? The "supreme truth" of every particular of the representation is praised, but this does not exclude the use of the "symbolical," that is, of particulars which are not found in nature, but mean what they are intended to mean, and "give the impression of the most persuasive reality, although, indeed precisely because, not one word of them can be said to be true to nature." With such a statement as this, the utmost attained is a confutation of the pertinacious artistic heresy as to imitation of nature. We find

"Shakespearean totality" exalted, by means of which "a passion is like a common denominator of the capital sum, and the capital sum becomes in its turn the general denominator of the play." This "totality" is clearly synonymous with the lyrical character, which constitutes the poetry of every poem, including those that are called epic and dramatic, or narrative, and those in the form of dialogue. We find here too that nearly all the tragedies assume in a sense the "form of a sonata," which contains in close relation and contrast the theme, the idea of the hero and the counter-theme, and in the passages aforesaid develops the motives of the theme with "harmonious and contrapuntal characteristics" and "in the third part resumes the whole theme in a more tranquil manner, and in tragedy in a parallel minor key." But this imaginary technical excellence is nothing but the "musical character" of all art, which, like the "lyrical character," is certainly worth insisting upon as against the materially figurative and realistic interpretation of artistic representations. Analogous observations avail as to the "ideality" of "time" and "place," which Ludwig discovers in Shakespeare, and which are to be found in every poem, where

rhythm and form obey rules, which are by no means arithmetical or geometrical, but solely internal and poetic. They also avail against all the other statements of Ludwig and other critics as to typicity, impersonality, constancy of characteristics, which is also variability, and the like. These are all similes or metaphors for poetry, which is unique. It is true that some of these things are noted, just with a view to differentiate Shakespeare from other poets, and therefore assume a proper individual meaning, when we take truth as being the particular Shakespearean truth, his vision of things, and the sense which he reveals for the indivisible tie between good and evil existing in every man; for "impersonality," his attitude of irresolute but energetic dialectic, and so on; but in certain other cases, it is not a question of the form of Shakespeare, but, as has been said, of his own sentiment and of his motives of inspiration.

In one case only is it possible to separate form from content and to consider it in itself; that is to say, when the rhetorical method is applied to Shakespeare or to any other artist. This consists in separating form from content and making of it a garment, which be-

comes just nothing at all without the body with which it grew up, or gives rise to pure caprice and to the illusion that anyone can appropriate and adopt it to his own purposes. In romantic parlance (for there existed a romantic manner of speech) what was known as a mixture of comic and tragic, of prose and verse, what was called the "humorous, the grotesque, the fanciful," such as apparitions of mysterious and supernatural beings, and again the method that Shakespeare employed in production of his plays, his manner of treating the conflict and determining the catastrophe, the way in which he makes his personages speak, the quality and richness of his vocabulary, were enumerated as "characteristics of his art," things that others could employ if they wished to do so, and indeed they were so employed, with the poor results that one can imagine. This is the source of the anticritical terminology employed for Shakespeare and other poets, which discovers and magnifies his "ability," his "expedients," his "conveying of the necessary information without having the air of doing so," as though he were a calculator or constructor of instruments with certain practical ends, not a divine imagination. But enough of this.

Certainly, it would be possible to take one of the plays of Shakespeare, or all of them, one after the other, and having exposed their fundamental motive (this has been done), to illustrate their aesthetic coherence and to point out the delicacy of treatment, bit by bit, scene by scene, accent by accent, word by word. In *Macbeth,* for instance, might be shown the robust and potent unity of the affective tragical representation, which bursts out and runs like a lyric, all of a piece, everywhere maintaining complete harmony of parts, and each scene seeming to be a strophe of the poem, from its opening, with the sudden news of Macbeth's victories, and the joy and gratitude of the old king, immediately followed by the fateful meeting with the witches and by the kindling of the voracious desire, against which Macbeth struggles; down to the coming of the king to the castle, where ambush and death await his unsuspecting confidence; then the scene darkens, the murder takes place on that dread night, and Macbeth becomes gradually involved in a crescendo of crimes, up to the moment when the terrible tension ends in furious combat and the slaying of the hero. King Duncan, when he arrives at the gate of the castle, serene and

happy as he is, in the event which has given peace to his kingdom, lingers to enjoy the delicate air and to admire the amenity of the spot. Banquo echoes him, and abandons himself to innocent pleasure, in whole-hearted confidence, repeating that delicious little poem about the martlet, which has suspended everywhere on the walls of the castle its nest and fruitful cradle,

> "This guest of summer,
> The temple-haunting martlet,"

whose presence he has always observed, implies that the "air is delicate." In the whole of that quiet little conversation, we feel sympathy for the good old man, we shudder for what is coming and are sensible of the piteous wrong in things. When Macbeth crosses swords with Macduff, he remembers the last words of the witches' prophecy, which he believes to be favourable to himself; but when it becomes suddenly evident that Macduff it is, who shall slay him, he shudders and bursts out as before, with: "I will not fight with thee." This ejaculation reveals the violence of the shock and an instinctive movement of the will to live, which would elude its destiny. And we can pause at

any part of *Othello,* for instance, at the moment when Desdemona intercedes for Cassio, with the gentleness and coquetry of a woman in love, who knows that she is loved, and talks like a child, who knows it has the right to be a little spoilt; or at the moment when Desdemona is in the act of being slain, when she does not break into the complaints of innocence calumniated, nor assumes the attitude of a victim unjustly sacrificed, but like a poor creature of flesh and blood that loves life, loves love, and with childish egoism has abandoned her father for love, and now breaks out into childish supplications, trying to postpone and to retard death, at least for a few moments.

"O, banish me, my lord, but kill me not! . . .
Kill me to-morrow; let me live to-night! . . .
But half an hour! . . .
But while I say one prayer!"

We could in like manner enable anyone to understand the fabulous-human character of *King Lear,* who did not at once understand it for himself, by analysing the great initial scene between Lear and his three daughters, where, at the poet's touch, the story and the fabulous personages assume at one stroke a reality that

is the very strength of our abhorrence of dry egoism cloaking itself in affectionate words and also the very strength of our tender admiration for the true goodness, which conceals itself and does not speak ("What shall Cordelia do? Love and be silent").

This insistence upon analysis and eulogy will be of special value to those who do not immediately understand of themselves, owing either to preconceptions, to habitual lack of attention, to their slight knowledge of art or to their lack of penetration. It will be of use in schools, to promote good reading, and outside them, it may assist in softening those hard heads which belong sometimes to men of letters. But it does not form part of our object in writing this treatise, nor does it appear to form part of the duty of Shakespearean criticism, for Shakespeare is one of the clearest and most evident of poets, capable of being perfectly understood by men of slight or elementary culture. We run with impatience through the many prolix, aesthetic commentaries which we already possess on his plays, as we should certainly listen with impatience to anyone who should draw our attention to the fact that the sun is shining brightly in the sky at midday,

that it is gilding the country with its light, making sparkle the dew, and playing with its rays upon the leaves.

On the other hand, it is not inopportune to record that excellence in his art was long denied or contested to Shakespeare. This was the general view of his contemporaries themselves, because we now know what we are to think of the words of praise, which we find relating to him in the literature of his time. These had been diligently traced and collected by scholars, but had been more or less deliberately misunderstood, and interpreted in a sense opposed to their correct meaning, which was that of benevolent sympathy and condescending praise for a poet of popular appeal, approximately what we should employ now for a lively and pleasing writer of romantic adventures. Similar judgments reappeared in a different style and at a different time in the famous utterances of Voltaire, which vary in their intonation according to his humour: such are *barbare aimable, fou séduisant, sauvage ivre,* and the like. They do not appear to have lost their weight especially in France, where a certain Monsieur Pellissier has filled a large volume with them, coming to the conclusion that

the work of Shakespeare, "malgré tant de beautés admirables est un immense fouillis," and that it generally seems to be, "celle d'un écolier, d'un écolier génial, qui n'ayant ni expérience, ni mesure, ni tact, gaspille prématurément son génie abortif." Finally (and this has greater weight), Jusserand, a learned historian of English literature, treating of Shakespeare with great display of erudition, presents him as "un fidéle serviteur" of his theatrical public, and speaks of his "défauts énormes." Châteaubriand, in his essay of 1801, playing the Voltaire in his turn, attributed to him "le génie," while he denied to him "l'art," the observance of the "règles" and "genres," which are "nés de la nature même"; but later he recognises that he was wrong to "mesurer Shakespeare avec la lunette classique." Here he put his finger on the fundamental mistake of that sort of criticism, which judges art, not by its intrinsic qualities, but by comparison with other works of art, which are taken as models. The same mistake was renewed, when French tragedy was not the model, but the art of realistic modern drama and fiction. The principal document in support of this is Tolstoi's book, where at every word or gesture of Shake-

speare's characters, he exclaims that men do not speak thus, that is to say, the men who are not man in universal, but the men of Tolstoi's romances, though these latter happen to be far nearer to the characters of Shakespeare than their great, but unreasonable and quite uncritical author suspected. Tolstoi arrives at the point of preferring the popular and unpoetical play *King Lear,* to the *King Lear* of Shakespeare, because there is more logic in the conduct of the plot in the former, thus showing that he prefers minute prosaic details to sublime poetry.

An attenuated form of these views as to the lack of art in Shakespeare is the theory maintained better by Rümelin than by others, to the effect that the characters in Shakespeare are worth a great deal more than the action or plots, which are disconnected, intermittent, contradictory and without any feeling for verisimilitude. He also holds that Shakespeare works on each scene, without having the power of visualising the preceding scene, or the one that is to follow, and also that the characters themselves do not respect the truth of dialogue and of the drama, in their manner of speech, which is always fiery, imaginative and splendid.

Finally, it might be said of him that he composes beautiful music for libretti, which are more or less ill constructed. Now if this theory had for its object to assert, though with emphasis and exaggeration, that in a poetical work the material part of the story, the web of events, does not count, and that the only thing of importance is the soul that circulates within it, just as in a picture, it is not the material side of the things painted (which is called by critics of painting "the literary element," or that which taken in itself is external and without importance), but the rhythm of the lines and of the colours, what he maintained would be correct, if only as a reaction. Coleridge has already noted the independence of the dramatic interest from the intrigue and quality of the story, which in the Shakespearean drama, was obtained from the best known and commonest sources. But the object with which this theory was conceived by Rümelin and with which it is generally maintained, has for its object to establish a dualism or contradiction in the art of Shakespeare, by proving him to be "strong" in one domain of the spirit and "weak" in another, where strength in both is "necessary," in order to produce a perfect work.

We are bound to deny with firmness this assumption: we refuse to admit the existence of any such dualism and contradiction, because the distinction between characters and actions, between style and dialogue and style and work, is arbitrary, scholastic and rhetorical. There is in Shakespeare one poetical stream, and it is impossible to set its waters against one another — characters against actions, and the like. So true is this, that save in cold blood, one does not notice his so-called contradictions, omissions and improbabilities, that is to say, when we leave the poetical condition of the spirit and begin to examine what we have read, as though it were the report of an occurrence. Nor is the imputation cast upon the speech of Shakespeare's characters, which is perfectly consonant with the nature of the poems, admissible. Hence from the lips of Macbeth and of Lady Macbeth, of Othello and of Lear, came true and proper lyrics. These are not interruptions and dissonances in the play, but motions and upliftings of the play itself; they are not the superposition of one life upon another, but the outpouring of that life, which is continued in the central motive. These witticisms, conceits and misunderstandings in *Romeo and Juliet,*

which have so often been blamed, are to be explained, at least in great measure, in a natural way, as the character of the play, as the comedy, which precedes and imparts its colour to the tragedy, and is brilliant with the fashionable and gallant speech of the day.

In making the foregoing statement, we do not wish to deny that in the drama of Shakespeare are to be found (besides historical, geographical, and chronological errors, which are indifferent to poetry but not necessary and for that reason avoidable or to be avoided) words and phrases, and sometimes entire scenes, which are not justifiable, save for theatrical reasons. We do not know to what extent they had his assent and to what extent they are due to the very confused tradition, under the influence of which the text of his works has descended to us. We also do not wish to deny that he was guilty of little oversights and contradictions, and that he was perhaps generally negligent. But it is important in any case to understand and bear in mind the psychological reasons for this negligence, inspired with that sort of indifference and contempt for the easy perfecting of certain details, of those engaged upon works of great magni-

tude and importance. Giambattista Vico, a mighty spirit who resembles Shakespeare, both in his full, keen sense of life and in the adventures of his work and of his fame, was also apt frequently to overlook details and to make slight mistakes, and was convinced "that diligence must lose itself in arguments, which have anything of greatness in them, because it is a minute, and because minute a tardy virtue." Thus he openly vindicated the right of rising to the level of heroic fury, which will not brook delay from small and secondary matters.

As Vico was nevertheless most accurate in essentials, never sparing himself the most lengthy meditations to sound the bottom of his thoughts, so it is impossible to think that Shakespeare did not give the best and greatest part of himself to his plays, that he was not continually intent upon observing, reflecting comparing, examining his own feelings, seeking out and weighing his expressions, collecting and valuing the impressions of the public and of his colleagues in art, in fact, upon the study of his art. The precision, the delicacy, the gradations, the shading of his representations, are an irrefragable proof of this. The sense of classic form is often denied to him, even by his

admirers, that is to say, of a partial and old-fashioned ideal of classical form, consisting of certain external regularities. But he was a classic, because he possessed the strength that is sure of itself, which does not exert itself, nor proceed in a series of paroxysmal leaps, but carries in itself its own moderation and serenity. He had that taste which is proper to genius and commensurate with it, because genius without taste is an abstraction to be found only in the pages of treatises. The various passages, where he chances to find an opportunity for theorizing on art, show that he had profoundly meditated the art he practised. In one of the celebrated passages of the *Dream,* he makes Theseus say,

"The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shape, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name."

And that a powerful imagination, if it is affected by some joy, imagines someone as the bringer of that joy, and if it imagine some nocturnal terror, it changes a bush into a wild beast with

great facility. That is to say, he shows himself conscious of the creative virtue of poetry and of its origin in the feelings, which it changes into persons, endowed with ethereal sentiment. But in the equally celebrated passage of *Hamlet,* he dwells upon the other aspect of artistic creation, upon its universality, and therefore upon its calm and harmony. What Hamlet chiefly insists upon in his colloquy with the players, is " moderation," " for in the very torrent, tempest, and, as I may say, the whirlwind of passion, you must acquire and beget a temperance that may give it smoothness." To declare Shakespeare to be a representative of the frenzied and convulsed style in poetry, as has been done several times, is to utter just the reverse of the truth. In this respect, it is well to read the contemporary dramatists, with a view to measuring the difference, indeed the abyss between them. In the famous *Spanish Tragedy* of Kyd, there is a scene (perhaps due to another hand) in which Hieronymus asks a painter to paint for him the assassin of his own son, and cries out:

" There you may show a passion, there you may show
a passion. . . .
Make me rave, make me cry, make me mad,

Make me well again, make me curse hell,
Invocate, and in the end leave me
In a trance, and so forth."

The same character is attacked by doubt and asks with anxiety: "Can this be done?" and the painter replies: "Yes, Sir."

Such was not the method of Shakespeare, who would have made the painter reply, not with a yes, but with a yes and a no together.

His art, then, was neither defective nor vitiated in any part of its own constitutive character, although certain works are obviously weak and certain parts of other works, in the vast mass that goes under his name. Such youthful plays as *Love's Labour's Lost, The Two Gentlemen,* the *Comedy of Errors,* are not notable, save for a certain ease and grace, only manifesting in certain places the trace of his profound spirit. The "historical plays," are as we have already shown, fragmentary and do not form complete poems animated with a single breath of passion. Some of them, and especially the first part of *Henry VI,* have about them an arid quality and are loosely anecdotal; in others, such as *Henry IV* and *Henry V,* is evident the desire to stimulate patriotic feelings, and they are further burdened with scenes

of a purely informative nature. *Coriolanus* too, which was apparently composed later and is derived from a different source, also lacks complete internal justification, for it consists of a study of characters. *Timon* (assuming that it was his) is developed in a mechanical manner, although it is full of social and ethical observations and possesses rhetorical fervour. *Cymbeline* and the *Winter's Tale* contain lovely scenes, but are not as a whole works of the first order; the idyllic and romantic Shakespeare appears in them to have rather declined in comparison to the author of the earlier plays of the same sort, inspired with a very different vigour. *Measure for Measure* contains sentiments and personages that are profoundly Shakespearean, as the protagonist Angelo, the meter out of inexorable justice, so sure of his own virtue, who yields to the first sensual temptation that occurs, in Claudius, who wishes and does not wish to die, and in the Barnadine already mentioned. This play, which oscillates between the tragic and the comic, and has a happy ending, instead of forming a drama of the sarcastic-sorrowful-horrible sort, fails to persuade us that it should have been thus developed and thus ended. There is something

of the composite in the structure of the wonderful *Merchant of Venice,* and certain of the scenes of *Troilus and Cressida,* such as those of the speeches of Ulysses and those on the other side of Hector and Troilus, seem to be echoes or even entire pieces taken from historical plays and transported with ironic intention into comedy. Points of this sort are to be found even in the great tragedies. In *Lear,* for instance, the adventures of Gloucester and his son are not completely satisfactory, grafted as they are upon those of the king and his daughters, either because they introduce too realistic an element into a play with an imaginary theme, or because they create a heavy parallelism, much praised by an Italian critic, who has attempted to express *King Lear* in a geometrical form; but the origin for this parallelism may perhaps be really due to the need for theatrical variety, complication and suspense, rather than to any moral purpose of emphasising horror at ingratitude. The clown, who accompanies the king, abounds in phrases, which are not all of them in place and significant. But if to set about picking holes in the beauties of Shakespeare's plays has seemed to us a superfluous and tiresome occupation, such too, from an-

other point of view and in addition pedantic and irreverent, seems to be the investigation of defects that we observe in them; they are opaque points, which the eye does not observe in the splendour of such a sun.

