A STUDY OF
THE POETIC INTERPRETATION OF
SHAKESPEARE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY
with special reference to
Wilson Knight and L.C. Knights

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I owe much to my guide Professor M.V. Rama Sarma, M.A., Ph.D. (Wales) and I place on record my gratitude to him for his kindly and able supervision of this work and his constant and red encouragement. I feel grateful to the critics of Shakespeare and to their critics, whom I take on to criticize in this thesis. Thanks to my endeavour of studying these critics, my interest in Shakespeare has been deepened. Not only have I learnt a great deal from these critics but I have been emboldened to write on Shakespearean topics myself for the scholarly periodicals.

While in England during 1974-75 on a Commonwealth Staff Fellowship for research on other Shakespearean subjects than this I had the privilege of the advice of Professor E.A. Foxkeon on some of the chapters of this thesis. I am grateful to him in this as in many other respects. My thanks are due to the modern editors of Shakespeare, especially those of the New Arden and the New Shakespeare series, of whose work I have made full use. These editions as well as the numerous journal reviews of the critics I deal with have generally been excluded from the bibliography at the end of the thesis in the interests of feasibility and of convenience of length. So have been the standard reference works, and the surveys of modern Shakespeare criticism which have appeared in SHAKESPEARE SURVEY from time to time. Of all of these, I have availed myself, and I make the acknowledgements wherever necessary.

Exacting and long drawn out as the task of writing on these Shakespearean critics may have been, it has none the less been a rewarding experience.
Standards abbreviations of journal and yearbook titles have been used wherever necessary or convenient. The following abbreviations have also been used for some of the more frequently cited Wilson Knight, E.L. Knight, and other sources and identifying chosen titles. Citations are from the editions specified.


36 - G. Wilson Knight, The Iliad of Homer (London, 1934, rev. of the 1931 ed.).


38 - E.L. Knight, Notes on Shakespeare (London, 1932).

39 - E.L. Knight, Notes on Shakespeare (London, 1932).

40 - E.L. Knight, Notes on Shakespeare (London, 1932).

41 - E.L. Knight, Notes on Shakespeare (London, 1932).


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SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY
INTRODUCTORY

Our age has been rightly called "an age of criticism." 

Its richest harvest of criticism has been gleaned in the field of Shakespearean commentary. Inside, modern Shakespearean criticism constitutes the most intensive and substantial section of the vast body of Shakespearean criticism through the centuries. The capaciousness and interpenetration of the work of commentary on Shakespeare which has piled up especially in our time has become almost untranslatable. In point of both its range and depth, and in its penetrations and exclamations of meanings and methods, modern Shakespearean criticism exhibits an intense complexity and sophistication and employs a bewildering array of speculative instruments drawn from a variety of sources of knowledge. It is only natural that modern literary criticism is represented at its most characteristic if not at its best and at its most sophisticated in the Shakespearean commentary of the age. Not only the literary critic, but the creative literature and the total intellectual and cultural movement of the age would seem to find their true image in its Shakespearean criticism.

1. The appellation, the title ofmondal Carroll's essay reprinted in his Poetry and the Age (New York, 1965), has been echoed a number of times, for example, by W. Steilman, "The New Critics", Critiques and Canon in Criticism, ed. Steilman (New York, 1949), p. 635 and by William O' Connor, An Age of Criticism, 1830-1860 (Chicago, 1952) in his title.
Crystal that one may call the hypertrophy of modern literary criticism and the predominance of Shakespeare in English literature, no wonder that the Shakespeare industry, explained against for its colossal expansion long ago, is a going concern even in this late age of criticism, and is likely to continue to be one in future too. If modern literary criticism as a whole consists of a number of different schools employing different and conflicting modes of approach to the study of literature, and hence deserves to be called 'a veritable Tower of Babel', more pronouncedly so is modern Shakespeare criticism, and the variety and at times the clash of critical voices and 'languages' are more readily perceived in this than in any other area of modern criticism. Hence the less, about three distinct trends, schools or movements can be isolated in modern Shakespearean commentary, and a threefold

classification of critics into historicist, theoretical and
practical can be conveniently made. 3

In an attempt to trace in this essay to examine one aspect of a
particular school, if not the outlets itself, of Shakespearean
criticism in the twentieth century, namely the attempts to
interpretation of Shakespeare, which is sometimes referred
to as the school of Hume and 'Humean' or even to loosely
call school of the 'historicists', the extent of this critical
approach is not merely a matter of vacillation between the
character of criticism of Bradley and Coleridge and the extreme
manifestations in nineteenth-century romanticises like Jane
Sandon and Henry Gordon Colbeau. 4 The
nineteenth-century

