CHAPTER – VI

CONCLUSION

The aim of this final chapter is to sum up in retrospect, the content of the whole work. A bird’s eye view is presented of the different critics and the critical approaches dealt with in each chapter, and an attempt has also been made to identify some of the forces and counter forces operating on each stage in the chronology of the Shakespeare criticism.

First of all the theme of chapter-1 will be analyzed. It is firmly believed that Shakespeare cannot be studied without his past. The New image that Shakespeare has been bestowed with by the modern scholars, is a welcome change, but one must not forget that this change in Shakespeare did not exist all by itself. This was generated by the former projections of Shakespeare. And whether we like it or not this new image of Shakespeare is actually based on many of the old views that are now considered out-worn and out-dated and hence rejected. The past cannot be rejected or obliterated, in some form or the other it does exist. Hence, the plea that needs to be established here is that, in order to interpret Shakespeare that, his background cannot be evaded. It becomes inevitable to trace his lineage back to the middle of the seventeenth century. If one ignores the past and fails to relate it with the present the future perspective becomes myopic.

In order to specify more explicitly one needs to re-view Chapter-I that goes under the sub-title of ‘The Shakespearean Scene’. The history of Shakespeare criticism has evidenced various rises and falls of movements, methods and approaches. A time had come in the history of Shakespeare criticism, when the only object of interest were characters. But however there
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were out-right rejection of such an approach due to extreme manifestations in
the form of Anna Jameson and Mary Cowden Clarke’s, Girlhood of
Shakespeare’s Heroines.

In the third quarter of the 18th century, Shakespeare’s character surfaced
occasionally to receive scattered remarks but they never became a matter of
strife and contest, like in the nineteen twenties. In the Age of Reason
Shakespeare was mainly censured for his lack of learning and observance of the
unities. Yet in spite of the harsh critical commentaries, Shakespeare flourished
and continued to entertain his audience and readers. But as time progressed
these ideas regarding the importance of scholarship and emulating the ancients
proved wrong. Shakespeare’s eminence was established and his treatment of
drama was seen to have been correct and thus ‘the Aristotelians with their
decorum and, their three unities were put in their proper place’.

This significant fact should also be accepted that it was the work of
scientific study that has from time to time yielded enormous development in the
field of Shakespeare studies and has also helped in diminishing the bias and
authoritarian attitudes of scholars and researchers. After the powerful attack of
Samuel Johnson on the ‘unities’ of time place and action, in his Preface to
Shakespeare (1756) the glitter and gleam of Aristotle’s rules started to fade into
insignificance. This was definitely a turning point in the interpretation of
Shakespeare’s plays. The controversy over Shakespeare’s learning was swept
over by the Romantic movement and its creed of personal individuality started
to be reflected in the criticism of Shakespeare. Thus this tradition of immense
interest in character studies was transported to the twentieth century.
Another point that has to be emphasized in this chapter of evaluative study is that A.C. Bradley’s publication of *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904) was not out of time and place, he had behind him the rich inheritance of the romantic tradition. When ever one appreciates Bradley’s work and his significant contribution in regard to Shakespeare, it is not possible to over look the concerns and predilections of his ancestors who were before him. Because it is natural for him to have accumulated and later integrated their ways and methods into his own analysis. Hence in order to explain Bradley’s philosophy in *Shakespearean Tragedy*, one has to understand Coleridge, Hazlitt and Maurice Morgann as well. Bradley has proclaimed Morgann’s famous essay on Falstaff as being incomparable in the world of Shakespeare criticism. And the suggestions made by Morgann regarding how to properly treat the characters in the plays,

‘rather as historic than dramatic beings’. These kind of technique were vastly incorporated by the critics of character analysers from Morgann’s day to that of Bradley’s. Even some of Coleridge’s remarks concerning character study can be found to be under Morgann’s impact.

‘The characters of the dramatis personae, like those in real life are to be inferred by the reader; they are not told to him’.

Similarly Morgann has also emphasized upon ‘latent motives’ and ‘policies not avowed’, having a sure reflection upon Coleridge’s opinion. These kinds of suggestion and inferences led the nineteen century critics to indulge in excesses so much so that they dexterously started probing into the lives of the character as if they were real human beings. They could not distinguish between art and life. They did not know how to balance their
wayward ideas and hence attracted immense strictures towards themselves. Coleridge and Bradley have been targeted frequently by the critics for having forgotten that Hamlet was only a character for the stage and one just could not trace such matters as his whereabouts during the time of his father’s death. But one finds that these kinds of enquiries and over-interpretation had become a general trend. Hence, the inconsistencies that we often find in Bradley’s writings his speculations, and his pleasure in supplying unnecessary details regarding Shakespeare, even at times providing Shakespeare’s characters, intention and his thought, all this was a common practice among all of his predecessors. Both of Bradley’s books, Shakespearean Tragedy (1904) and Oxford Lectures on Poetry (1909) were published in the form of lectures.