Another judgment which also has vogue refers to a constitutive or general defect in Shakespeare's poetry, a certain limit or barrier in it, a narrowness, albeit an ample and a rich narrowness. We must distinguish two forms of this judgment, the first of which might be represented by the epigrams of Platen, who, while recognising Shakespeare's power to move the heart and the strength of his characterisation, declared that "so much truth is a fatal gift," and that Shakespeare draws so incisively, only because he cannot veil his personages in grace and beauty. He greatly admired even what is painful in Shakespeare, looking upon it as beautiful, and was full of admiration for his comical figures, such as Falstaff and Shylock, "an incomparable couple"; but he denied to Shakespeare true tragic power, which "must open the deepest of wounds and then heal them." The second of these forms is the commonest, and Mazzini may stand as its representative. He maintained that Shakespeare

was a poet of the real, not of the ideal, of the isolated individual, not of society; that he was not dominated by the thought of duty and responsibility towards mankind, as expressed in politics and history, that his was a voice rather of the Middle Ages than of modern times, which found their origin in Schiller, the poet of humanity and Providence.

Even Harris's book concludes with a series of reservations: he says that Shakespeare was neither a philosopher nor a sage; that he never conceived a personage as contesting and combating his own time; that he had only a vague idea of the spirit by which man is led to new and lofty ideals in every historical period; that he was unable to understand a Christ or a Mahomet; that instead of studying, he ridiculed Puritanism and so remained shut up in the Renaissance, and that for these reasons, in spite of *Hamlet;* he does not belong to the modern world, that the best of a Wordsworth or of a Tolstoi is outside him, and so on. We may perfectly admit all this and it may even be of use in putting a curb upon such hyperbole and such superlatives as those of Coleridge, to the effect that Shakespeare was *anér myriónous,* the myriad-minded man (although even this my-

riad-mindedness may seem to be but a very ample narrowness, if myriads be taken as a finite number).

Shakespeare could never have desired to possess the ideal of beauty, which visited the soul of the hirsute and unfortunate Platen, the social or humanitarian ideals of the Schillers and Tourgueneffs. But he had no need whatever of these things to attain the infinite, which every poet attains, reaching the centre of the circle from any point of the periphery. For this reason, no poet, whatever the historical period at which he was born and by which he is limited, is the poet of only one historical epoch. Shakespeare formed himself during the period of the Renaissance, which he surpasses, not with his practical personality, but with his poetry. There is nothing, then, for these limiters to do, save to manifest their dissatisfaction with poetry itself, which is always limited-unlimited. This, I think, was also the case with Emerson, who lamented that Shakespeare (whom he nevertheless placed in the good company of Homer and of Dante) "rested in the beauty of things and never took the step of investigating the virtue that resides in symbols," which seemed to be inevitable for such

a genius, and that "he converted the elements awaiting his commands," into a diversion, and gave "half truths to half men": whereas, according to Emerson, the entire truth for entire men could only be given by a personage whom the world still awaits. To Emerson, this personage seemed most attractive, but to others he may possibly perhaps seem as little amiable as Antichrist: he called him "the poet-priest."

CHAPTER XI

SHAKESPEAREAN CRITICISM

Criticism of Shakespeare, like every criticism, has followed and expressed the progress and alternations of the philosophy of art, or aesthetic; it has been strong or weak, profound or superficial, well-balanced or one-sided, according to the doctrines that have there been realised. Their history would form an excellent History of Aesthetic, because the fame of Shakespeare became widespread, concurrently with the spread of aesthetic theory, with its liberation from external norms and concepts, and its penetration to the heart of its subject. Shakespeare's poetry in its turn stimulated this deepening of the theory of aesthetic, by its revelation of a poetic world, for emotion and admiration, in appearance at least, very different from what had previously passed as its sole and perfect example. But since we are occupied at the present moment with Shakespeare and not with aesthetic theory, we shall touch

only upon certain points of this criticism, in order the more firmly to establish by indirect proof the judgment expressed above, and to indicate certain obstacles, which the student of Shakespeare will meet with in critical literature relating to that poet. Our description and definition of them may render avoidable certain of the most common errors.

Among these must be included (not in the seat of criticism, but in the entrance-hall and at the gates) what may be called *exclamatory* criticism, which instead of understanding a poet in his particularity, his finite-infinity, drowns him beneath a flood of superlatives. This is the method employed by English writers towards Shakespeare (I am bound to admit that the Italians do the same as regards Dante). An example of this habit, selected from innumerable others, is Swinburne's book, from which we learn that "it would be better that the world should lose all the books it contains rather than the plays of Shakespeare"; that Shakespeare is "the supreme creator of men"; that he "stands alone," and at the most might admit "Homer on his right and Dante on his left hand"; then, as to individual plays, we learn that the trilogy of *Henry IV–V* suffices

to reveal him as "the greatest playwright of the world," that the *Dream* stands "without and above any possible or imaginable criticism." Thus he continues, puffing out his cheeks to find hyperboles, which themselves finally turn out to be inferior to hyperbolic requirements. Sometimes such exclamations not only border on the ridiculous, but fall right into it, as is the case with Carlyle, who stood in perplexity before the hypothetical dilemma, as to whether England could better afford to lose "the empire of India or Shakespeare." Victor Hugo, more generous, and an admirer of the ocean, constituted a series of *hommes océans,* where the tragic poet of Albion found a place alongside of Aeschylus, Dante, Michael-Angelo, Isaiah and Juvenal.

Another style of criticism, *by images* to be found in works that are estimable in other respects, is somewhat akin to this criticism without criticism, besides being far more justifiable, because, if it does not explain, it tries at least to give, as though in a poetical translation, a synthetic impression of Shakespeare's art and of the physiognomy of his various works. It describes the works of Shakespeare by means of landscapes and other pictures, as Herder

and other writers of the *Sturm und Drang* period delighted in doing. Coleridge too did likewise and Hazlitt even more often, as may be shown by an extract from the letter of a certain Miss Florence O'Brien, on *King Lear,* to be found in well-nigh all books that deal with this tragedy. She begins: "This play is like a tempestuous night: the first scene is like a wild sunset, grandiose and terrible, with gusts of wind and rumblings of thunder, which announce the imminence of the hurricane: then comes a furious tempest of madness and folly, through which we see darkly the monstrous and unnatural figures of Goneril and Regan"; et cetera. The danger of such poetical variations is that of superimposing one art on another, and of leading astray or of distracting the attention from the genuine features of the original to be enjoyed and understood, in the attempt to render its effect.

Let us pass over *biographical-aesthetic* criticism: its fundamental error and the arbitrary judgments with which it disturbs both biography and the criticism of art have already been sufficiently illustrated; and let us also pass over the *aesthetic* criticism of *philologists,* who imagine themselves to be interpreting and judg-

ing poetry, when they are talking mere philology and uttering ineptitudes prepared with infinite pains. Being confined to citing but one example of their method, I would select for that purpose Furnivall's introduction to the *Leopold Shakespeare.* I fail to understand why this introduction is so highly esteemed and reverenced. Furnivall too, when he contrives not to lose himself in exclamations and attempts poetry, ("who could praise Falstaff sufficiently?" "who could fail to love Percy?" "the countess mother in *All's Well* resembles one of Titian's old ladies"; etc.), amuses himself by establishing links between the plays. These he discovers in the situations, in the action and elsewhere, regarding the works externally and from a general point of view. Thus he discovers a connection between *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet,* in the repetition of the name of "Caesar," which is found thrice in the latter play, in the mouth of Horatio, of Polonius and of Hamlet, on the occasion of both seeing a ghost, in Hamlet's feeling that he must avenge his father like Antonius Caesar, and in the likeness of character between Brutus and Hamlet's father. Thus he attains to the ridiculous, as Carlyle and Swinburne by another

route, when, for instance, he affirms that "in a certain sense Hotspur (the fiery Hotspur of *Henry IV*) is Kate (that is to say, the shrew in the *Taming of the Shrew*), become a man and bearing armour!"

We shall also not dwell upon *rhetorical* criticism, which employs the method of "styles." This method, after having rejected Shakespeare, because he does not pay attention to the different styles of writing (French criticism), and having then proceeded to reconcile him with styles as explained by Aristotle in his *Poetics,* when these are well understood (Lessing), having sung his praises as the "genius of the drama," the "Homer of dramatic style" (Gervinus), is still seeking for what is "his alone and individually" in "the treatment" of the "drama." This it will never find, because such a thing as a "dramatic style" does not exist in the world of poetry: what does exist is simply and solely "poetry." These questions of literary style are now rather out of date: they survive rather in the lazy repetition of words and forms than in actual substance. It is certainly surprising to know that there still exist persons who examine what are called the "historical plays," and because they are

" historical," compare them with history books, blaming the poet for not having given to Caesar the part that should have been his in *Julius Caesar,* and quoting in support of their argument (like Brandes) the histories of Mommsen and of Boissier. And there are also fossils who discuss in the language of the sixteenth century, verisimilitude, incongruity or multiplicity of plot, congruity or reverse of characters, crudeness of expression, and observation or failure to observe by Shakespeare the rules of dramatic composition. To German criticism of the speculative period and to the vast monographs that it produced upon Shakespeare must be given the credit of having tried to discover and determine the *soul* of Shakespeare's poetry. We must also admit, as a general quality of scientific German books on literature, even when these are of the heaviest and most full of mistakes, that they do make us feel the presence of problems not yet solved, whereas other books, more easy to read, better written and perhaps less full of mistakes, are less fruitful of thoughts that arise by repercussion or reaction. Unfortunately, these German writers imagined that soul to reside in a sort of *philosophical, moral, political and historical*

teaching, upon which Shakespeare was supposed to have woven his plays. This was a flagrant offence against all sense of poetry, for not only did they forget the poetical in favour of the non-poetical; and attributed equal value to all of Shakespeare's widely differing works, whatever their real value, but also, since this non-poetical teaching had no existence, they set about creating it on their own account by means of various subtleties, and of a sort of allegorical exegesis. Thus in Ulrici, Gervinus, Kreyssig, Vischer and others like them, we read with astonishment, that in *Richard III* (to take a historical play) Shakespeare wished to impart "an immortal doctrine upon the divine right of kings and their intangibility," and at the same time to give warning that it does not suffice a king to be conscious of his right divine, unless he be prepared to maintain it with force against force. These writers have an almost prophetic vision that Germany will need this lesson in the case of its romantic king, Frederick William IV of Prussia! In the *Tempest* again (to take an imaginative play) Shakespeare is supposed by them to have desired to give his opinion upon the great question, common to our time and his, as to the right of

Europeans to colonise and the need of subjecting the native savage by means of whip and sword, free of any scruple dictated by false sentiment. Finally (to take a last example from the great tragedies), they held that the ideal teaching of *Othello* is that punishment awaits unequal marriages, marriage between persons of different race, or different social condition, or of different age; and that Desdemona deserved her cruel fate, for she was weighed down with sin, having disobeyed her old father, imprudently and over-warmly supported the cause of Cassio, and shown negligence and lack of care in handling the famous handkerchief, which she let fall at her feet! We can only reply to all this in the witty words of Rümelin, *à propos* of such incredible interpretations of Shakespeare's catastrophes, to the effect that this "dramatic justice," so dear to German aestheticians, is "like Draco's sanguinary code, which decreed a single penalty for all misdeeds: death."

Numberless are the shocks that the artistic consciousness receives from such a method as this. Gervinus, who professed "an even firmer belief in Shakespeare's infallibility in matters of morality than in his lack of aesthetic de-

fects," is indignant with readers disposed to find hard and cruel Prince Henry's repulse on coming to the throne, of his old friend Falstaff, the companion of his merry adventures. He gravely declares that this proves modern readers to be "far inferior both to Prince Henry and to Shakespeare in nobility and ethical fervour"; whereas it is evident that the poor readers are right, because we have to deal here with poetical images, not with practical and moral acts, and readers justly feel that Shakespeare was on this occasion obeying certain ends outside the province of art. Falstaff is sympathetic to every reader: even Gervinus does not dare to declare him antipathetic, but sets about finding plausible explanations for this illicit attractiveness. He produces three: the artistic perfection of the representation, the logical perfection of the type, and the struggle between the will for pleasure that always stimulates Falstaff, and his old age and his paunch, which hinder or make him impotent, and according to Gervinus, are bestowed upon him, in order to appease or mitigate our shocked sense of ethical severity. But the only and obvious explanation of Falstaff's sympathetic attractiveness is the sympathy which the poet himself felt

in his genial way for him as a human force. In like manner, what we have held to be an error of composition, such as the story of Gloucester and his sons forming a parallel with that of Lear, is held to be a miracle by the professors aforesaid, because, as says Ulrici, the poet wished to teach us that "moral corruption is not isolated, but diffused among the most noble families, representative of all the others." Vischer holds a similar view, to the effect that Shakespeare "intended to show that, if impiety is widely diffused, society becomes impossible, and the world rocks to its foundation; but one instance of this did not suffice, so he had to accumulate the most terrifying confirmation of the fact."

These professors are also unanimous in rejecting the interpretation of the words: "He has no sons!" uttered by Macduff, when he learns that Macbeth has caused his wife and little son to be murdered, as they are understood by the ingenuous reader, namely, that Macduff thus expresses his rage at not being able to take an equal vengeance upon Macbeth, by slaying his sons. Their reason for this is that such a thing would be unworthy of so upright and honourable a man as Macduff. As

though such honourable men as Macduff are not subject to the impulse of anger and capable of at least momentary blindness; as though the eyes, even of Manzoni's Father Christopher did not sometimes blaze "with a sudden vivacity," though he kept them as a rule fixed on the ground, as if (in the word of the author), they were two queer-tempered horses, driven by a coachman, whom they know to be their master, yet they will nevertheless indulge in an occasional frolic, for which they immediately atone with a good pull on the bit.

That is what happens to Macduff, who assumes possession of himself when he hears Malcolm's words that immediately follow. "Dispute it like a man,"— and says: "I shall do so; but I must also feel it like a man."

Quitting psychology and returning to poetry, nothing short of Malcolm's savage outburst can express his torment, in the climax of the dialogue. Were Shakespeare himself to come forward and declare that he meant what those insipid, moralising professors declare that he meant, Shakespeare would be wrong, and whoever said that he was wrong, would be in better accordance with his genius than he himself, for

he was a genius, only upon condition of remaining true to the logic of poetry.

We could fill a large volume with the misinterpretations of moralising and philosophising Shakespearean critics, but it is hoped that having here demonstrated the absurdity of the principle, readers should be able to recognise it for themselves, in its sources and methods of approach.

But it would need a series of volumes to catalogue all the absurdities of another form of Shakespearean criticism, which differs from the preceding, in being in full flower and vigour today: we refer to *objectivistic* criticism. The reason for this is that few are yet fully aware that every kind and example of art is only successful to the extent that it is irradiated with a sentiment, which determines and controls it in all its parts. This used to be denied of certain forms of poetry, particularly of the dramatic; hence the false, but extremely logical deduction of Leopardi, that the dramatic was the lowest and least noble kind of poetry, because it was the most remote and alien from pure form, which is the lyric. Shakespeare's objectivity of "representation" and the perfect "reality" of his characters, which live their

own lives independently are often praised. This can be said in a certain sense, but must not be taken literally, for it is metaphorical; because, when we would reach and handle those images of the poet's sentiment, there may not be an "explosion" (as happened when Faust threw himself upon the phantom of Helen), but in any case they will lose their shape, fall into shreds and vanish before our eyes. In their place will appear an infinite number of insoluble questions as to the manner of understanding or reëstablishing their solidity and coherence. What is known as the *Hamlet-Litteratur* is the most appalling of all these manifestations and it is daily on the increase. Historians, psychologists, lovers of amorous adventures, gossips, police-spies, criminologists investigate the character, the intentions, the thoughts, the affections, the temperament, the previous life, the tricks they played, the secrets they hid, their family and social relations, and so on, and crowd, without any real claim to do so, round the "characters of Shakespeare," detaching them from the creative centre of the play and transferring them into a pretended objective field, as though they were made of flesh and blood.

Among those inclined to such realistic and antipoetical investigation, some there are, who see in Hamlet a pleasure-seeker, called to the achievement of an undertaking beyond his powers; others find in him a scrupulous person, who struggles between the call to vengeance and his better moral conscience, or one who studies vengeance, but without staining his conscience. For others again, he is an artistic genius, inclined to contemplation, but ill-adapted to action, or a partial genius not adapted to artistic creation, or a pure soul, or an impure and diseased soul, or a decadent, or a sexual psychopath, obsessed with lust and incest. We find others able to discover that he inherited the characteristics of a father, who was tyrannical, vicious and a bad husband, and of an uncle possessed of a lofty soul and capacity for governing a kingdom. Finally, some have even suspected him of not being a man, but a woman, daughter of the king, disguised as a man, and for that reason and for no other, rejecting the beautiful Ophelia and seeking Horatio, with whom she (Hamlet) was secretly in love. And what kind of maiden was Ophelia? Was she naïve and innocent, or was she not rather a malicious little court lady? Perhaps she too

had her secret, which would explain her strange relations with Hamlet. An English enquirer has arrived at the conclusion that Ophelia was not chaste, that she had given birth to a baby, and what is more, to a baby whose father was not Hamlet, and that this was the reason why Hamlet advised her to get her to a nunnery, and the priest refused to give her body Christian burial. Her brother, Laertes, had lived in Paris, and having there learned French customs, was for this reason so ready to accept the advice of the king to use a poisoned sword. According to some, Macbeth was so powerfully restrained by his own conscience, that, save for his wife, he would never have satisfied his ambition and slain King Duncan. But according to others, he had meditated regicide for some time and had deferred his design, because he hoped to succeed in a legitimate manner, were the king to die without an heir. But he broke truce, when the king contemplated bestowing upon his son the title of Duke of Cumberland, that is to say, Crown Prince. For many, Lady Macbeth is a cold, pitiless woman, but for others she is tender and sweet by nature; for some, she is madly in love with her husband, for others, madly incensed with

him, because, judging by his undoubted military prowess, she had at first believed him to possess the great soul of a conqueror, and then, when she found him vile with human mildness, sensible of scruples and remorse perturbed at the results of his own deeds, to the extent of experiencing hallucinations and behaving rashly, she is consumed with scorn and dies of a broken heart, on the fall of that idol and which she had aspired, the perfect criminal.