3. Other modes of classification have also been employed by
students on the modern critical scene. Thus, in
James, 'The Rise of Modern Criticism', Shakespearean Studies,
in dalin, ed. (New York, 1960), p. 67, divides the
critics into the 'tragicomical' and the 'gentleman' (the
Shakespearean Shakespearean) ones and the 'Shakespearean
Shakespearean' ones. Also, the 'Shakespearean


distinguish between the school of romantic criticism of
which Coleridge is the father and which considers Shakespeare's
works as reacting to feelingly, detached from the
age in which they were written and firm the theater in which
they were performed, and the school of thought which con-
cerns itself with the Elizabethan Shakespeare. He also

divides the critics into the 'Bradleyites' and those those
preoccupation is with the conventions of the Elizabethan
age and stage (p. 52). Kenneth Burke, 'Fifty Years of
Shakespearean Criticism', 4 (1961) considers modern
Shakespeare criticism in terms of categories such as
Bradley and Bradleyites', 'Approaches to Shakespeare'
general surveys of Shakespeare', 'Personal and Historical
Shakespeare', 'Interpretation and Misinterpretation',
'Scholarship and Criticism', 'Sociology and Convention', and
'Imagery, Symbolism and the Liberty of Interpreting.' L.D.
Lasner in his Introduction to his Shakespeare's Theatricals: An
Anthology of Modern Criticism (Harmondsworth, 1962) tries to
see approaches to Shakespeare in the present century in terms
of the six elements of drama which Aristotle isolated: plot,
character, diction, thought, music and spectacle (p. 10).
Developments in Shakespeare scholarship as well as in scholarly criticism in connection to the field lead us to many changes in modern literary criticism and, more generally, in general literature. From the first of all, the sense one may find Shakespeare in the plays at a whole is. The idea of the poetic approach has been to reveal these developments and other research efforts in them. It may not be an exaggeration to say that these clearness on the sense of modern literary criticism also in the literary, but at least partially, a result of Shakespeare and existential role one recognizes about the existential situation or sort of existence and also of function of interpretation under available. These in these stands close to belongs, the notion of the artistic interpretation can be used to have a similar relationship not only of history, civilization and at times conflict with the schools of thought in historical scholarship on interpretation but of more - less, there are unconscious collaboration and even incoherence.

There is no denying that there is a disjunction between the purposes of scholarship and the safeguards of criticism. To put it simply if rather coarsely, the scholarly interpreters seek and expand a 'then-meaning' in the plays whereas the critic-interpreters are concerned with a 'now-meaning'. As the following study tries to show at many points, one does regret that the critic-interpretor does not make as much use of historical scholarship as he can or should. One wishes that there had been a closer integration between the two than
has actually been there. Yet when the Shakespearean scene is viewed from a historicist angle it would appear that the poetic approach has been in a number of ways indirectly fed and fostered by historicist scholarship in this century or at least led up to by it. There are numerous instances of the 'imaginative intuition' of the critic and the 'metalical singularity' of the scholar (to use the two phrases employed by O. C. Nordal in *Shakescians and Shakesiologues* (1923) agreeing with each other and providing mutual corroboration. It may enter, the basic attitudes and assumptions, and the idea on the part of the poetic critics of what Shakespearean drama is are such that their rise, currency and validity can be seen to be promoted by the contributions of the scholar-interpreters; though, naturally, at a point the scholar and the critic part company. These may thus be seen as equivalent interlinking between criticizer and scholar.

The critical assumptions of the leading poetic interpreters of Shakespeare like C. J. M. Knight and G. D. H. Cole and of the pioneer analyst of Shakespeare imagery Caroline Spurgeon and her successors, and their ways of proceeding as commentators are the focus of the chapters that follow. In this study of the why and how of the Shakespearean criticism of those interpreters, a historical if not a historicist view is taken of the contributions of these critics and of the causes and consequences of their great critical venture. Viewed from such an angle of vision, the interplay or dialogue between the
The commentaries of these critics and the findings of historical scholars and scholar-interpreters claim particular attention. A consideration of the circumstances in Shakespeare studies under which the poetic interpretation arose, and as is undertaken in Chapter II, helps to place the school of Knight and Knights in its immediate setting in the history of Shakespeare criticism. It serves to show how the situation was viewed by earlier scholars, discoverying the critical insights for the interpretation of the plays through their poetry. The overall context of the poetic approach to Shakespeare extends far beyond the field of Shakespeare studies and embraces very nearly the whole of the modern literary and cultural scene, so much so that the relevant backgrounds and governing influences in the modern literary and cultural climate have to be reckoned with. Shakespeare criticism in this age, as in earlier ones, is a reflection of the times and bears a close correlation to developments in creative literature in the period. An outline of this general ethos is made in Chapter III after a study of the milieu of Shakespeare criticism in Chapter II. In the perspective which may be gained thus, the interpretative commentaries of Knight, Knights and Burgeon and some other imagistic critics are studied in some detail in the rest of the chapters. In view alike of the volume and of the importance of his commentaries, Wilson Knight’s ‘spatial’ interpretation is dealt with in two chapters, IV and V. The no less important and influential studies of the plays by L.C. Knights are looked at in Chapter VI.
on the literary critics, especially Caroline Spurgeon, are the subject of the seventh chapter in which again the object is to study the methods of Spurgeon and those who have often had alike satisfying evidence and the intercommunication between linguistic analysis and historical scholarship. The last chapter is by way of some concluding observations.