Typically, Bradley’s criticism, like Dowden’s takes the form of academic lectures designed for undergraduates, subsequently collected and published by the lecturer. To these circumstances his work owes much of its accessibility.⁵

Bradley’s analysis of Lear was unexpected, it was not like what Shakespeare intended. Actually the commentators have found the reflection of Dowden’s thoughts on it and Bradley has even agreed to such an impact upon him in 1909 he affirmed, “In everything that I have written on Shakespeare I am indebted to Professor Dowden.”⁶

Another fact regarding Bradley that needs to be highlighted is that the theatre mattered less to him and to the dominant trend that he had followed during his time. Hence Bradley in his Shakespearean Tragedy addresses the readers of Shakespeare’s plays and lays stress on the effect of passages when read. That is the reason why Bradley was assailed by critics for treating
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Shakespeare like a novelist that too a Victorian, and not like a playwright. The point that needs to be ascertained here is that the style of the writer is due to the impact of his time:

Dryden the dramatist had cast his criticism of Shakespeare in the form of a dialogue of Dramatic Poesie; the journalists Steele and Addison had inscribed Shakespeare in shapely prose essays; Keats and Coleridge had been the greatest practitioners of a mode of criticism typified by lyrical fragments. In Bradley’s hands Shakespearean criticism became a philosophical novel.7

The highlights of the first chapter of this work conveys one message very explicitly that each of these authors, critics and movements are consciously or unintentionally associated with each other. Samuel Johnson may have seen many flaws in the writings of Shakespeare along with Dryden but later on in the 20th century these very ‘false wit, puns, and ambiguity’ became the center of interest for the 20th century ‘New Criticism’. And while these devices were subject to very harsh censures in the neo-classical era they were now praised for their resonance of meaning and profundity. Johnson has further been acclaimed for having generated the criticism of Shakespeare’s characters that reached its culmination in the late 19th century work of A.C. Bradley. Before Bradley, William Hazlitt had been granted, the credit for developing the character analysis begun by Johnson; Hazlitt regarded each of Shakespeare’s characters as exceptional but discovered unanimity through analogy and gradation of characters. With A.C. Bradley, the end of a phase in character study may have reached its apex, but the idea and thoughts of Bradley are not curtailed and obliterated but spreads and gets absorbed by the 20th century imagistic approach. The hint made by Bradley that Shakespeare’s plays have a
unifying imagistic atmosphere, was an idea that brought about the rise of the new approach.

Thus, we find how these critics and the movements they endorse were inter-related, on surface they may appear to be totally opposing but actually at the same time they were providing ample scope and range and even inspiration and inadvertent co-operation to each other in an implicit manner.

The Second Chapter of this thesis undertakes to study the criticism of Hamlet, which has been selected as a specimen for a clear understanding of Bradley, Stoll and W.Knight. The examination of the various doctrines as revealed by the author themselves gives each of then a unique identity of their own. Some critics have been grouped together due to the similarity of their approaches. Although critics as different as J.M. Robertson, E.E. Stoll and L.L. Schucking’s work have been considered under the same banner, although no doubt, they wrote regarding Shakespeare but with different aims and understanding. They have been grouped together for study because of their initial commitment that, Hamlet could only be properly illuminated in the Elizabethan terms and conditions which includes the theatre and the audiences.

Their doctrine of an “Elizabethan Hamlet” ‘consists of the following ideology’:

“The primary aim of the job of the critic of Hamlet is to explain the play by relating it to its conditions of the Elizabethan age. The critic may, if he wishes, go on to evaluate the play or to interpret it for our time, but his central task remains an explanation of the play in its contemporary terms’.
Stoll, along with the pioneers of new criticism has tried to show that such a criticism as has been pursued by Bradley and his successors cannot do justice to Shakespeare’s plays, particularly Hamlet. While Wilson Knight, Caroline Spurgeon, William Empson, T.S. Eliot and other poetic critics have essentially presented the plays as poetic creations and de-emphasised the significance of Shakespeare’s plots, his characters and their motives, Stoll’s contention was to prove that the focus on the true to life image was not right as Shakespeare often sacrificed character in order to project the significance of plot.