Othello has been by some identified with a Moor, a Berber, a Mauritanian, for others he is without doubt a bestial negro, boiling with African blood. Iago is generally characterised as amoral and Machiavellian, a true Italian; but others deem him worthy the name of "honest Iago," because he was good, amiable, serviceable in all things — when his personal ambition was not at stake.

By some, Desdemona has been held to be desirable as a wife (others, on the other hand, would be ready to marry Cordelia or Ophelia, others Imogen or Hermione, others the nun Isabel, and finally there are some who would prefer Portia, as "an ideal woman," and a "perfect wife"); but as regards this, there are some who have divined the secret tendencies of

Desdemona and have had no hesitation in defining her as " a virtual courtesan."

Then again: what was the difference of age between Othello and Desdemona? Had Othello seen the wonderful things existing in other countries of which he speaks, or had he imagined them, or had he been told of them? Perhaps he had enjoyed the wife of Iago, which would explain the regard he has for the husband?

Brutus, until lately, passed for an idealist tormented with ideals; but more accurate investigations have revealed him to be a hypocrite in the Puritan manner, who, by means of repeated lies, ends by himself believing the noble motives to be found on his lips; however, things turn out badly and he finally receives the punishment he deserves.

Falstaff's religious origin has been discovered: he was a Lollard, and thus a declared eudemonist, convinced of the nullity of the world and of the inutility of life, living from minute to minute. He is not really a liar and a boaster, but an imaginative person; nor is he vile, save in appearance; he should be regarded rather as an opportunist.

We read these and an infinity of other not

less astonishing statements in the volumes, opuscules and articles which are published every year upon the characters of Shakespeare. The effect of such discussions, even where most sensibly written, is never to clear up or decide anything, but on the contrary, to darken what appeared perfectly certain, and gave no reason for any difficulty, to render uncertain what was clearly determined. Such works give rise further to the doubt that Shakespeare was perhaps so inexpert a writer as not to be able to represent his own conceptions, nor express his own thoughts.

But when we do not allow ourselves to be caught in the meshes of these fictitious problems, of which we indicated the *proton pseudos,* when we resolutely banish them from the mind, and read and reread Shakespeare's plays without more ado, everything remains or becomes clear again, everything, that is to say, which should (as is natural) be clear for the ends of poetry, in a poetical work. As Grillparzer remarked in his time, that very Hamlet, whom Goethe took such trouble to explain psychologically, and over whom so many hundreds of interpreters have so diligently toiled, " is understood with perfect ease by the tailor or the

bootmaker sitting in the gallery, who understands the whole of the play by raising his own feelings to its level."

From this derives another consequence: Shakespeare has been loudly praised for his portentous fidelity to nature and reality, but at the same time the critics, as quoted above, have placed obstacles of various sorts in the way of those who would understand him so it has been freely stated that Shakespeare is certainly a great poet, but that his method is not that of "fidelity," to nature, on the contrary, he violates "reality" at every turn, creating characters and situation, "which are not found in nature." It would be better to say simply that Shakespeare, like every poet, is neither in accordance nor in disaccordance with external reality (which for that matter is what each one of us likes to make and to imagine in his own way), for the reason that he has nothing to do with it, being intent upon the creation of his own spiritual reality.

The third great misadventure that has befallen Shakespeare, after those of the moralising and psychological-objectivistic critics, is his transference, we will not call it his promotion, to the position of a *German,* opposed to that of

a *Latin* or neo-Latin poet. It is not difficult to trace the origin of this transference, when we remember that Shakespeare was looked upon, both by his contemporaries and yet more so when rediscovered in the eighteenth century, as a spontaneous, rough, natural, popular poet, just the opposite of the cultured, mannered school, in which, however, he had shown evidence of prowess with the lesser poems and the sonnets.

This conception of his as a natural poet is found in the first school of the new German literature, known as the *Sturm und Drang,* which cultivated the idea of "genius"; and from this arose the idea of Shakespeare as the expression of "pure virgin genius, ignorant of rules and limits, a force as irresistible as those of nature" (Gerstenberg). And since the new German poets and men of letters greatly admired him, and as has been said, the new Aesthetic understood him much better than the old Poetic had done or been able to do, instead of this better sympathy and intelligence being attributed to the spiritual dispositions of the Germans of that period and to the progress that they were effecting in the life of thought, it was attributed to affinity and relationship, which

was supposed to connect the German spirit with that of Shakespeare. It is true that this theory was soon found to lack foundation, because the best German critics, among whom were August William Schlegel, proved that there was as much art and regularity in Shakespeare as in any other poet, although they were not the same in him as in others, and he did not obey contingent and arbitrary rules.

It is also true that to a Frenchman was due the first revelation of Shakespeare outside his own country: Voltaire, with his *odi et amo,* has always been blamed and held up to ridicule for the negative side of his criticism, but the positive side of it, the mental courage, the freshness of mental impressions, which his interest in Shakespeare, his admiration for his sublimity, deserved, have not been sufficiently remarked. But it is likewise true that France has never understood Shakespeare well, owing to her classical tradition in literature and her intellectualist tradition in philosophy, though we do not forget her fugitive enthusiasms for the poet. Even to-day, Maeterlinck notes "la profonde ignorance" that still reigns "de l'oeuvre shakespearienne," even among "les plus lettrés." This afforded an opportunity

for underlining the antithesis between "German" and "French" taste, which was soon, but without any justification, expanded into "Latin" taste.

The English of that period, both in speech and literature, were almost as indifferent to Shakespeare as were the French. This was observed and commented upon in a lively manner, among others by Schlegel, Tieck, Platen and Heine. However, the new methods of German criticism soon made their influence felt in England (Coleridge, Hazlitt), and it seemed to the Germans that these writers had preserved the true tradition of the race and had reillumined the fire that was languishing or had been altogether extinguished among their brethren of the same race, and that they had dissipated the heavy cloud of classical, French and Latin taste, which was hanging over England. To their real merit in recognising the fame of Shakespeare and their profound study of the poet, and to the false interpretation that they gave of these merits by attributing them to the virtue of their race, were added, for well known political reasons, German pride and self-conceit, which did the rest. All the moralising critics, to whom we have referred, were also

critics imbued with the German spirit. They united the austere morality, which they discovered in Shakespeare and his heroes, to celebration of the German nature of these qualities and of the poet. They set in opposition the genuine, rude, realistic quality of Shakespeare's poetry, to the artificial, cold, schematic poetry of the Latins. They celebrated the Germanism of a Henry IV (his wild youth is just that of a German youth, says Gervinus; it is the genius of the German race, with its incorruptible health, its strength of marrow, its infinite depths of feeling, beneath a hard and angular exterior, its childlike humility, its wealth of humour, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera, says Kreyssig), of a Hamlet (naturally, because he is represented as a student of Wittenberg) and so on, through the Ophelias and the Cordelias, and even the characters of the comedies, such as Benedick and Biron (this last "possessing a character entirely German," "with the harshness of a Saxon," humorous, remote from sentimentality and affectation, and therefore "out of place among the gallantries of Latin society"— all the above is taken from Gervinus).

Shakespeare's place "is in the Pantheon of the Germanic people, in the sanctuary richly

adorned with all the gods and demons of this race, the most vigorous in life, the best capable of development, the most widely diffused of all races." He stands, either beside Durer and Rembrandt, or on a spur of Parnassus, facing Homer and Aeschylus on another spur, sometimes permitting Dante to stand at his side — Dante was of German origin — , while the impotent crowd of the poets of Latin race seethes at his feet. For Carriere, he is the mouthpiece of the German spirit in England, while for another, he is England's permanent ambassador to Germany, accredited to the whole German people.

Both French and Italian critics also gave credence to this boasting, sometimes echoing the theory of difference between the two different arts, that of the north and that of the south, romantic and classic, realistic and idealistic or abstract, passionate or rhetorical, while others bowed reverently before the superiority of the former. In the recent war took place a rapid change of style, but not of mental assumptions. Both French and Italians mocked and expressed their contempt for the rough and violent poetry of Germany, and even Shakespeare did not have *une bonne presse* on the occasion

of his centenary, which took place during the second year.

But return to serious matters, it seems undeniable that the historical origin of Shakespeare is to be found in the Renaissance, which is generally admitted to have been chiefly an Italian movement. Shakespeare got from Italy, not only a great part, both of his form and of his material, but what is of greater moment, many thoughts that went to form his vision of reality. In addition to this, he obtained from Italy that literary education, to which all English writers of his time submitted. One may think, however, what one likes as to the historical derivation of Shakespeare's poetical material and of his literary education: the essential point to remember is that the poetry had its origin solely in himself; he did not receive it from without, either from his nation, his race, or from any other source. For this reason, divisions and counter-divisions of it, into Germanic and Latin poetry, and similar dyads, based upon material criteria, are without any foundation whatever. Shakespeare cannot be a Germanic poet, for the simple reason that in so far as he is a poet, he is nothing but a poet and does not obey the law of his race, whether it be *lex salica, wisigothica,*

langobardica, anglica or any other *barbarorum,* nor does he obey the *romana* — he obeys only the universally human *lex poetica.*

That a more profound and a better understanding of Shakespeare should have been formed and be steadily increasing, in the midst of and because of these and other errors, is a thing that we are so ready to admit as indubitable and obvious that we take it as understood, because it always happens thus, in every circle of thought and in literary history and criticism in general, and so in the particular history and criticism of Shakespeare.

Our object has not been, however, to give the history of that criticism, but rather to select those points in it, which it was advisable to clear up, in order to confirm the judgment that we propose and defend. If erroneous positions of criticism serve by their opposition to arouse correct thoughts relating to the poet, others, which are not erroneous, lead directly to them. In addition to the pages of older writers, always worthy of perusal (though devoted to problems of different times), such as those of Herder, Goethe, Schlegel, Coleridge and Manzoni, the student will find among those with whom he will like to think among the

Dowdens, the Bradleys, the Raleighs of to-day. These will inspire in him the wish to continue thinking on his own account about the nature of the great poetry of Shakespeare.

CHAPTER XII

SHAKESPEARE AND OURSELVES

Shakespeare (and this applies to every individual work) had a history, but has one no longer. He had a history, which was that of his poetical sentiment, of its various changing notes, of the various forms in which it found expression. He had also (we must insist), an individual history which it is difficult to identify united with that of the Elizabethan drama, to which he belongs solely as an actor and provider of theatrical works. The general traits, which, among many differences, he shares with his contemporaries, predecessors and imitators (even when these are more substantial than theatrical imitations, conventions and habits) form part of the history of the Renaissance in general and of the English Renaissance in particular, but do not of themselves constitute the history that was properly speaking his own.

But he no longer has this, because what happened afterwards and what happens in the present, is the history of others, is our history,

no longer his. Indeed, the histories of Shakespeare, which have been composed, considered in the light of later times — and they are still being written — have been and are understood, in a first sense, as the history of the criticism of his works; and it is clear that in this case, it is the history of us, his critics, the history of criticism and of philosophy, no longer that of Shakespeare. Or they are understood as the history of the spiritual needs and movements of different periods, which now approach and now recede from Shakespeare, causing either almost complete forgetfulness of his poetry, or causing it to be felt and loved. In this case too, it is the history, not of Shakespeare, but of the culture and the mode of feeling of other times than his. Or they are understood in a third sense, as the history of the literary and artistic works, in which the so-called influence of Shakespeare is more or less discernible; and since this influence would be without interest, if it produced nothing but mere mechanical copies, and on the contrary has interest only because we see it transformed in an original manner by new poets and artists, it is the history of the new poets and artists and no longer that of Shakespeare.

As regards the last statement, it will not be out of place to remark that the accounts which have been given of the representations of his plays are altogether foreign to Shakespeare; because theatrical representations are not, as is believed, "interpretations," but variations, that is to say "creations of new works of art," by means of the actors, who always bring to them their own particular manner of feeling. There is never a *tertium comparationis,* in the sense of a presumably authentic and objective interpretation, and here the same criterion applies as to music and painting suggested by plays, which are music and painting, and not those plays. Giuseppe Verdi, who for his part composed an *Othello,* wrote to the painter Morelli, who had conceived a painting of Iago (in a letter of 1881, recently published): "You want a slight figure, with little muscular development, and if I have understood you rightly, one of the cunning, malignant sort . . . But if were I an actor and wished to represent Iago, I should prefer a lean, meagre figure, with thin lips, and small eyes close to the nose, like a monkey's, a high retreating forehead, with a deal of development at the back of the head; absent and *nonchalant* in manner, indifferent to

everything, incredulous, sneering, speaking good and evil lightly, with an air of thinking about something quite different from what he says . . . " They might have entered into a long discussion as to the two different interpretations, had not Verdi, with his accustomed good sense, hastened to conclude: " But whether Iago be small or big, whether Othello be Venetian or Turk, *execute them as you conceive them*: the result will always be good. But remember *not to think too much about it.*"

The insurmountable difference that exists between the most studiously poetic theatrical representation and the original poetry of Shakespeare, is the true reason why, contrary to the general belief in Shakespeare's eminent " theatricality," Goethe considered that " he was not a poet of the theatre and did not think of the stage, which is too narrow for so vast a soul, that the visible world is too narrow for it." Coleridge too held that the plays were not intended for acting, but to be read and contemplated as poems, and added sometimes to say laughingly, that an act of Parliament should be passed to prohibit the representation of Shakespeare on the stage.

Certainly, Lear and Othello, Macbeth and

Hamlet, Cordelia and Desdemona are part of our souls, and so they will be in the future, more or less active, like every part of our souls, of our experiences, of our memories. Sometimes they seem inert and almost obliterated, yet they live and affect us; at others they revive and reawaken, linking themselves to our greatest and nearest spiritual interests. This latter was notably the case in the epoch that extends from the "period of genius" at the end of romanticism, from the criticism of Kant to the exhaustion of the Hegelian school. At that time, poets created Werther and Faust, as though they were the brothers of Hamlet, Charlotte and Margaret and Hermengarde, as though sisters of the Shakespearean heroines, and philosophers constructed systems, which seemed to frame the scattered thoughts of Shakespeare, reducing his differences to logical terms, and crowning them with the conclusion that he either did not seek or did not find. At that time persisted even the illusion that the spirit of Shakespeare had transferred itself from the Elizabethan world to the new world of Europe, was poetising and philosophising with the mouths of the new men and directing their sentiments and actions.

Perhaps after that period, love of Shakespeare, if not altogether extinguished, greatly declined. The colossal mass of work of every sort devoted to Shakespeare, cannot be brought up against this judgment, for this mass, in great part due to German, English and American philologists, proves rather the sedulity of modern philology, than a profound spiritual impulse. This was more lively, when Shakespeare was far less investigated, rummaged and hashed up, and was read in editions far less critically correct. How could he be truly loved and really felt in an age which buried dialectic and idealism beneath naturalism and positivism, for the former of which he stood and which he represented in his own way? In this age, the consciousness of the distinction between liberty and passion, good and evil, nobility and vileness, fineness and sensuality, between the lofty and the base in man, became obscured; everything was conceived as differing in quantity, but identical in substance, and was placed in a deterministic relation with the external world. In such an atmosphere artistic work became blind, diseased, gloomy, instinctive; struggling for expression amid the torment of sick senses, no longer amid pas-

sionate, moral struggles of the soul; confused writers, half pedantic, half neurasthenic, were taken for and believed themselves to be, the heirs of Shakespeare. Even when one reads some of the most highly praised pages of the critics of the day upon Shakespeare, so abounding in exquisite refinements, a sort of repugnance comes over one, as though a warning that this is not the genuine Shakespeare. He was less subtle, but more profound, less involved, but more complex and more great than they.

This is not a lamentation directed against the age, which is perhaps now drawing to a close and perhaps has no desire to do so, and will continue to develop its own character for a greater or lesser period. It is simply an observation of fact, which belongs to that history, which is not the history of William Shakespeare. He continues to live his own history, in those spirits alone, who are perpetually making anew that history which was truly his, as they read him with an ingenuous mind and a heart that shares in his poetry.