In the interests of convenience and feasibility the study has been confined to those select few among the critics who have made the poetic approach to Shakespeare. A good many other critics of Shakespeare who are exponents of this school of criticism probably merit study on the line pursued here. One may mention major critics like J. Baldwin Brown and William Hazlitt, and commentators of considerable influence like John A. Milne, not to speak of the American critic Robert M. Lewis and his important studies of Browning and Shakespeare. After all, a sensitive response to the poetic-dramatic constituents of the plays has become both a requisite and a characteristic of competence in the Shakespearean commentator or scholar. In general, thanks to the deep impact made by the poetic interpreters on the world of Shakespearean studies, and one cannot but be thankful for the fact that there have been a very large number of commentators who have responded with subtle sensitivity to the poetry of Shakespeare's plays. Since, inevitably, in a study of this kind justice cannot be done to all these commentators, at least a bare outline of the significance of the more important of these critics not dealt with may be in place at this point.
Among the writers who in the twenties charted the course for a full response to the poetry of Shakespeare's plays and launched the new interpretation in a way the price of prose should go to "Fiddler'sferry," his IEL lectures at Oxford, the lectures of Castle (1922), were a pioneer exemplification of the close reading of Shakespearean verse and an inspiration to response to its effects, both limbs and large. His essay entitled "Atropos" (1938) [reprinted, for example, in "Shakespeare and Renaissance (1943; 1954)"
] as well as his other early writings on Shakespeare, were influential examples of the work of the critic with the right key with which to unlock the mysteries of the heart of Shakespearean poetry. Mary's "Shakespeare" (1925) was a consummation of such readings of his in the plays, as in several of his later essays and writings Mary returned to Shakespeare, Mary was a considerable influence on William Knight, and he brought to bear on Shakespeare, as does Knight, a framework of richer idiosyncratic values and metaphysics (not to use the terms which Mary coined, "metaphysics"). But, idiosyncrasies excepted, he did offer a number of insights into the plays which have been assimilated into later criticism, though it must be said that he has certain imperfect sympathies or blind spots which led him to say, for instance, that "Marlowe was an imaginative failure."

Besides Mary, there were a handful more or less academic commentators who brought out the very first studies of imagery in general and in Shakespeare and Elizabethan literature in
particulars such as ... Collins, Mr. Stephen Green and Elizabeth Whiten a little before Caroline Spurgeon came on the scene. The books of George Eliot, Ann Rutledge and Mr. Kellet towards the close of the twenties were, again, early manifestations of a redirection of attention to the words and poetry of the plays. At the close of the twenties, in 1925, the year of Inaugurations, some Yausn's experimental semiotics which demonstrated how share sensation words and constructions could act in many situations and at moments at the same time, and thus opened up fascinating vistas of structural-semiotic terms. In short the book was at once an exploration and demonstration by way of a semantic analysis of the endless possibilities of poetic suggestion in the presence of share-sensational voice.

Janson followed... It will not be mentioned in detail. (1956) In which, among other things, insights were offered into the functions of multiple plots in Shakespearean drama, and a pamphlet called Machiavellianism (in collaboration with George Bennet in 1956 containing the first version of "Ionesco's influence entitled 'The Best Policy' and 'Ionesco's Log') and several articles in the forties and the fifties in the 'American Review' and the 'Kuran Review'. The most useful and richest product of Janson's investigation of Shakespearean semiotics is The Structure of Complex Words (1952). The contributions of Ionesco and Janson, the one a semantic and the other a cognitive critic, are so substantial and so individualistic and influential that nothing like an adequate consideration of their criticism can be attempted within the limited compass of this study. But two
general observations would seem worth noting. There is an evolu-
tion in the commentaries of Bapaon, even to a lesser extent in
those of Lunny, towards a more and more extensive use of his-
torical findings and thus towards a greater interplay between
historical scholarship and critical insights in their later
commentaries. In his more recent essays and books (like
The Structure of Stanley Lunn's and Milton's Soni (1961)) Bapaon
employs the methods of character criticism in conjunction
with and by way of semantic analysis, and also speculates
about the likely responses of the original audience of the
plays (cf. 'Hamlet than See', Journal Review, 232 (1952),
15-42, 185-206), thus ostensibly trying to restore the plays
to their existing theoretical context. It should however be
noted that his reconstructions of the response of the original
audience are often such too speculative and speculatively and
suffer from a lack of convincing evidence.