Stoll’s idea of artifice that he created Shakespeare of using in order to thrill his audience, this indeed is very new and revolutionary and cannot be surpassed by any other vision of Hamlet’s interpretation. Yet Stoll’s criticism has been branded as ‘provocative’ and he has been badly assailed by fellow critic and his idea of Hamlet as an ideal hero challenged by Dover Wilson. Stoll has projected Hamlet as an Avenger-Malcontent with no hint of inner conflict according to the tradition of older Hamlet.

This present study regards the issue of Hamlets delay that arises from Bradley and Stoll’s criticism can not ever be resolved and is a continuous process of defining and rejecting. The real mystery that lurks in the character of Hamlet is an enigma. It is an achievement not of the commentators and critics but of William Shakespeare. The mystery can never be solved it shall remain as an object for debate and research, exactly like Mona Lisa’s Smile similarly you can never rob a rose of its fragrance. It is the marvel, the triumph of the artist.

There are evidences of paradoxes visible in the criticism of New Critics. These very critics like W. Knight who deemed it fit at first to subordinate
character to themes and images also “repudiated character analysis completely.” Yet Knight sometimes sound absolutely like Bradley in comments like:

‘His wit is often illuminating, often amusing, sometimes rather disgusting’.10

Even L.C. Knight’s who participates very actively in repudiating Bradley’s excessive concentration on character has frequently indulged himself in the same kind of philosophical speculation as Bradley. In his essay on Hamlet (1940) this is the kind of description that Hamlet is bestowed with:

“What Hamlets wit, his cruelty and his self-righteousness have in common is a quality of moral relaxation which more or less subtly distorts the values for which he professes to stand.’11

Moreover, another strong assailant of Bradley, C.S. Lewis can also not be spared of this hypocrisy, because in the very same essay where he rejects Bradley’s character criticism, he has remarked regarding Hamlet: “the affection we feel for the Prince, and, through him, for Horatio, is like a friendship in real life”.12 These scattered comments often project that even Bradley’s opponents did not practice what they preached.

This review on the criticism of Hamlet can never come to the finishing point unless, one gives space to the most important problem of Hamlet, according to Bradley. The basic problem in Hamlet as viewed by Bradley, is the delay in Hamlet’s main task. He designs his entire doctrine on the assumption that Hamlet’s action in hesitating to accomplish his duty was the core of the tragedy. He takes all these points into consideration without discussion or debate. And as Weitz informs us:
Bradley assumes, without question, that Hamlet’s delay is an undeniable datum of the play. \( ^{13} \)

Thus, in the entire discussion of the play, he is engrossed with this only issue for which he provides explanation. Naturally the critics of 20\(^{th} \) century have challenged this datum of Bradley. G.B. Harrison, a critic depending on scientific research and historical investigation questions Bradley on this assumption, and declared that, ‘In the play which Shakespeare wrote there was no delay.’\(^{14} \)

This analysis does not seek to question the truth or the falsification of Bradley’s or any other critic’s interpretation. The critics have been too harsh on Bradley because if we examine our inner self honestly, have we not had the inclination to feel like Hamlet at times. And that ‘smack of Hamlet’ that Coleridge had felt has percolated down to the modern times. There is another very illuminating side to Bradley’s criticism, it is Bradley’s unique insight to Hamlet’s fondness of quibbles and conceit that has today paved the path of newer discovery into Shakespeare’s language that had been brushed aside by Dryden and Johnson as great defects on the part of Shakespeare. Caroline Spurgeon and W.H. Clemen have followed this hint of Bradley’s and converted these vague quibbles into a basic clue to the understanding of Hamlet. Hence, even in this context we can trace the co-relation between these critics one’s hint leads to the others exquisite discovery and renovation. This analysis on these major critics enriching the understanding of Hamlet could be summed by this keen observation of Clifford Leech:

Hamlet, Written by more than one, perhaps written by Shakespeare more than once, has a smack of each of us in it: Stoll
gives us its theatrical excitement Bradley and Ernest Jones the working of the protagonist's mind, D.G. James its twentieth century appeal, Dover Wilson and Schucking its special reverberations for its first audience, Granville-Barker its available meaning for a producer.\textsuperscript{15}

What is desperately needed in Shakespeare criticism is not another movement or rejection of others definition but a synthesis of artistic assessment and literary intuition of finesse and knowledge.