PART III

PIERRE CORNEILLE

CHAPTER XIII

CRITICISM OF THE CRITICISM

There is no longer any necessity for a criticism of Corneille's tragedies in a negative sense, for it is already to be found in several works. Further, if there exists a poet, who stands outside the taste and the preoccupations of our day (at least in France), it is Corneille. The greater number of lovers of poetry and art confess without reserve that they cannot endure his tragedies, which "have nothing to say to them." The fortune of Corneille has declined more and more with the growth of the fame of Shakespeare, which has been correlative to the formation and the growth of modern aesthetic and criticism; and if the fame of Shakespeare seemed strange and repugnant to classicistic elegance, the same fate has befallen the French dramatist, as the result of Shakespeareanism in relation to the appreciation of art which has now penetrated everywhere. Corneille once represented "*la pro-*

fondeur du jugement" as opposed to *" les irrégularités sauvages et capricieuses"* of the Englishman, decorum against the lack of it, calm diffused light against shadows pierced at rare intervals with an occasional flash. Lessing had selected for examination and theme the *Rodogune,* which he held to be a work, not of poetical genius, but of an ingenious intellect, because genius loves simplicity, and Corneille, after the manner of the ingenious, loved complications. Schiller, when he had read the most highly praised works of Corneille, expressed his astonishment at the fame which had accrued to an author of so poor an inventive faculty, so meagre and so dry in his treatment of character, so lacking in passion, so weak and rigid in the development of action, and almost altogether deprived of interest. William Schlegel noted in him, in place of poetry, " tragic epigrams " and " airs of parade," pomp without grandeur — he found him cold in the love scenes — his love was not as a rule love, but, in the words of the hero Sertorius, a well calculated *aimer par politique* — intricate and Machiavellian and at the same time ingenuous and puerile in the representation of politics. He defined the greater part of the tragedies as

nothing but treatises on the reason of State in the form of discussions, conducted rather in the manner of a chess-player than of a poet. Even the most temperate De Sanctis could not succeed in enjoying this writer, as is to be gathered from his lectures upon dramatic literature delivered in 1847. He found that he does not render the fullness of life, but only the extreme points of the passions in collision, and that he prefers eloquence to the development of tragedy, so that he often unconsciously turns tragedy into comedy. The confrontation of Corneille's *Cid* with its Spanish original, *Las mocedades* of Guillen de Castro, has however prevailed above all others as the text upon which to base arguments against the French dramaturge. Shack declared that the work of Corneille was altogether negative, that he reduced and reëlaborated his original, losing the poetical soul of the Spanish poet in the process and destroying the alternate and spontaneous expression of tenderness and of violent passion. He found that he substituted oratorical adornments and a swollen phraseology for the pure language of sentiment, coquetry for the struggle of the affections, to which it is directly opposed, and a boastful charlatan for the

heroic figure of Rodrigo. Klein, passing from severe criticism into open satire, described the *Cid* to be a " commentary in Alexandrines " upon the poem of the *Mocedades,* comparing the Spanish Jimena to a fresh drop of dew upon " a flower that has hardly bloomed," and the French Chiméne on the contrary to a " muddy drop, which presents a tumultuous battle of infusorians to the light of the sun ": the " infusorians " would represent the antithesis to the " Alexandrine tears " (*Alexandrinerthränen*), which she pours forth.

But these negative judgments were not restricted altogether and at first to foreigners and romantics. In the eighteenth century, Voltaire (who for that matter sometimes lifts his eyes to the dangerous criterion of Shakespeare in his notes upon Corneille) did not refrain from criticising his illustrious predecessor for the frequent *froideur* observable in his dramatic work, as well as for his constant habit of speaking himself as the author and not allowing his personages to speak, for his substitution of reflections for immediate expressions, and for the artifices, the conventions and the padding, in which he abounds. Vauvenargues showed himself irreconcilable (Racine was his

ideal). He too blamed the heroes of Corneille for uttering great things and not inspiring them, for talking, and always talking too much, with the object of making themselves known — whereas great men are rather characterised by the things they do not say than those they do say — and in general for ostentation, which takes the place of loftiness, and for declamation, which he substitutes for true eloquence. Gaillard allowed the influence of the generally unfavorable verdict or the verdict full of retractations and cautions in respect of its theme, to colour the eulogy which he composed in 1768. It used to be said of Corneille that he aimed rather at "admiration" than at "emotion," and that he was in fact "not tragic." This insult (declared Gaillard) was spoken, but not written down, "because the pen is always wiser than the tongue." But the accusation of "coldness" had made itself heard on the lips of Corneille's contemporaries in the second half of the seventeenth century, particularly when the tragedies of Racine, with their very different message to the heart, had appeared to afford a contrast.

The defenders of Corneille have often yielded to the temptation of accepting Shakespeare's

dramas or at least the tragedies of Racine as a standard of comparison and a reply to criticism. They have attempted to prove that Corneille should be read, judged and interpreted in the spirit of those poets. They have claimed to discover in Corneille just that which their adversaries failed to discover and of which they denied the existence: this they call truth, reality and life, meaning thereby, passion and imagination. Thus we find Sainte-Beuve lamenting that not only foreigners, but France herself, had not remarked and had not gloried in the possession of Pauline (in *Polyeucte*), one of the divine poetical figures, which are to be placed in the brief list containing the Antigones, the Didos, the Francescas da Rimini, the Desdemonas, the Ophelias. More recently others have elevated the Cleopatra (of *Rodogune*) to the level of Lady Macbeth, and the Cid, on account of the youthful freshness of his love-making, to the rank of *Romeo and Juliet,* while they have discovered in *Andromède* nothing less than that kind of *féerie poètique* " to which the English owe a *Midsummer Night's Dream* and the *Tempest.*" They also declare that the *Horace* is a tragedy in which reigns a sort of " savage Roman sanctity," cul-

minating in the youthful Horace, " intransigent and fanatical, ferociously religious "; while his sister Camilla is " a creature of nerves and flesh, who has strayed into a family of heroes " and rises up in revolt against that hard world. For them Camilla is an " invalid of love," " one possessed by passion," a " neurotic," of an altogether modern complexion. *Polyeucte* represents " a drama of nascent Christianity," and its protagonist, a " mystical rebel," recalls at once " Saint Paul, Huss, Calvin and Prince Krapotkine," arousing the same curiosity as a Russian nihilist, such as one used to see some years ago in the beershops, with bright eyes, pale and fair, the forehead narrow about the temples and of whom it was whispered that he had killed some general or prefect of police at Petersburg. Severus seems to them to be similar in some respects to " a modern exegete," who is writing the history of the origin of Christianity. There exists no play " which penetrates more profoundly into the human soul or opens a wider perspective of untrodden paths." *Cinna* represents in the tragedy of Augustus another neurotic after the modern manner. Augustus, ambitious and without scruples, has attained to the summit of his de-

sires and is weary and tired of power. He negates the man who ordered the proscriptions that is in himself and his generosity is due almost to satiety for too easy triumphs and vengeances. Attila, in the tragedy of that name, springs out before us as " a monster of pride, cruel, emphatic and subtle, conscious of being the instrument of a mysterious power, an ogre with a mission ": this " stupendous " conception is worthy to stand side by side with the gigantic figures of the *Légende des Siècles*.

These are all fantastic embroideries, metaphors, easel pictures, which sometimes do honour to the artistic capacity of the eulogists, but have no connexion whatever with the direct impression of Corneille's tragedies. Spinoza would have said that they have as much connexion with them as the dog of zoology with the dog-star. An obvious instance of this is the strange comparison of the character Poluseucty with the " Russian nihilist "— but it is little less evident in the other instances, because it is altogether arbitrary to interpret the Augustus of the *Cinna* as though he were a Shakespearean Richard II or Henry IV and to attribute to him the psychology of what Nietzsche describes as the " generous man."

Fancy for fancy, as well admit Napoleon's comment. He declared himself persuaded that Augustus was certainly not changed in a moment into a "*prince débonnaire,*" into a poor prince exercising "*une si pauvre petite vertu*" as clemency, and that if he holds out to Cinna the right hand of friendship, he only does this to deceive him and in order to revenge himself more completely and more usefully at the propitious moment. It is an amusement like another to take up the personages of a play or of a story and refashion them in our own way by the free use of the fancy, or to weave a new mode of feeling out of the facts concerning certain cases and characters. Camilla can thus be quite well transformed even into a nymphomaniac; but unfortunately criticism insinuates itself into the folds of fancy and causes the fancier himself (Lemaître) to note that Camilla sacrifices her love to her duty "*délibérément,*" that she certainly resembles a character of Racine, but "*non certes par la langue,*" and that she would show us what she really is "*si elle parlait un langage moins rude at moins compact.*" As though the speech and the inflection were an accident and not the whole of a poetic creation, the beating of its heart! The

demoniacal, the neurotic Camilla, it is true, speaks in this way:

> " Il vient, préparons-nous a montrer constamment
> Ce que doit une amante à la mort d'un amant."

Here Voltaire's unconquerable good sense could not refrain from remarking: "'*Préparons-nous*' adds to the defect. We see a woman who is thinking how she can demonstrate her affliction and may be said to be rehearsing her lesson of grief."

The same fantastic and anticritical method of comparison has been adopted with De Castro's play, with the object of obtaining a contrary result: this comparison, whenever it is conducted with the criterion of realistic art, or of art full of passion, cannot but result in a condemnation of Corneille's reëlaboration of the theme. This has been frankly admitted by more than one French critic (Fauriel for example), who contrived to loosen somewhat the chains of national preconceptions and traditional admirations. Indeed it was already implied in the celebrated judgment of the Academy, which is not the less just and acute for having been delivered by an academy and written by a Chapelain. Guillen de Castro's play,

which is epical and popular in tone, celebrates the youthful hero Rodrigo, the future Cid, strong, faithful and pious, admired by all, and looked upon with love by princesses. An anecdote is recounted, with the object of celebrating him, describing how he was obliged to challenge and to slay the father of the maiden he loved. Bound to the same degree as himself by the laws of chivalry, she is held to be obliged to provide for the vendetta required by the death of her father. She performs her duty without hatred and solely as a legal enemy, an "*ennemie légitime*" (to employ a phrase of the same Corneille in the *Horace*). She does not cease to love, nor does she feel any shame in loving. Finally, his prowess and the favour of heaven, which he deserves and which ever accompanies him, obtain for Rodrigo the legal conquest of his loving beloved, who is also his enemy for honour's sake. De Castro's play is limpid, lively, full of happenings. Corneille both simplifies and complicates it, reducing it to series of casuistical discussions, vivified here and there with echoes of the passionate original, softened with moments of abandonment, as in the vigorous scene of the challenge, which is an echo of the Spanish play,

or in the tender sigh of the duet, "*Rodrigue, qui l'eût cru? . . . Chimène, qui l'eût dit? . . .*" which is also in De Castro. After this, it can be asserted that Corneille "has made a human drama, a drama of universal human appeal, out of an exclusively Spanish drama"; it will also be declared that "the most beautiful words of the French language find themselves always at the point of the pen, when one is writing about the *Cid;* duty, love, honour, the family, one's native land," because "everything there is generous, affectionate, ingenuous, and there never has been breathed a livelier or a purer air upon the stage, the air of lofty altitudes of the soul." But this is verbiage. It is also possible to revel in the description of "the fair cavalier, protected of God and adored by the ladies, who carries his country about with him wherever he goes, and along with it everybody's heart; in the beautiful maiden with the long black veil, so strong and yet so weak, so courageous and so tender; in the grand old man, so majestic and yet so familiar, the signor so rude and so hoary, yet with a soul as straight and as pure as a lily, in whom dwells the ancient code of honour and all the glory of times past; in the king, so good-natured and ingenuous, yet so clever, like

the good king one finds in fairy stories; in the gentle little infanta, with her precious soliloquies, so full of gongorism and knightly romances . . ."; but as we have previously observed, this will be merely drawing fancy pictures. It suffices to read the *Cid,* to see that it contains nothing of this and nothing of this is to be found among the tragedies of Corneille.

The vanity of such criticisms, which attempt to alter Corneille by presenting him as that which he is not and does not wish to be, a poet of immediate passions, would at once be apparent, were it to be realised that no such attempts are made in the case of Racine, whose passionate soul makes its presence at once felt through literary and theatrical conventions, in the affection which he experiences for the sweet, for what is tremendous and mysterious with religious emotion, which palpitates in Andromache, in Phoedra, in Iphigenia and Eriphylis in Joad and in Attila. But it confutes itself by becoming modified, sometimes among the very critics whom we have been citing, into the thesis that Corneille is the poet of the " reason," or of " the rational will." And we say modified, because the reason or the rational will is in poetry itself a passion, and he would be correctly de-

scribed as a poet of that kind of inspiration, who should accentuate the rational-volitional moment in the representation of the passions, by creating types of wise and active men, such as are to be found in the epic, in many dramatic masterpieces, in high romance and elsewhere. But not even this exists in Corneille, so much so that the very persons who maintain the thesis, remark that he isolates a principle and a force, the reason and the will, and seeks out how the one makes the other triumph. To this, they declare, we must attribute the " character of stiffness " proper to the heroes of Corneille, who are necessarily bound to lack " the seductive flexibility, the languors, the perturbations, which are to be observed in those moved by sentiment." Now this is not permissible in art, because art, in portraying a passion, even if it be that of inflexible rationality and inflexible will and duty, never " isolates " it, in the fashion of an analyst in a laboratory, or a physicist, but seizes it in its becoming, and so together with all the other passions, and together with the " languors " and " disturbances." Thus Corneille, described as they describe him by isolating the reason and the will, would be a slayer of life, and so of the will and the rea-

son themselves. And when he is blamed for having given so small and so unhappy a place to love, " to the act by which the race perpetuates itself, to the relations of the sexes and to all the sentiments that arise from them, and which, by the nature of things form an essential part of the life of the human race," it is not observed that beneath this reproof, which is somewhat physiological and lubricious and lacks seriousness of statement, there is concealed the yet more serious and more general reproof that Corneille suffocates and suppresses the quiver of life. La Bruyère was probably among the first to give currency to the saying, which has been repeated, that Corneille depicts men not " as they are," but " as they ought to be," and leads to a like conclusion, though expressed in an euphemistic form; because poetry in truth knows nothing of being or of having to be, and its existence is a having to be, its having to be a being.

This critical position, which desires to explain and to justify Corneille as poet of the reason and of the rational will (although, as we shall see further on, it contains some truth), is indeed equivocal, because it seems to assert on the one hand that he possesses a particular

form of passion, and on the other takes it away from him with its "isolation," its "having to be," and with its assertion that his personages "surpass nature," with its boasting of his "Romans being more Roman than Romans," his "Greeks more Greek than Greeks" and the like, that is to say, by making of him an exaggerator of types and of abstractions, the opposite of a poet. The passage, then, is easy from this position to its last thesis or modification, by means of which Corneille is exalted as an eminent representative of a special sort of poetry, "rationalistic poetry," which is held to coincide with poetry that is especially "French." The theory here implied is to be found both among the French and those who are not French, among classicists and romantics, sometimes being looked upon among both as a merit, that is to say, it is recognised by them that this sort of poetry is legitimate. In the course of his proof that French rationalistic tragedy excludes the lyrical element and demands the intrigue of action and the eloquence of the passions, Frederick Schlegel indicated "the splendid side of French tragedy, where it evinces lofty and incomparable power, fully responding to the spirit and character of a nation, in which

eloquence occupies a dominant position, even in private life." A contemporary writer on art, Gundolf, blames his German conationals for the prejudices in which they are enmeshed, and for their lack of understanding of the great rationalistic poetry of France, so logical, so uniform, so ordered and subordinated, so regular and so easily to be understood. It is the natural and spontaneous expression of the French character, in the same way as is the monarchy of Louis XIV, differing thereby from the narrow convention or imitation, which it became in the hands of Gottsched and others of Gallic tendencies, in other countries. Sainte-Beuve, alluding in particular to Corneille, argued that in French tragedy " things are not seen too realistically or over-coloured, since attention is chiefly bestowed upon the saying of Descartes: — I think, therefore I am: I think, therefore I feel; — and everything there happens in or is led back to the bosom of the interior substance," in the " state of pure sentiment, of reasoned and dialogued analysis," in a sphere " no longer of sentiment, but of understanding, clear, extended, without mists and without clouds." Another student of Corneille opposes the different and equally admissible system of the

French tragedian, " a constructor and as it were an engineer of action," to that of Shakespeare, portrayer of the soul and of life. Thus, while all the most famous plays of Shakespeare are drama, but lyrical drama, " hardly one of the most beautiful and popular plays of Corneille is essentially lyrical." What are we to think of " rationalistic " or " intellectualistic," or " logical " or " non-lyrical " poetry? Nothing but this: that it does not exist. And of French poetry? The same: that it does not exist; because what is poetry in France is naturally neither intellectualistic nor essentially French, but purely and simply poetry, like all other poetry that has grown in this earthly flowerbed. And if the old-fashioned romanticism, which sanctifies and gives substance to nationality and demands of art, of thought and of everything else, that it should first be national, is reappearing among French writers in the disguise of anti-romanticism and neo-classicism, this is but a proof the more of the spiritual dulness and mental confusion of those nationalists, who embrace their presumed adversary.

The only reality that could be concealed in " rationalistic poetry," for which Corneille is praised, as shown above, would be one of the

categories in old-fashioned books of literary instruction, known as "didactic poetry," which was not too well spoken of, even there. Corneille is admired from this point of view, among other things, for his famous political dissertations in the *Cinna* and in the *Sertorius,* where Voltaire considers that he is deserving of great praise for "having expressed very beautiful thoughts in correct and harmonious verse." In this connexion are quoted the remarks of the Maréchal de Grammont about the *Othon,* that "it should have been the breviary of kings," or of Louvois, "an audience of ministers of state would be desirable for the judgment of such a work." It is indeed only in "didactic poetry," which is versified prose, that we find "thoughts" that are afterwards "versified." The method employed by another man of letters would also make of the tragedies of Corneille masked didactic poetry. He is an unconscious manipulator of thesis, antithesis and synthesis, in the manner of Hegel, and describes it as "the alliance of the individual with the species, of the particular with the general," which were separate in the medieval "farces" and "moralities," the former being all compact of individuals and actions, the latter of ideas, which

Corneille was able to unite, being one of those great masters who proceed from the general to the particular and vivify the abstractions of thought with the power of the imagination.

The justification of the tragedies of Corneille, as based upon the foundations of French society and history in the time of Corneille, is certainly more solid than that which explains them as based upon a mystical French "character," or "race," or "nation." Do conventions and etiquette govern and embarrass the development of dialogue and action in every part of those tragedies? But such was life at court, or life modelled upon life at court, in those days. Do the characters rather reason about their sentiments than express them? But such was the custom of well-bred men of that day. And do they always discuss matters according to all the rules of rhetoric and with perfect diction? But to speak well was the boast of men in society and diplomatists at that time. Do the women mingle love and politics, and rather make love for political reasons than politics for love? But the ladies of the Fronde did just this; indeed Cardinal Mazarin, in conversation with the Spanish ambassador, gave vent to the opinion that in France "an honest

woman would not sleep with her husband, nor a mistress with her lover, unless they had discussed affairs of State with them during the day." And so discussions continue and are to be found continuing in Taine and many others, without explaining anything, because they pass over the poetry and the problem of the poetry, which is not, as Taine held, " the expression of the genius of an age " or " the reflection of a given society " (society reflects and expresses itself in its own actions and customs), but " poetry, that is to say, one of the free forces of every people, society and time, which must be interpreted with reasons contained in itself." [1] It is superfluous to add that the poetry is lost sight of in the delight of finding the personages and social types of the French seventeenth century, beyond the verses and the ideal conceptions of character; for example, we find them declaring their own affectionate sympathy for " Christian Theodora," for this martyr, of the dress with the starched collar and the equally proudly starched sentiments, for this proud

[1] " Est-ce que la critique moderne n'a pas abandonné l'art pour l'histoire? La valeur intrinsèque d'un livre n'est rien dans l'école Sainte-Beuve-Taine. On y prend tout en considération, sauf le talent."

(Flaubert, *Correspondence,* IV, 81.)

martyr, in the grand style of Louis XIII," altogether forgetting the reality of the art of Corneille and the critical problems suggested by the *Théodora*. This is certainly very prettily and gracefully said, but it misses the point.

There remains to mention but one last form of defence, which however is not a justification of the art of Corneille, but a eulogy of him as an ingenious man, who deserved well of culture and possessed refinement of manners, particularly as regards theatrical representations. To him belongs the "great merit" (said Voltaire in concluding his commentary) of "having found France rustic, gross and ignorant, about the time of the *Cid*, and of having changed it by teaching it not only tragedy and comedy, but even the art of thinking." And his rival Racine, in his praise of Corneille before the Academy at the time of his death, had recorded "the debt that French poetry and the French stage owed to him." He had found it disordered, irregular and chaotic, and after having sought the right road for some time and striven against the bad taste of his age, "he inspired it with an extraordinary genius aided by study of the ancients, and exhibited reason (*la raison*)

on the stage, accompanied with all the pomp and all the ornaments, of which the French language is capable." All the historians of French literature repeat this, beginning by bowing down before Corneille, the "founder," or "creator" of the French theatre. Such praise as this means little or nothing in art, because non-poets, or poets of very slender talents, even pedants, are capable of exercising this function of being founders and directors of the culture and the literature of a people. An instance of this in Italy was Pietro Bembo, "who removed this pure, sweet speech of ours from its vulgar obscurity, and has shown us by his example what it ought to be."

He was not a poet, yet was surrounded with the gratitude and with the most sincere reverence on the part of poets of genius, among whom was Ariosto, to whom belong the verses cited above.

That other merit accorded to Corneille, of having accomplished a revolution, cleared the ground and "raised the French tragic system upon it," the "classical system," is without poetical value. We shall leave it to others to define as they please, precisely of what this work consisted, the introduction of the unities

and of the rules of verisimilitude, the conception and .realisation of tragic psychological tragedy, or the tragedy of character, of which actions and catastrophes should form the consequences, the fusing and harmonising in a single type of sixteenth century tragedy, which starts from " the tragic incident," with that of the seventeenth century, which ends with it, and so on. We prefer to remark, with reference to this and to so many other disputes that have taken place since the time of Calepio and Lessing onward, and especially during the romantic period, with regard to the merits and the defects of the " French system," as compared with the " Greek system " and with the " romantic " or " Shakespearean," that " systems " either have nothing to do with poetry, or are the abstract schemes of single poems, and therefore that such disputes are and always have been, sterile and vain. Here too it should be mentioned that a " system " may be the work of non-poets or of mediocre poets, as was the case in Italy with the system of " melodrama," of which (to employ the figure of De Sanctis), Apostolo Zeno was the " architect " and Pietro Metastasio the " poet." In England too, the system of the drama was not fixed by Shake-

speare, but by his predecessors, small fry indeed as compared with him. We would also observe that death or life may exist in one and the same system, for indeed a system is a prison, with bolts and bars. Note in this respect, that although the romantics had boasted the salvation that lay in the Shakespearean system, a new dramatic genius springing therefrom was vainly awaited. There appeared only semigeniuses and a crowd of strepitous works, not less cold and empty than those that had been condemned in the opposing "French system."

We may therefore conclude that the arguments of the admirers and apologists of Corneille, which have been passed in review, do not embrace the problem, but leave the judgments of negative criticism free to exercise their perilous potency. They find in Corneille intellectual combinations in place of poetical formations, abstractions in place of what is concrete, oratory in place of lyrical inspiration and shadow in place of substance.

CHAPTER XIV

THE IDEAL OF CORNEILLE

Nevertheless, when all this has been said and the conclusion drawn, there remains the general impression of the work, which has in it something of the grandiose, and brings back to the lips the homage that the next generations rendered to the author, when they called him " the great Corneille." It is to be hoped that no one has been deceived as to the intention of our discourse up to this point, which has been directed not against Corneille, but against his critics, nor among them against those who have written many other things both true and beautiful on the subject; we have but to refer to the acute Lemaître among the most recent, to the diligent and loving Dorchain, and to the most solid of all, Lanson. We shall avail ourselves of them in what follows, but shall oppose their particular theories and presuppositions, which are misrepresentations of the subject of their judgments itself. For the negative criticism, which

we have recapitulated, does not win our confidence, but rather shows itself to be erroneous or (which amounts to the same thing) incomplete, exaggerated and one-sided, for the very reason that it does not account for that impression of the grandiose. Conducted as it has been, it would very well suit a writer who was a rhetorician with an appearance of warmth, a writer able to make a good show before the public and in the theatre, while remaining internally unmoved himself, superficial and frivolous. But Corneille looks upon us and upon those critics with so serious and severe a countenance, that we lose the courage to treat him in so unceremonious and so expeditious a manner.

Whence comes that air of severity, which we find not only in his portraits but in every page of his tragedies, even in those and in those parts of them, in which he fails to hit the mark, or appears to be tired, to have lost his way, and to be making efforts?

From this fact alone: that Corneille had an ideal, an ideal in which he believed, and to which he clung with all the strength of his soul, of which he never lost sight and which he always tended to realise in situations, rhythms,

and words, seeking and finding his own intimate satisfaction, the incarnation of his ideal, in those brave and solemn scenes and sounds.

His contemporaries felt this, and it was for this reason that Racine wrote that above all, "what was peculiar to Corneille consisted of a certain force, a certain elevation, which astonishes and carries us away, and renders even his defects, if there be found some to reprove him for them, more estimable than the virtues of others"; and La Bruyère also summed it up in the phrase that "what Corneille possessed of most eminent was his soul, which was sublime."

The most recent interpreters have found Corneille's ideal to reside in will for its own sake, the "pure will," superior or anterior to good and evil, in the energy of the will as such, which does not pay attention to particular ends. Thus the false conception of him as animated with the ideal of moral duty or with that of the triumph of duty over the passions has been eliminated, and agreement has been reached, not only with the reality of the tragedies, but also with what Corneille himself laid down in his *Discours* as to the dramatic personage. Such a personage may indeed be plunged in all sorts of crimes, like Cleopatra in the *Rodogune,* but

in the words of the author, " all his actions are accompanied with so lofty a greatness of soul that we admire the source whence his actions flow, while we detest those actions themselves."

On the other hand, the concept of the pure will runs some risk of being perverted at the hands of those who proceed to interpret it by identification with that other " will for power " of Nietzsche, who understood the French poet in this hyperbolical manner and referred to him with fervent admiration on account of this fancy of his. The ideal of the will for power has an altogether modern origin, in the protoromantic and romantic superman, in over-excited and abstract individualism. It did not exist at the time of Corneille, or in the heart of the poet, who was very healthy and simple. The figures of Corneille's tragedies must be looked at through coloured and deforming glasses, as supplied by fashionable literature, in order to see in them such attitudes and gestures.

The further definition, which, while it renders the first conception more exact and more appropriate, at the same time shuts the door on these new fancies, is this: that Corneille's ideal does not express the pure will at the moment of violent onrush and actuation, but of

ponderation and reflection, that is to say, as *deliberative will.* This was what Corneille truly loved: the spirit which deliberates calmly and serenely and having formed its resolution, adheres to it with unshakeable firmness, as to a position that has been won with difficulty and with difficulty strengthened. This represented for him the most lofty form of strength, the highest dignity of man. *"Laissez-moi mieux consulter mon âme,"* says one of Corneille's personages, and all of them think and act in the same way. *"Voyons,"* says the king of the Gepidi to the king of the Goths in the *Attila, "— voyons qui se doit vaincre, et s' il faut que mon âme À votre ambition immole cette flamme. Ou s'il n'est point plus beau que votre ambition Elle-même s'immole a cette passion."*

Augustus hesitates a long while, and gives vent to anguished lamentations, when he has discovered that Cinna is plotting against his life, as though to clear his soul and to make it better capable of the deliberation, which begins at once under the influence of passion, in the midst of anguish and with anguish. Has he the right to lament and to become wrathful? Has he not also made rivers of blood to flow? Does he then resign himself in his turn? Does

he forsake himself as the victim of his own past? Far from it: he has a throne and is bound to defend it, and therefore will punish the assassin. Yes, but when he has caused more blood to flow, he will find new and greater hatreds surrounding him, new and more dangerous plots. It is better, then, to die? But wherefore die? Why should he not enjoy revenge and triumph once again? This is the tumult of irresolution, which, while felt as a hard, a desperate torment, and although it seems to hold the will in suspense, in reality sets it in motion, insensibly guiding it to its end. *"O rigoureux combat d'un coeur irrésolu! . . ."* The more properly deliberative process enters his breast with the appearance upon the scene of Livia, to whose advice he is opposed, for he disputes and combats it, yet listens and weighs it, seeming finally to remain still irresolute, yet he has already formed his resolve, he has decided in his heart to perform an act of political clemency, so thunderous, so lightning-like in quality, as to bewilder his enemy and to hurl him vanquished at his feet.

The two brother princes in *Rodogune* are conversing, while they await the announcement as to which is the legitimate heir to the throne.

Upon this announcement also depends which shall become the happy husband of Rodogune, whom they both love with an equal ardour. How will they face and support the decision of fate? One of the two, uncertain and anxious about the future, proposes to renounce the throne in favour of his brother, provided the latter renounces Rodogune; but he is met with the same proposal by the other. Thus the satisfaction of both, by means of mutual renunciation, is precluded. But the other course is also precluded, that of strife and conflict, for their brotherly affection is firm, and so is the sentiment of moral duty in both. This also forbids the one sacrificing himself for the other, because neither would accept the sacrifice. What can be saved from a collision, from which it seems that nothing can be saved? One of the two brothers, after these various and equally vain attempts at finding a solution, returns upon himself, descends to the bottom of his soul, finds there a better motive and is the first to formulate the unique resolution: *"Malgré l'éclat du trône at l'amour d'une femme, Faisons si bien régner l'amitié sur notre âme, Qu'étouffant dans leur perte un regret suborneur, Dans le bonheur d'un frère on trouve son bonheur. . . ."* And the

other, who has not been the first to see and to follow this path asks: *"Le pourriez, vous mon frère?"* The first replies: *"Ah; que vous me pressez! Je le voudrais du moins, mon frère, et c'est assez; et ma raison sur moi gardera tant d'empire, Que je désavoûrai mon coeur, s'il en soupire."* The other, firm in his turn replies: *"J'embrasse comme vous ces nobles sentiments. . . ."*

Loving as he did, in this way, the work of the deliberative will (we have recorded two only of the situations in his tragedies, and we could cite hundreds), Corneille did not love love, a thing that withdraws itself from deliberation, a severe illness, which man discovers in his body, like fire in his house, without having willed it and without knowing how it got there. Sometimes the deliberative will is affected by it and for the moment at least upset, and then we hear the cry of Attila: *"Quel nouveau coup de foudre! O raison confondue, orgueil presque étouffé. . . ."* as he struggles against its enchantments: *"cruel poison de l'âme et doux charme des yeux."* But as a general rule, he promptly drives it away from him, coldly and scornfully; or he subdues it and employs it as a means and an assistance in far graver matters,

such as ambition, politics, the State; or he accepts it for what it contains of useful and worthy, which as such is the object and the fruit of deliberation. *" Ce ne sont pas les sens que mon amour consulte: Il hait des passions l'impétueux tumulte. . . ."* Certainly, this attitude is intransigent, ascetic and severe: but what of it? *" Un peu de dureté sied bien aux grandes âmes."* Certainly love comes out of it diminished and humiliated: *" L'Amour n'est pas le maître alors qu'on délibére ";* love deserves its fate and almost deserves the gibe: *" La seule politique est ce qui nous émeut; On la suit et l'amour s'y mêle comme il peut: S'il vient on l'applaudit; s'il manque on s'en console. . . ."* It manages as best it can and becomes less powerful and wonderfully ductile beneath this pressure, ready to bend in whatever direction it is commanded to bend by the reason. Sometimes it remains suspended between two persons, like a balance, which awaits the addition of a weight in order to lean over: ". . . *Ce coeur des deux parts engagé, Se donnant à vous deux ne s'est point partagé, Toujours prêt d'embrasser son service et le vôtre, Toujours prêt à mourir et pour l'un et pour l'autre. Pour n'en adorer qu'une, il eût fallu choisir; Et ce choix*

eût été au moins quelque désir, Quelque espoir outrageux d'être mieux reçu d'elle. . . ." On another occasion, although there might be some inclination or desire, rather toward the one than the other side, it is yet kept secret, beneath the resolve to suffocate it altogether, should reason ordain that love must flow into a contrary channel. Not only are Corneille's personages told to their face: "*Il ne faut plus aimer,*" an act of renunciation to be asked of a saint, but they are also bidden thus: "*Il faut aimer ailleurs,*" an act worthy of a martyr.

He did not love love, not because it is love, but because it is passion, which carries one away and which, if it be allowed to do so, will not consent to state the terms of the debate clearly, and engage in deliberation. His dislike for the inebriation of hatred and of anger, which blind or confound the vision, and which, as passion, is also foreign to his ideal, also appears in confirmation of this view. "*Qui hait brutalement permet tout à sa haine, Il s'emporte oú sa fureur l'entraîne. . . . Mais qui hait par devoir ne s'aveugle jamais; c'est sa raison qui hait. . . .*" His ideal personages sometimes declare, when face to face with their enemy: "*je te dois estimer, mais je te dois haïr.*"

On the other hand, we perceive clearly why Corneille was led to admire the will, even when without moral illumination, even indeed when it is actively opposed to or without morality; for it has the power of not yielding to and of dominating the passions, of not being violent weakness, but strength, or as it was called during the Renaissance, "virtú." In that sphere of deliberation there existed a common ground of mutual understanding between the honest and dishonest man, between the hero of evil and the hero of good, for each pursued a course of duty, in his own way and both agreed in withstanding and despising the madness of the passions.

And we also see why the domain towards which Corneille directed his gaze and for which he had a special predilection, was bound to be that of politics, where "virtú," in the sense that it possessed during the period of the Renaissance, found ample opportunity for free expansion and for self-realisation. In politics, we find ourselves continuously in difficult and contradictory situations, where acuteness and long views are of importance and where it is necessary to make calculations as to the interests and passions of men, to act energetically upon

what has been decided after nice weighing in the balance, to be firm as well as prudent. It has been jocosely observed by William Schlegel that Corneille, the most upright and honest of men, was more Machiavellian than any Machiavelli in his treatment and representation of politics, that he boasted of the art of deceiving, and that he had no notion of true politics, which are less complicated and far more adroit and adaptable. Lemaître too admits that in this respect he was "*fort candide.*" But who is not excessive in the things that he loves? Who is not sometimes too candid regarding them, with that candour and simplicity which is born of faith and enthusiasm? His very lack of experience in real politics, his simplicism and exaggeration in conceiving them, is there to confirm the vigour of his affection for the ideal of the politician, as supremely expressed by the man who ponders and deliberates. He always has *la raison d'état* and *les maximes d'état* upon his lips. We feel that these words and phrases move, edify and arouse in him an ecstasy of admiration.

It was free determination and complete submission to reason, duty, objective utility, to what was fitting — and not a spirit of courtly

adulation — that led him to look with an equal ecstasy of admiration upon personages in high positions and upon monarchs, the summit of the pyramid. He did not therefore admit them because they can do everything, still less because they can enjoy everything, but on the contrary, because, owing to their office, their discipline and tradition, they are accustomed to sacrifice their private affections and to conduct themselves in obedience to motives superior to the individual. Kings too have a heart, they too are exposed to the soft snares of love; but better than all others they know what is becoming behaviour: "*Je suis reine et dois régner sur moi: le rang que nous tenons, jaloux de notre gloire, Souvent dans un tel choix nous défend de nous croire, Jette sur nos désirs un joug impérieux, Et dédaigne l'avis et du coeur et des yeux.*" And elsewhere: "*Les princes ont cela de leur haute naissance, Leur âme dans leur rang prend des impressions Qui dessous leur vertu rangent leurs passions; Leur générosité soumet tout à leur gloire. . . .*" They love, certainly, as it happens to all to love, but they do not on that account yield to the attractions of the senses. "*Je ne le cèle point, j'aime, Carlos, oui, j'aime; Mais l'amour de l'état plus*

fort que de moi-même, Cherche, au lieu de l'objet le plus doux à mes yeux, Le plus digne héros de régner en ces lieux." His predilection for history, especially for Roman history, has the same root, and had long been elaborated as an ideal — even in the Rome of the Empire, yet more so at the time of the Renaissance and during the post-Renaissance, and even in the schools of the Jesuits. It was thus transformed into a history that afforded examples of civic virtues, such as self-sacrifice, heroism, and greatness of resolve. We spare the reader the demonstration that this tendency was altogether different from, and indeed opposed to historical knowledge and to the so-called " historical sense," because questions of this sort and the accompanying eulogies accorded to Corneille as a historian, are now to be looked upon as antiquated.

The historical relations of Corneille's ideal are clearly indicated or at any rate adumbrated in these references and explanations, as also its incipience and genesis, which is to be found, as we have stated, in the theory and practice of the Renaissance, concerning politics and the office of the sovereign or prince, and for the rest in the ethics of stoicism, which was so widely diffused in the second half of the sixteenth cen-

tury, and not less in France than elsewhere. The image of Corneille is surrounded in our imagination with all those volumes, containing baroque frontispieces illustrative of historical scenes, which at that time saw the light every day in all parts of Europe. They were the works of the moralists, of the Machiavellians, of the Taciteans, of the councillors in the art of adroit behaviour at court, of the Jesuit casuists Botero and Ribadeneyra, Sanchez and Mariana, Valeriano Castiglione and Matteo Pellegrini, Gracian and Amelot de la Houssaye, Balzac and Naudée, Scioppio and Justus Lipsius. They might be described as comprizing a complete and conspicuous section of the Library of the Manzonian Don Ferrante, the "intellectual" of the seventeenth century.

Such literature as this and the history of the time itself have been more than once given as the source of the poetical inspiration proper to Corneille, and indeed they appear spontaneously in the mind of anyone acquainted with the particular mode of thought and of manners that have prevailed during the various epochs of modern society. It is therefore unpleasant to find critics intent on fishing out other origins for it, in an obscure determinism of race and

religion, almost as if disgusted with the obvious explanation, which is certainly the only true one in this case, pointing out for instance in Corneille "an energy that comes from the north," that is to say from the Germany that produced Luther and Kant, or from the country that was occupied for a time by their forefathers the Normans, those Scandinavian pirates who disembarked under the leadership of Rollo (if this fancy originated with Lemaître, they all repeat it); or they discover the characteristic of his poetry in the subtlety and litigious spirit of the Norman, and in the lawyer and magistrate whose functions he fulfilled.

The customary association of his ideal with the theory of Descartes is also without much truth. Chronological incompatibility would in any case preclude derivation or repercussion from this source, the utmost that could be admitted being that both possessed common elements, since they were both descended from a common patrimony of culture, namely the stoical morality already mentioned, and from the cult of wisdom in general. In Descartes, as later in Spinoza, the tendency was towards the domination of the passions by means of the intellect or the pure intelligence, which dissipates

them by knowing and thinking them, while with Corneille the domination was all to be effected by means of an effort of the will.

The historical element in the ideal of Corneille does not mean that its value was restricted to the times of the author and should be looked upon as having disappeared with the disappearance of those customs and doctrines, because every time expresses human eternal truth in its forms that are historically determined, laying in each case especial stress upon particular aspects or moments of the spirit. The idea of the deliberative will has been removed in our day to the second rank, indeed it has almost been lost in the background, under the pressure of other forces and of other more urgent aspects of reality. Yet it possesses eternal vigour and is perpetually returning to the mind and soul, through the poets and philosophers and through the complexities of life itself, which make us feel its beauty and importance. The history of the manners, of the patriotism, of the moral spirit, of the military spirit of France, bears witness to this, for one of its mainstays in the past as in the present has been the tragedies of Corneille. The heroic, the tragic Charlotte Corday gave reality in her own

person to one of Corneille's characters, so full of will power and ready for any enterprise: she was one of those *aimables furies,* nourished like the tyrannicides of the Renaissance on the *Lives* of Plutarch, whom her great forefather had set on paper with such delight.

It is inconceivable that such heroines as she, sublime in their meditated volitional act, should have been audaciously classed and confounded with those weak and impulsive beings extolled by the philosophers and artists of the will for power, from Stendhal to Nietzsche, who freely sought their models among the degenerates of the criminal prisons.

The whole life of Corneille, the whole of his long activity, was dominated by the ideal that we have described, with a constancy and a coherence which leaps to the eye of anyone who examines the particulars. As a young man, he touched various strings of the lyre, the tragedy of horrors in the manner of Seneca (*Médée*), eccentric comedy in *L'Illusion comique,* the romantic drama of adventures and incidents in *Clitandre,* the comedies of love; but we already find many signs in these works and especially in the comedies, of the tendency to fix the will in certain situations, as will for a purpose and

choice. After his novitiate (in which period is to be comprehended the *Cid,* which is rather an attempt than a realisation, rather a beginning than an end) he proceeded in a straight line and with over increasing resolution and self-consciousness. It is due to a prejudice, born of extrinsic or certainly but little acute considerations, that an interval should be placed between the *Cid* and the later works, though this was done by Schlegel, by Sainte-Beuve and by many others, both foreigners and French. They deplored that Corneille should have abandoned the Spanish mediaeval and knightly style, so in harmony with his generous, grandiose and imaginative inclinations, so full of promise for the romantic future, and should have restricted himself to the Graeco-Roman world and to political tragedy. It is impossible (as we have shown in passing), to assert the originality and the beauty of the *Cid,* when it is compared with and set in opposition to the model offered to Corneille by Guillen de Castro. Now if there is not to be found beauty, there is certainly to be found a sort of originality in the personality of Corneille, who eats into the popular epicity of the model and substitutes for it the study of deliberative situations. The

harmonious versification of these explains in great part the success which the play met with in a society accustomed to debate "questions of love" (as they had been called since the period of the troubadours at the Renaissance), and those of honour and knighthood, of challenges and duels. But on the other hand, the reason of its success was also to be found in what persisted scattered here and there of the ardour and tenderness of the original play, which moved the spectators and made them love Chimène: *"Tout Paris pour Chimène a les yeux de Rodrigue."* Yet these words of tenderness and strong expressions, though beautiful in themselves, show themselves to be rather foreign to the new form of the drama, and there is some truth in the strange remark of Klein: that "there is not enough Cidian electricity, enough material for electro-dramatic shocks in that atmosphere full of the exhalations of the *antichambre,* to produce a slap in the face of equally pathetic force and consequence" with the *bofetada* which Count Lozano applied to the countenance of the decrepit Diego Laynez in the Spanish drama. And there is truth also in the judgment of the Academy, that the subject of the *Cid* is "defective

in the essential part" and "lacking in verisimilitude"; of course not because it was so with Guillen de Castro, or that a subject, that is to say, mere material, can be of itself good or bad, verisimilar or the reverse, poetic or unpoetic, but because it had become defective and discordant in the hands of Corneille, who elaborated and refined it. Rodrigue, Jimena the lady Urraca, are simple, spontaneous, almost childlike souls, in the mould of popular heroes. Chimène and Rodrigue and the Infanta are reflective and dialectical spirits, and since their novel psychological attitude does not chime well with the old-fashioned manner of behaviour, Rodrigue and the father sometimes appear to be charlatans, Chimène sometimes even a hypocrite, the Infanta insipid and superfluous. Also, when Corneille returned to the "Spanish style," in *Don Sanche d'Aragon,* he charged it with reflections and ponderations and deliberative resolutions, without aiming at the picturesque, as the romantics did later, but at dialectic and subtlety. It must however be admitted that all this represents a superiority, if viewed from another angle: but this superiority does not reside in the artistic effect obtained;

it is rather mental and cultural and represents a more complex and advanced humanity.

Thus the *Cid* is to be looked upon as really a work of transition, a transition to the *Horace,* which has seemed to a learned German, to be substantially the same as the *Cid,* the *Cid* reconstructed after the censures passed upon it by his adversaries and in the Academy, which Corneille inwardly felt to be, in a certain measure at any rate, just. But another prejudice creates a gap between what are called the four principal tragedies, the *Cid,* the *Horace,* the *Cinna* and the *Polyeucte* —" the great Cornelian quadrilateral " eulogised by Péguy in rambling prose,— and the later tragedies, as though Corneille had changed his method in these and begun to pursue another ideal, " political tragedy." Setting aside for the time being the question of greater or lesser artistic value, it is certain that he never really changed his method. In the *Horace,* there is no suggestion of the ferocious national sanctity of a primitive society, in the *Cinna,* there is no trace of the imagined tragedy of satiety or of the *lassitude,* which the sanguinary Augustus is supposed to have experienced. The *Polyeucte*

does not contain a shadow of the fervour, the delirium, the fanaticism, of a religion in the act of birth, but as Schlegel well expressed it, "a firm and constant faith rather than a true religious enthusiasm." In the four tragedies above mentioned, *le coeur* is not supreme, any more than *l'esprit* is supreme in the later tragedies, but "political tragedy" is present more or less in all of them, in the intrinsic sense of a representation of calculations, ponderations and resolutions, and often too in the more evident sense of State affairs. He pursues these and suchlike forms of representation, heedless, firm and obstinate, notwithstanding the disfavour of the public and of the critics, who asked for other things. They divest themselves of extraneous elements and attain to the perfection at which they aimed. This may be observed in one of the very latest, the *Pulchérie*. The author congratulated himself upon its half-success or shadow of success, declaring that "it is not always necessary to follow the fashion of the time, in order to be successful on the stage." Just previously, he was pleased with Saint-Évremond for his approbation of the secondary place to be assigned to love in tragedy, "for it is a passion too surcharged with weaknesses to

be dominant in a heroic drama." Voltaire was struck with this constancy to the original line of development, for he felt bound to remark at the conclusion of his commentary, not without astonishment and in opposition to the current opinion, that "he wrote very unequally, but I do not know that he had an unequal genius, as is maintained by some; because I always see him intent, alike in his best and in his inferior works, upon the force and the profundity of the ideas. He is always more disposed to debate than to move, and he reveals himself rich in finding expedients to support the most ungrateful of arguments, though these are but little tragic, since he makes a bad choice of his subjects from the *Oedipe* onwards, where he certainly does devise intrigues, but these are of small account and lack both warmth and life. In his last works he is trying to delude himself." But Corneille did not delude himself; rather he knew himself, and he himself the author was a personage who had deliberated and had made up his mind, once and for all.

The vigour of this resolution and the compactness of the work which resulted from it, are not diminished, but are rather stressed by the fact that Corneille possessed other aptitudes

and sources of inspiration, which he neglected and of which he made little or no use. Certainly, the poet who versified the delicious *Psyche,* in collaboration with Molière, would have been able, had he so desired, to enter into the graces of those "*doucereux*" and "*enjoués,*" whom he despised. There are witty, tender and melancholy poems among his miscellaneous works, and in certain parts of the paraphrase of the *Imitation* and other sacred compositions, there is a religious fervour that is to seek in the *Polyeucte.* His youthful comedies contain a power of observation of life, replete with passionate sympathy, which foreshadows the coming social drama. We refer especially to certain personages and scenes of the *Galerie du Palais,* of the *Veuve* and of the *Suivante;* to certain studies of marriageable girls, obedient to the resolve of their parents, and to mothers, who still carry in their heart how much that submission cost them in the past and do not wish to abuse the power which they possess over their daughters. There are also certain tremulous meetings of lovers, who had been separated and are annoyingly interrupted by the irruption of prosaic reality in the shape of their relations and friends ("*Ah! mère, soeur, ami,*

comme vous m' importunez!") and certain odious and painful psychological cases, like that of Amaranthe, the poor girl of good family, who is made companion of the richer girl, not superior to her either in attractiveness, or spirit, or grace, or blood. She envies and intrigues against her, attempts to carry off her lover and being finally vanquished, hurls bitter words at society and distils venomous maledictions.

"Curieux," "étonnant," "étrange," "paradoxal," "déconcertant," are the epithets that the critics alternately apply to the personage of Alidor, in the *Place Royale,* and Corneille himself calls him *"extravagant"* in the examination of his work that he wrote later. All too have held that uncompromising lover of his own liberty to be very "Cornelian" or "pure Cornelian," who although in love, is afraid of love, because it threatens to deprive him of his internal freedom. He therefore tries to throw the woman he loves and who adores him, into the arms of others, by stratagem. Failing in this endeavour, and being finally abandoned by the lady herself, who decides to enter a convent, instead of sorrowing or at least being mortified at this, he rejoices at his good fortune. Indeed, Corneille, despite the tardy epithet of

"*extravagant,*" which he affixes to this personage, does not turn him to ridicule in the comedy, nor does he condemn or criticise him. On the contrary, in the dedicatory epistle, addressed to an anonymous gentleman, who might be the very character in question, he approves of the theory, which Alidor illustrates. "I have learned from you"— he writes —"that the love of an honest man must always be voluntary; that he must never love in one way what he cannot but love; that if he should find himself reduced to this extremity, it amounts to a tyranny and the yoke must be shaken off. Finally, the loved one must have by so much the more claim to our love, in so far as it is the result of our choice and of the loved one's merit and does not derive from blind inclination imposed upon us by a heredity which we are unable to resist." But the disconcertion and perplexity caused by the play in question, have their origin in this; that Corneille had not yet succeeded in repressing and suppressing the spontaneous emotions, and therefore throws his ideal creation into the midst of a throng of beings, whose limbs are softer, their blood warmer and more tumultuous, who love and suffer and despair, like Angélique. This would render

that ideal personage comic, ironical and extravagant, if the poet did not for his part think and feel it to be altogether serious. A subtle flaw, therefore, permeates every part of the play, which lacks fusion and unity of fundamental motive. This is doubtless a grave defect, but a defect which adds weight to the psychological document that it contains, proving the absolute power which the ideal of the deliberative will was acquiring in Corneille.

CHAPTER XV

THE MECHANISM OF THE CORNELIAN TRAGEDY

The ideal of the deliberative will, then, formed the real, living *passion* of this man devoid of passions; for no one that lives can withhold himself from passion: he is only able to change its object by passing from one to the other. The judgment that holds Corneille to be an intrinsically prosaic, ratiocinatory and casuistical genius is therefore to be looked upon as lacking of penetration. Had he been a casuist, it seems clear that he would have composed casuistical works. Nor did he lack of requests and encouragement in that direction in the literature that was admired and sought after in his time. Instead, however, of acceding to them, he dwelt ever in the world of poetry and was occupied throughout his life, up to his seventieth year, with the composition of tragedies. He was not a casuist, although he loved casuistry: these two things are as dif-

ferent as the love for warlike representations and accounts of wars and the being actually a soldier, the perpetual dwelling of the imagination upon matters of business, commerce and speculation (like Honoré de Balzac for instance), and being really a man of business. Nor can his gift be described as merely that of a didactic poet, although he often gives a dissertation in verse, because he was not inspired with the wish to teach, but rather to admire and to present the power and the triumphs of the free will for admiration. Those philologists who have patiently set to work to reconstruct Corneille's conception of the State into a *Staatsidee* have not understood this. Corneille's conception of the State, of absolute monarchy, of the king, of legitimacy, of ministers, of subjects, and so on, were not by any means in him political doctrine, but just forms and symbols of an attitude of mind, which he caressed and idolised.

The enquiry as to the nature and degree and tone of that passion differs altogether from the fact of Corneille's powerful passionality, as to which there can be no doubt. The problem, that is to say, is, whether passion, which is certainly a necessary condition for poetry, was so

shaped and found in him such compensations and restraints as to yield itself with docility to poetry and to give it a fair field for expression. It is well known that the sovereign passion, the pain that renders mute, the love that leads to raving, impede the dream of the poet, they impede artistic treatment, the cult of perfect form and the joy in beauty. There is too a form of passion, which has in it something of the practical: it is more occupied with embodying its favourite dreams, in order to obtain from them stimulus and incentive, than with fathoming them poetically and idealising them in contemplation.

It seems impossible to deny that something of this sort existed in the case of Corneille, for as we read his works, while we constantly receive the already mentioned impression of seriousness and severity, there is another impression that is sometimes mingled with these and suggests the disquieting presence of men firmly fixed and rooted in an ideal. When faced with his predilection for deliberation and resolution, the figure of the Aristophanic Philocleon sometimes returns to the memory. This Philocleon was a " philoheliast," that is to say he was the victim of a mania for judging, τοῦ δικάζειν. His

son locked him up, but he climbed out of window, in order to hasten to the tribunal and satisfy his vital need of administering justice!

The consequences of this excess of practical passionality in the case of Corneille, of its exclusive domination in him, was that he either did not love or refused to allow himself to love anything else in the world, and lost interest in all the rest of life. He did not surpass it ideally, in which case he would have remained trembling and living in its presence, although it was combated and suppressed, but he drove it out or cut it off altogether. He acted as one, who for the love of the human body, should eliminate from his picture, landscape, sky, air, the background of the picture, upon and from which the figure rises and with which it is connected, although separated from it in relief, and should limit himself to the delineation of bodies and attitudes of bodies. Corneille, having abolished all other forms of life, found nothing before him but a series of situations for deliberation, vigorously felt, warmly expressed, sung with full voice, and illustrated with energetic yet becoming gestures.

What tragedy, what drama, what representation, could emerge from such a limitation of

volitional attitudes? How could the various tonalities and affections and so the various personages, unite and harmonise among themselves with all their shades and gradations? The bridge that should give passage to this full and complete representation was wanting or had been destroyed. All that was possible was a suite of deliberative lyrics, of magnificent perorations, of lofty sentiments, sometimes standing alone, sometimes also taking the form of a duet or a dialogue, a theory of statues, draped in solemn attitudes, of enormous figures, rigid and similar as Byzantine mosaics. Here and there a writer such as Lanson has to some extent had an inkling of this intrinsic impossibility when, writing about the *Nicoméde,* he remarked that Corneille " in his pride at having founded a new kind of tragedy, without pity or terror, and having admiration as its motive, did not perceive that he was founding it upon a void; because the tragedy will be the less dramatic, the purer is the will, since it is defeats or semi-defeats that are dramatic, the slow, difficult victories of the will, incessant combats." But he held on the other hand that Corneille had once constructed, in *Nicoméde,* a perfect tragedy, on the single datum of the pure will,

par un coup de génie; but this was the only one that ever could be written, the reason that it could not be repeated being " that all the works of Corneille are dramatic, precisely to the extent that the will falls short in them of perfection and in virtue of the elements that separate it from them." The beauty, he says, of the *Cid,* of *Polyeucte* and of *Cinna,* " consists in what they contain of passion, coöperating with and striving against the will of the heroes." But " strokes of genius " are not miracles and they do not make the impossible possible and the other dramas of Corneille that we have mentioned do not differ substantially from the *Nicoméde,* for in them passionate elements are intruded and felt to be out of harmony (as in the *Cid*), or they are apparent and conventional.

Apparent and conventional: because the lack of the bridge for crossing over forbade Corneille to construct poetically out of volitional situations representations of life, to which they did not of themselves lead. It did not however prevent another kind of construction, which may be called intellectualistic or practical. He deduced other situations and other antitheses from the volitional situations and

their antitheses that he had conceived, and thus he formed a sort of semblance of the representation of life. At the same time he reduced it to the dimensions of the drama that he was originating mentally, partly through study of the ancients and above all Seneca, partly from the Italian writers of tragedy of the sixteenth century, partly from that of the Spanish writers and of his French predecessors, but not without consulting, following or modifying the French and Italian casuists and regulating the whole with his own sense for theatrical effect and for the forms of it likely to suit the taste of the French public of his day.

This structure of tragedy, with its antitheses and parallelisms, its expedients for accelerating and arresting and terminating the action has been qualified with praise or blame as possessing great "logical" perfection. Logic, however, which is the life of thought, has nothing to do with the balancing and counterbalancing of mechanical weights, whose life lies outside them, in the head and in the hand that has constructed and set them in motion. It has been also compared to architecture and to the admirable proportions of the Italian art of the Renaissance. But here too, we must suspect

that the true meaning of the works thus characterised escapes us, for attention is paid only to the external appearance of things, in so far as it can be expressed in mathematical terms. We have said exactly the same thing, without having recourse to logic or to architecture, when we noted that the structure of Corneille's tragedies did not derive from within, that is, from his true poetical inspiration, but rose up beside it, and was due to the unconscious practical need of making a canvas or a frame upon which to stretch the series of volitional situations desired by the imagination of the poet. Thus it was poetically a cold, incoherent, absurd thing, but practically rational and coherent, like every "mechanism." This word is not pronounced here for the first time owing to our irreverence, but is to be found among those who have written about Corneille and have felt themselves unable to refrain from referring to his "*mécanique théatrale*" and to the "*système fermé*" of his tragedies, where "*s'opére par un jeu visible de forces, la production d'un état définitif appelé dénouement.*"

When this has been stated, it is easy to see that anyone who examines this assemblage of thoughts and phrases with the expectation of

finding there a soft, rich, sensuous and passionate representation of life, full of throbs, bedewed with tears, shot through with troubles and enjoyments, such as are to be found in Shakespearean drama and also in Sophoclean tragedy, is disappointed, and thereupon describes Corneille's art as false, whereas he should perhaps describe his own expectation as false. But it is strange to find, as counterpoise to that delusion, the attempt to demonstrate that the apparatus is not an apparatus, but flesh and blood, that the frame is not a frame but a picture, like one of Titian's or Rembrandt's, and now setting comparisons aside, that the pseudo-tragedy and the pseudo-drama of Corneille is pure drama or tragedy, that his intellectualistic deductions, his practical devices, are lyrical motives and express the truth of the human heart. Such, however, is the wrongheadedness of the criticisms that we have reviewed above. The mode of procedure is to deny what is evident, for example that Corneille argues through the mouths of his characters, instead of expressing and setting in action his own mode of feeling, in such a way as the situations would require, were they poetically treated. Faguet answers Voltaire's re-

marks upon the famous couplet of Rodogune: "*Il est des noeuds secrets, il est des sympathies* . . ." to the effect that "the poet is always himself talking and that passion does not thus express itself," by saying that people are accustomed to express themselves in this way, that is to say, in the form of general ideas, when they are calm, as though the question could be settled with an appeal to the reality of ordinary life, whereas on the contrary it is a question of poeticity, that is to say, of the tragic situation, which by its own nature, excludes *couplets* in certain cases, however well turned they be.

Yet the very same critics, who are thus guilty of sophistry in their attempts to defend Corneille, are capable of observing on another occasion that if not all, at any rate many or several of Corneille's tragedies are "melodramas," and that the author tended more and more to melodrama, in the course of his development or decadence, as we may like to call it. Perhaps in so saying, they are making a careless use of the word "melodrama," and mean by it a drama of intrigue, of surprises, of shocks and of recognitions. If on the contrary they have employed it in its true sense, or if their

tongue has been instinctively more correct than their thought, since "melodrama" means precisely a melodrama, that does not exist for itself, but for the music, and is a canvas or frame, they have again declared the extrinsic character of the Cornelian tragedy.

Another confirmation of this character of the tragedies is to be found in that suspicion of comicality, which lurks so frequently in the background as we read them, and occasionally makes itself clearly audible in the course of development of their pseudo-tragic action. It has been asked whether the *Cid* were a tragedy or a comedy and inquiry has resulted in no satisfactory answer being arrived at, because involuntary comicality is present there, akin to what is to be found in certain of the pompous and emphatic melodramas of Metastasio. It is true that Don Diego's reply to the king has been cited as sublime, when he does not wish the new duel to take place at once, in order that the Cid may have a little rest, after the great battle that he has won against the Moors, which he has described triumphantly and at great length: *"Rodrigue a pris haleine en vous la racontant!"* But are we then to regard as sinful the smile that gradually dawns upon the lips of

those who are not pledged to admire at all costs? And consider the case of the furious Emilia, who at the end of the *Cinna* gets rid in the twinkling of an eye, of all the convictions anchored in her breast, of that hatred that burned her up, much in the same manner as a stomach-ache disappears upon the use of a sedative, and declares that she has all of a sudden become the exact opposite of what she was previously? *"Ma haine va mourir, que j'ai cru immortelle; elle est morte et ce coeur devient sujet fidèle, Et prenant désormais cette haine en horreur, L'ardeur de vous servir succède à sa fureur."* And Curiace, who finds himself in such a situation as to deliver the following madrigal to his betrothed: *"D'Albe avec mon amour j'accordais la querelle; je soupirais pour vous, en combattant pour elle; Et s'il fallait encor que l'on en vînt aux coups, Je combattrais pour elle en soupirant pour vous."*? But we will not insist upon this descent into the comic, for it is not always to be avoided, being a natural effect of the "mechanicity" of the Cornelian drama and is for the rest in conformity with the theory which explains the comic as *"l'automatisme installé dans la vie et imitant la vie"* (Bergson).

Another form of the comic, discoverable in him, must also be insisted upon; but this is not involuntary and blameworthy, but coherent and praiseworthy. The form in question is that which led to the comedy of character and of costume, to psychological and political comedy. Brunetière even said between jest and earnest: "The *Cid, Horace, Cinna* and *Polyeucte,* give me much trouble. Were it not for these four, I should say that Corneille is fundamentally and above all a comic poet, and an excellent comic poet; and this is perfectly true; but how are we to say it, when the *Cid, Horace, Cinna* and *Polyeucte* are there? These four tragedies embarrass me exceedingly!" And he proceeds to note and illustrate the "family scenes" scattered among his tragedies, the prosaic and conversational phraseology, which so displeased Voltaire, and the complete absence in some of them of tragic quality, even of the external sort, that is, scenes of blood and death, and the prevalence of the ethical over the pathetic representation, in the manner of the comedy of Menander and of Terence. Despite all this, his definition of Corneille as a comic poet will be admired as acute and ingenious, but will never carry conviction as being

true: none of those tragedies is a comedy, because none is accentuated in that manner. For the same reason that Corneille could not attain to the poetical representation of life, because he was not able to pass beyond the one-sidedness of his ideal, by merging it in the fulness of things, he was unable to present the comic or ethical side of them, because he did not pass beyond the spectacle of life and so of his ideal, by viewing it *sub specie intellectus,* in its external and internal limitations. The attempt to do so in the Alidor of the *Place Royale* had not been successful, and it never was successful, even assuming that he attempted it. He did not indeed attempt it, and the ethos that so often took the place of the pathos in the structure of his tragedies, was itself a natural consequence of their mechanicity. Owing to this, when they had lost the guidance of the initial poetic motive, they often fluctuated between emphasis and cold observation, between eloquence and prose, between stylisation of the characters and certain realistic determinations. This hybridism, which has sometimes led to the belittling of Corneille to the level of a poet of observation and of comicality, has more often led, from another point of view, to his

being increased in stature and importance, to his being belauded and acclaimed as possessing "romantic tendencies," or as a "French Shakespeare," although but "a Shakespeare in trammels." There is really nothing whatever in him of the romantic, in the conception, that is to say, and in the sentiment of life; and there is less than nothing in him of Shakespeare, whose work had its origins in a far wider and certainly a very different sphere of spiritual interests. But since "romanticism" and "Shakespeare" perhaps stand here simply for poetry, it must be admitted that he is a poet, who does not explain himself fully, or explains himself badly, without the liberty, the sympathy, the abandonment of self necessary for poetry. He harnesses his inspiration to an apparatus of actions and reactions, of parallelisms and of conventions, which may be well described as "trammels," when compared with poetry.

But they are in any case trammels which he sets in his own way, trammels which he creates and fixes in his soul and are not imposed upon him by the rules, conventions and usages, which were in vogue at the time he wrote, as is erroneously maintained, coupled with lamenta-

tions as to the unfavorable period for the writing of poetry, which fell to his lot. What poet can be trammeled from without? The poet sets such obstacles aside, or he passes through them, or he goes round them, or he feigns to bow to them, or he does bow to them, but only in secondary matters that are almost indifferent. For this reason, disputes and doctrines as to the three unities, as to the characters of tragedy, as to the manner of obtaining the catharsis or purgation, have considerable importance for anyone investigating the history of aesthetic and critical ideas, of their formation, growth and progress, by means of struggles that seem to us now to be ridiculous, though they were once serious; but they have no importance whatever as an element in the judgment of a poem. Corneille did not rebel against the so-called rules, because he did not feel any need for rebellion; he accepted or accustomed himself to them, because, having treated tragedy mechanically, it suited him, or did him no harm, to take heed of the mechanical rules, laid down by custom and literary and theatrical precepts.

For this reason, his method of theatrical composition was not only susceptible of being

tolerated, but even of pleasing and receiving the praise, the applause and the admiration of the contemporary public, which did not seek in them the joy of poetic rapture, but a different and more or less refined pleasure, answering to its spiritual needs and aspirations. It could later and can now prove insupportable, because the delight of a certain period in dexterity, expedients and clever devices, in the fine phrases of the courtier, in certain actions that were the fashion, in the gallantries of pastoral and heroic romance, in epigrams, antitheses and madrigals, are no longer our delights. Passionate or realistic art, as it is called, flourishes everywhere, in place of the old scholastic, academic and court models. But for us, everything that concerns Corneille's composition and the technique of his work is indifferent, since we are viewing the problem from the point of view of poetry. We shall not therefore busy ourselves with discriminating those parts of it that are well from those that are ill put together, nor his clever from his unsuccessful expedients, his well-constructed " scenes " from those that suffer from padding, his " acts " that run smoothly from those that drag, the more from the less happy " endings," as is the habit of those

critics, who nourish a superstitious admiration for what Flaubert would have called "*l'arcane théatral.*" We care nothing for the canvas, but only for what of embroidery in the shape of poetry there is upon it.

CHAPTER XVI

THE POETRY OF CORNEILLE

The poetry of Corneille, or what of poetry there is in him, is all to be found in the lyrical quality of the volitional situations, in those debates, remarks, solemn professions of faith, energetic assertions of the will, in that superb admiration for one's own personal, unshakable firmness. Here it is that we must seek it, not in the development of the dramatic action or in the character of the individual personages. For it is only an affection for life, that is to say, penetration of it in all its manifestations, which is capable of generating those beings, so warm with passion, who insinuate themselves into us and take possession of our imagination, who grow in it and eventually become so familiar to us that we seem to have really met them: the creations of Dante, of Shakespeare, or of Goethe. Certainly, Corneille's lyricism, which seems to be exclusive and one-sided, would not be lyricism and poetry, if it were really always

exclusive and one-sided and although it cannot give us drama in the sense we have described, owing to its driving away the other passions, yet it does not succeed in doing so in such a complete and radical manner that we fail to perceive their fermentation, however remote, in those severe and vigorous assertions of the will. The loftiness itself of the rhythm indicates the high standard of the vital effort, which it represents and expresses. To continue the illustration above initiated, Corneille's situations may be drawings rather than pictures, or pictures in design rather than in colour; but these pictures also possess their own qualities as pictures, they too are works of love and must not be confounded with drawings directed to intellectual ends, with illustration of real things, or concepts with prosaic designs.

And indeed everyone has always sought and seeks the flower of the spirit of Corneille, the beauty of his work, in single situations, or "places." The commentators who busy themselves with the exposition and the degustation of his works have but slight material for analysis of the sort that is employed by them in the case of other poets, whose fundamental poetic motive furnishes a basis for the rethinking of

the characters and of their actions. Here on the contrary they feel themselves set free from an obstruction, when they pass to the single passages, and at once declare with Faguet, one of the latest: "*Il y a de beaux vers à citer.*" The actors too, who attempt to interpret his tragedies in the realistic romantic manner, fail to convince, while those succeed on the other hand who deliver them in a somewhat formal style. In thus listening to the intoned declamations of the monologues, exhortations, invectives, sentiments and *couplets,* one feels oneself transplanted into a superior sphere, exactly as happens with singing and music.

Corneille's characters are not to be laid hold of in their full and corporate being. It is but rarely that they allow us a glimpse of their human countenance, or permit us to catch some cry of scorn, and then rapidly withdraw themselves into the abstract so completely that we do not succeed in taking hold of even a fold of their fleeting robes, although a long-enduring echo of their lightning-like speech remains in the soul. The old father of the Horatii strengthens his sons in their conflict between family affection and their imperious duty to their country, with the maxim: "*Faites votre*

devoir et laissez faire aux Dieux." The youthful Curiace murmurs with tears in his voice, to the youthful Horace, his friend and brother-in-law: "*Je vous connais encore et c'est ce qui me tue,*" but Horace is as inflexible as a syllogism, having arrived at the conclusion that the posts assigned to them in the feud between Rome and Alba have made enemies of them, and therefore that they must not know one another in future. Curiace, when at last he has become bitterly resigned to their irremediable separation and hostility, exclaims: "*Telle est nôtre misère . . .*"— Emilia, another being with nerves like steel springs, reveals her proud soul in a single phrase; when Maximus suggests flight to her, she exclaims as she faces him, in a cry that is like a blow: "*Tu oses m'aimer et tu n' oses mourir!*" She is perhaps more deeply wounded here in her pride as a woman, who fails to receive the tribute of heroism, which she expects, than in her moral sentiment. The noble Suréna holds it an easy thing, a thing of small moment, to give his life for his lady: he wishes "*toujours aimer, toujours souffrir, toujours mourir!*"; and Antiochus, in *Rodogune,* when he discovers that he is surrounded with ambushes, decides to die and

in doing so directs his thought to the sad shade of his brother, who has been slain in a like manner: "*Cher frère, c'est pour moi le chemin du trépas . . .*"; and Titus feels himself penetrated with the melancholy of the fleeting hour, the sense of human fragility:

Oui, Flavian, c'est affaire à mourir.
La vie est peu de chose; et tôt ou tard qu'importe
Qu'un traître me l'arrache, ou que l'âge l'emporte?
Nous mourrons á toute heure; et dans le plus doux sort
Chaque instant de la vie est un pas vers la mort.

Words expressive of death are always those whose accent is clearest and whose resonance is the most profound with Corneille. It is perhaps as well to leave the *Moi* of Medea and the *Qu'il mourrait* of the old Horace to the admirative raptures of the rhetoricians; but let us repeat to ourselves those words of the sister of Heraclius (in the *Heraclius*), mortified by fate, ever at the point of death and ever ready to die:

Mais à d'autres pensers il me faut recourir:
Il n'est plus temps d'aimer alors qu'il faut mourir. . . .

And again:

Crois-tu que sur la foi de tes fausses promesses
Mon âme ose descendre à de telles bassesses?

Prends mon sang pour le sien; mais, s'il y faut mon coeur,
Périsse Héraclius avec sa triste soeur!

And when she stays the hand of the menacing tyrant suddenly and with a word:

. . . Ne menace point, je suis prête a mourir.

Or, finally, those sweetest words of all, spoken by Eurydice in the *Suréna:*

Non, je ne pleure pas, madame, mais je meurs.

These dying words form as it were the extreme points of the resolute will, of the will, fierce *usque ad mortem.* But the others, in which the volitional situations are fixed and developed and determination to pursue a certain course is asserted, are, as we have said, the proper and normal expression of the poetry of Corneille, which can be fully enjoyed, provided that we do not insist upon asking whether they are appropriate in the mouths of the personages, who should act and not analyse and define themselves, or whether they are or are not necessary for the development of the drama. Their poetry consists of just that analysis, that passionate self-definition, that arranging of the folds of their own decorous robes, that sculpturing of their own statues.

Let us examine a few examples of it, taking them from the least known and the least praised tragedies of Corneille, for it is perhaps time to have done with the so-called decadence or exhaustion of Corneille, with his second-childhood (according to which, some would maintain that he returned to his boyish, pre-Cidian period in his maturity), and with the excessive and to no small extent affected and conventional exaltation of the famous square block of stone representing the four faces of honour (the *Cid*), of patriotism (*Horace*), of generosity (*Cinna*) and of sanctity (*Polyeucte*). There is often in those four most popular tragedies a certain pomposity, an emphasis, an apparatus, a rhetorical colouring, which Corneille gradually did away with in himself, in order to make himself ever more nude, with the austere nudity of the spirit. It was perhaps not only constancy and coherence of logical development, but progress of art on the road to its own perfection, which counselled him to abandon too pathetic subjects. In any case, unless we wish to turn the traditional judgment upside down, we must insist that those four tragedies, like those that followed them, are not to be read by the lover of poetry otherwise

than in an anthological manner, that is to say, selecting the fine passages where they are to be found, and these occur in no less number and in beauty at least equal in the other tragedies also, some of which are more and some less theatrically effective.

Pulchérie is the last and one of the most marvellous Cornelian condensations of force in deliberation. She thus manifests her mode of feeling to the youthful Léon whom she loves:

Je vous aime, Léon, et n'en fais point mystère:
Des feux tels que les miens n'ont rien qu'il faille taire.
Je vous aime, et non point de cette folle ardeur
Que les yeux éblouis font maîtresse du coeur;
Non d'un amour conçu par les sens en tumulte,
A qui l'âme applaudit sans qu'elle se consulte,
Et qui, ne concevant que d'aveugles désires,
Languit dans les faveurs et meurt dans les plaisirs:
Ma passion pour vous généreuse et solide,
A la vertu pour âme et la raison pour guide,
La gloire pour objet et veut, sous votre loi,
Mettre en ce jour illustre et l'univers et moi.

Here we have clearly the lyricism of a soul which has achieved complete possession of itself, of a soul overflowing with affections, but knowing which among them are superior and which inferior, and has learned how to administer and how to rule itself, steering the ship

with a steady and experienced hand through treacherous seas, and feeling its own nobility to lie in just what others would call coldness and lack of humanity. Note the expressions "*folle ardeur*" and "*sens en tumulte,*" and the contempt, not to say the disgust, with which they are uttered and the hell that is pointed out as lying in that soul which allows itself to be carried away "*sans qu' elle se consulte.*" Note too the vision of the sad effeminacy of those affections, so blind and so egotistic, which consume and corrupt themselves in themselves, and how he enhances it by contrast with her own rational passion, so "*génereuse et solide,*" with those solemn words of "*vertu,*" of "*raison,*" of "*gloire,*" and the final apotheosis, which lays at the feet of the man she loves and loves worthily, her person and the whole world.

And Pulchérie, when she has been elected empress, again takes counsel with herself and recognises that this love of hers for Léon is still inferior, not yet sufficiently pure, and decides to slay it, in order that it may live again as something different, as something purely rational:

Léon seul est ma joie, il est mon seul désir;
Je n'en puis choisir d'autre, et je n'ose le choisir:

Depuis trois ans unie à cette chère idée,
J'en ai l'âme à toute heure en tous lieux obsédée;
Rien n'en détachera mon coeur que le trépas,
Encore après ma mort n'en répondrai-je pas,
Et si dans le tombeau le ciel permet qu'on aime,
Dans le fond du tombeau je l'aimerai de même.
Trône qui m'éblouis, titres qui me flattez,
Pourriez-vous me valoir ce que vous me coûtez?
Et de tout votre orgueil la pompe la plus haute
A-t-elle un bien égal à celui qu'elle m'ôte?

She thus concedes to human frailty the relief of a lament, such a lament as can issue from her lips, full of strength and charged with resolution in passion, but at the same time noble, measured and dignified. After this, she follows the direction of her will with inexorable firmness. Léon shall not be her spouse, because her choice must be and seem to be dictated by the sole good of the State, and fall upon a man whom she will not love with love, but who will be for Rome an emperor to be feared and respected. A conflict had been engaged between one part of herself and another, between the whole and a part, and she has again subjected the part to the whole and has assigned to it its duty, that of obedience.

Je suis impératrice et j'étais Pulchérie.
De ce trône, ennemi de mes plus doux souhaits,

Je regarde l'amour comme un de mes sujets;
Je veux que le respect qu'il doit à ma couronne
Repousse l'attentat qu'il fait sur ma personne;
Je veux qu'il m'obéisse, au lieu de me trahir;
Je veux qu'il donne à tous l'exemple d'obéir;
Et, jalouse déjà de mon pouvoir suprême,
Pour l'affermir sur tous, je le prends sur moi-même.

Thus love is subjected to the mind, or as it used to be expressed in the language of the time, which was of Stoic origin, to the "hegemonic potency." She would desire to raise her youthful beloved to the lofty level of her intent, by removing him from the sphere of weak lamentations and assuring his union with herself in a mystic marriage of superior wills. What contempt is hers for sentimentalism, which wishes to insinuate itself where it is not wanted, for "tears," for "the shame of tears"!

La plus ferme couronne est bientôt ébranlée
Quand un effort d'amour semble l'avoir volée;
Et pour garder un rang si cher à nos désirs
Il faut un plus grand art que celui des soupirs.
Ne vous abaissez pas à la honte des larmes;
Contre un devoir si fort ce sont de faibles armes;
Et si de tels secours vous couronnaient ailleurs,
J'aurais pitié d'un sceptre acheté par des pleurs.

When we read such verses as these, our breast expands, as it does when we are in the company of men whose gravity of word and deed induce gravity, whose superiority over the crowd makes you forget the existence of the crowd, transporting you to a sphere where the non-accomplishment of duty would appear, not only vile, but incomprehensible. On another occasion our admiration is about to shroud itself in pity, but soon shines forth again and displays itself triumphant, as in the young princess Hiedion of the *Attila,* who is accorded to the abhorred king of the Huns by a treaty of peace — were she to refuse the union, immeasurable calamities would fall upon her family and people. She too observes a sorrowful attitude but hers is an erect and combative sorrow:

Si je n'étais pas, seigneur, ce que je suis,
J'en prendrais quelque droit à finir mes ennuis:
Mais l'esclavage fier d'une haute naissance,
Où toute autre peut tout, me tient dans l'impuissance;
Et, victime d'état, je dois sans reculer
Attendre aveuglement qu'on daigne m'immoler.

The heart trembles and restrains itself at the same moment before that "*esclavage fier,*" that proud and sarcastic "*qu' on daigne m'immoler*"

the victim has already scrutinised the situation in which she finds herself, the duty which is incumbent upon her, the prospect of vengeance which opens itself before her and her race, and has already conceived her terrible design. In like manner with Queen Rodolinde in the *Pertharite,* when she is solicited and implored by the usurper Grimoalde, who wished to espouse her and promises to declare himself tutor to her son and to make him heir to the throne,— suspecting that in this way he will deprive her of the honour of marriage faith and may then put her son to death — she decides upon a horrible course of action, proposing to him that he should put her son to death on the spot:

Puisqu'il faut qu'il périsse, il vaut mieux tôt que tard;
Que sa mort soit un crime, et non pas un hazard;
Que cette ombre innocente à toute heure m'anime,
Me demande à toute heure une grande victime;
Que ce jeune monarque, immolé de ta main,
Te rende abominable à tout le genre humain;
Qu'il t'excite par tout des haines immortelles;
Que de tous tes sujets il fasse des rebelles.
Je t'épouserai lors, et m'y viens d'obliger,
Pour mieux servir ma haine et pour mieux me venger,
Pour moins perdre des voeux contre ta barbarie,
Pour être à tous moments maîtresse de ta vie,

Pour avoir l'accès libre à pousser ma fureur,
Et mieux choisir la place où te percer le coeur.
Voilà mon désespoir, voilà ses justes causes:
A ces conditions, prends ma main, si tu l'oses.

Her husband Pertharite, who had been believed to be dead, is alive: he returns and is made prisoner by Grimoalde, and Rodolinde, fearing ruin, decides to avenge him or to perish with him. But he sees the situation in which he finds himself with his consort in a different light objectively: he sees it as a conquered king, who bows his head to the decision of destiny, recognises the right of the conqueror and holds ever aloft in his soul the idea of regal majesty. So he asserts it with firmness and serenity, going beyond all personal feelings, in order that he may consider only what appertains both to the rights and duties of a king:

Quand ces devoirs communs ont d'importunes lois,
La majesté du trône en dispense les rois;
Leur gloire est au-dessus des règles ordinaires,
Et cet honneur n'est beau que pour les cœurs vulgaires.
Sitôt qu'un roi vaincu tombe aux mains du vainqueur,
Il a trop mérité la dernière rigueur.
Ma mort pour Grimoald ne peut avoir de crime:
Le soin de s'affermir lui rend tout légitime.
Quand j'aurai dans ses fers cessé de respirer,
Donnez-lui votre main sans rien considérer;

Epargnez les efforts d'une impuissante haine,
Et permettez au Ciel de vous faire encor reine.

The courageous and sagacious Nicoméde speaks kingly words of a different sort, well calculated to arouse him and make him lift up his head, to the vacillating father, who wishes to content both Rome and the queen, establish agreement between love and nature, be father and husband:

— Seigneur, voulez-vous bien vous en fier à moi?
Ne soyez l'un ni l'autre.— Et que dois-je être? — Roi.
Reprenez hautement ce noble caractère.
Un véritable roi n'est ni mari ni père;
Il regarde son trône, et rien de plus. Régnez;
Rome vous craindra plus que vous ne la craignez.
Malgré cette puissance et si vaste et si grande,
Vous pouvez déjà voir comme elle m'appréhende,
Combien en me perdant elle espère gagner,
Parce qu'elle prévoit que je saurai régner.

Let us listen also for a moment to the Christian Théodora, who has been granted the time to choose between offering incense to the gods and being abandoned to the soldiery in the public brothel:

Quelles sont vos rigueurs, si vous les nommez grâce!
Et que choix voulez-vous qu'une chrétienne fasse,
Réduite à balancer son esprit agité
Entre l'idolâtrie et l'impudicité?

Le choix est inutile où les maux sont extrêmes.
Reprenez votre grâce, et choisissez vous-mêmes:
Quiconque peut choisir consent à l'un des deux,
Et le consentement est seul lâche et honteux.
Dieu, tout juste et tout bon, qui lit dans nos pensées,
N'impute point de crime aux actions forcées;
Soit que vous contraigniez pour vos dieux impuissans
Mon corps à l'infamie ou ma main à l'encens,
Je saurai conserver d'une âme résolue
À l'époux sans macule une épouse impollue.

She really does *balance* herself mentally at the parting of the ways placed before her, analyses it and formulates her determination, rejecting as cowardly both the choice of the sacrilege and of the shameful punishment and casting it in the teeth of her unworthy oppressors. It is the only answer that befits the Christian virgin, firm in her determination of saving her constancy in the faith and modesty, which resides not only in the will, but also in desire itself. The expression of her intention has just such a tone and adopts just the formulae of a theologian speaking by her mouth —*"le consentment," "l'époux sans macule," "l'épouse impollue."*

In *Theseus* of the *Oedipe* the poet himself protests against a conception that menaces the foundation of his spirit itself, because it offends

the idea of free choice and makes unsteady the consciousness that man has of being able to determine upon a line of conduct according to reason. He is protesting against the ancient idea of fate, or rather against its revival in modern form, as the Jansenist doctrine of grace:

Quoi! la nécessité des vertus et des vices
D'un astre impérieux doit suivre les caprices,
Et Delphes, malgré nous, conduit nos actions
Au plus bizarre effet de ses prédictions?
L'âme est donc toute esclave: une loi souveraine
Vers le bien ou le mal incessamment l'entraine;
Et nous ne recevons ni crainte ni désir
De cette liberté qui n'a rien à choisir,
Attachés sans relâche à cet ordre sublime,
Vertueux sans mérite et vicieux sans crime.
Qu'on massacre les rois, qu'on brise les autels,
C'est la faute des dieux et non pas des mortels:
De toute la vertu sur la terre épandue
Tout le prix à ces dieux, toute la gloire est due:
Ils agissent en nous quand nous pensons agir;
Alors qu'on délibère, on ne fait qu'obèir;
Et notre volonté n'aime, hait, cherche, évite,
Que suivant que d'en haut leur bras la précipite!
D'un tel aveuglement daignez me dispenser.
Le Ciel, juste à punir, juste à récompenser,
Pour rendre aux actions leur perte ou leur salare,
Doit nous offrir son aide et puis nous laisser faire. . . .

What indignation, what a revolt of the whole being against the thought that "*quand on délibére, on ne fait qu' obéir*"! How he defends the liberty, not only of the "*virtus*," but also of the "*vices*," the liberty "*de nous laisser faire*"!

This eloquence of the will and of liberty, this singing declamation, is the true lyricism of Corneille, intimate and substantial, and not the so-called "lyrical pieces," which he inserted into his tragedies here and there. These are lyrical in the formal and restricted scholastic sense of the term, but they are often as affected as the monologue of Rodrigue, which is accompanied by a refrain. Others have demonstrated in an accurately analytical manner that he lacks lyricism or poetry of style; that the construction of his phrase is logical, with its "because," its "but," its "then," that he overabounds in maxims and altogether ignores metaphor, the picturesque and musicality. But the same writer who has maintained this, has also declared that his poetry is to be found, if not in the coloured image and in the musical sound, then certainly "in the rhythm, in the wide or rapid vibration of the strophe, which extends or transports the thought" (Lanson): that is to

say, in making this admission, he has confuted his previous mean and narrow theory concerning poetry and lyricism. The other judgment is to the effect that Corneille is not a poet by style, but by the conception and meaning of his works — that he is a latent poet or one who dressed up his thought in prose. But it is unthinkable that there should exist latent poets, who do not manifest themselves in poetic form. The truth of the matter is that where Corneille felt as a poet, he expressed himself as a poet, without many-coloured metaphors, without musical trills and softnesses of expression, but with many maxims, many conjunctive particles, declaratory and expressive of opposition. He employed the latter rather than the former, because he had need of the latter and not of the former. His rhythm too, which has been so much praised and owing to which his alexandrine rings out so differently from the mechanical alexandrines of his imitators, the rhetoricians, is nothing but his spirit itself, noble and solemn, debating and deliberating, resolute, unafraid and firm in its rational determinations.

Corneille's keenest adversaries have always been compelled to recognise in him a residuum, which withstood their destructive criticism.

Vauvenargues said that "he sometimes expressed himself with great energy and no one has more loftly traits, no one has left behind him the idea of a dialogue so closely compacted and so vehement, or has depicted with equal felicity the power and the inflexibility of the soul, which come to it from virtue. There are astonishing flashes that come forth even from the disputes and upon which I commented unfavourably, there are battles that really elevate the heart, and finally, although he frequently removes himself from nature, it must be confessed that he depicts her with great directness and vigour in many places, and only there is he to be admired." Jacobi, in an essay which is an indictment, was however, compelled to excogitate or to beg for the reason of such fame; he found himself obliged to praise the many vivacious scenes, the depth of discourse, the loftiness of expression, to be found scattered here and there in those tragedies. Although Schiller did not care for him at all, he made an exception for "the part that is properly speaking

NOTE. I draw attention to it in this note, because I have never seen it mentioned: it is to be found in the *Charaktere der vornehmsten Dichter aller Nationen.. . . von einer Gesellschaft von Gelchrten* (Leipzig, 1796), Vol. V, part I, pp. 38–138.

heroic," which was "felicitously treated," although he added that "even this vein, which is not rich in itself, was treated monotonously." Schlegel was struck with certain passages and with the style which is often powerful and concise and De Sanctis observed that Corneille was in his own field, when he portrayed greatness of soul, not in its gradations and struggles, but "as nature and habit, in the security of possession." A German philologist, after he has run down the tragedies of the "quadrilateral," judges Corneille to be "a jurist and a cold man of intellect, although full of nobility and dignity of soul, but without clearness as to his own aptitudes, and without original creative power." This writer declares that "nowhere in his works do we feel the breath of genius that laughs at all restraints," but he goes on to make exception for the splendour of his "language." It seems somewhat difficult to make an exception for the language, precisely when discussing the question of poetical genius!

We certainly find monotony present in the figures that he sets before us, repetitions of thoughts and of schemes, analogies in the matter of process. A *concordantia corneliana,* explicatory of this side of his genius could be

constructed and perhaps the sole reason that this has not been done is because it would be too easy. Steinweg, whom we have quoted above, has provided a good instance of this. But even the monotony of Corneille must not be looked upon altogether as a proof of poverty, or a defect, but rather as an intrinsic characteristic of his austere inspiration, which was susceptible of assuming but few forms.

I cannot better close this discussion of Corneille than with the citation of a youthful page of Sainte-Beuve, which contains nothing but a fanciful comparison, but this comparison has much more to say to us, who have now completed the critical examination of his works, than Sainte-Beuve was himself able to say in his various critical writings relative to the poet, for he there shows himself to be at one moment inclined to be uncertain and to oscillate, at another inclined to yield to traditional judgments and conventional enthusiasms. This affords another proof, if such be necessary, that it is one thing to receive the sensible impression aroused by a poem and another to understand and to explain it. "Corneille" — wrote Sainte-Beuve,— "a pure genius, yet an incomplete one, gives me, with his qualities and his

defects, the impression of those great trees, so naked, so gnarled, so sad and so monotonous as regards their trunk, and adorned with branches and dark green leaves only at their summits. They are strong, powerful, gigantic, having but little foliage; an abundant sap nourishes them; but you must not expect from them shelter, shade or flowers. They put forth their leaves late, lose them early and live a long while half dismantled. Even when their bald heads have abandoned their leaves to the winds of autumn, their vital nature still throws out here and there stray boughs and green shoots. When they are about to die, their groans and creakings are like that trunk, laden with arms, to which Lucan compared the great Pompey."

INDEX