The third chapter of this work is attempted as a reparation to Bradley's esteem, it is also a kind of twenty first century perspective of Bradley. The severe criticism that had been directed towards Bradley's \textit{Shakespearean Tragedy} twenty five years after its publication had to some extent undermined the significance of Bradley’s profound analysis. Bradley became an easy target in the hands of this massive critical assault which had actually been directed against the orthodox point of view its their obsession for character analysis. This brick-batting was being hurled at the core of that belief that had been carried into the nineteen century criticism from Dryden to Bradley. Bradley and his predecessors had all voiced the same fundamental belief that "Shakespeare's character were essentially true to nature and to life."\textsuperscript{4} And these twentieth century critics who were paving a new way to the understanding of Shakespeare were compelled to carry out this vociferous attack.

This study of Bradley aims to convey that even if, he is viewed as an adversary, he should be granted the status of a stimulus who puts these assailants into their mettle. Hence it is the contention of this chapter to restore Bradley back to his former glory so that once again his study of Shakespeare
could be acclaimed as among the wisest and truest interpretation of Shakespeare’s plays that had ever appeared. This chapter further highlights that no matter how scathingly critics have tried to prove Bradley’s incompetence in his understanding of Shakespeare’s plays, but no professional expert and not even the readers could afford to ignore his Shakespearean Tragedy. The objective of all literary books should be to give immense pleasure and entertainment and that happiness and upliftment is definitely the hallmark of Bradley’s his one and only book. Also, one must not forget that the developments in the early twentieth century in Shakespeare’s scholarship as well as Shakespeare’s criticism were also related to Bradley. The new critics in a number of ways have inherited from Bradley Wolfgang Clemen in his invaluable study of: ‘The Development of Shakespeare’s Imagery (1951) has bestowed a place to Bradley as the pioneer in the study of metaphors and ‘images’. Finally, it dawns upon us that character-criticism is not a spent force it does exist till now, and it is an essential aspect of the dramatic art.

Chapter-IV of this work has defined the nature and impact of Stoll’s contribution to the study of Shakespeare criticism, and intends to illuminate that E.E. Stoll like the other historical critics cannot be accused of being critically naive. It has been highlighted that his criticism has a solid basis and a remarkable contribution to a perfect understanding of the nature of dramatic art. One very important aspect of his criticism is his demand not to displace Shakespeare from his background of Elizabethan terms and conditions.

Although Kenneth Muir has attached some significance to the contribution of Stoll in his article, ‘Fifty years of Shakespearean criticism’ in Shakespeare Survey, 4(1951), but neither Arthur Eastman, in his History of Shakespearean Criticism, nor Augustus Ralli in his two volumes of History of
Shakespeare Criticism, has not done sufficient justice to the pioneering and distinguished work of E.E. Stoll. The synthesis of all his doctrines can be gauged from his Art and Artifice in Shakespeare its enormous contribution to Shakespeare criticism is not as well known as Bradley’s, Shakespearean Tragedy. But inspite of having all the qualities of a good critic and scholar, it is rather puzzling, that Stoll did not receive the attention and the acclaim that could have been his. He went unsung and unrecognized and one wonders what could have prevented Stoll from being a famous critic, when Bradley with his, one and only well known book is better known than Stoll.

As is indicated by this short review that has been mentioned above there has to be a definite reason for Stoll having been deprived of that acclaim that was his due. An attempt has been made to explain where Stoll went wrong, and why he could not carve a niche for himself and secure a position as one of the top ranking critics and intellectual of Shakespeare studies, inspite of Stoll having argued vigorously over a period of forty years his doctrine could not make a mark on the English psyche.

If one looks back in retrospect, one remembers that it was that Stoll and Schucking together who presented Shakespeare for the first time as an Elizabethan Jacobean playwright. Shakespeare’s hegemony as a universal genius and his eternal relevance had long been established by that time and nobody could challenge it. Shakespeare was above all projected by Stoll above all as a practicing playwright, with a very difficult duty to perform- the entertainment of his audiences and also keeping with the tradition of his time. These two scholars had the audacity to present Shakespeare with an absolutely new image that had never been attempted before that of, ‘a busy, often harassed artificer’. Then again they broke this looming myth regarding Bradley’s
Shakespearean Tragedy (1904) that ‘the last word’ about Shakespeare had been written and that character study is a vein exhausted by Bradley and no longer exploitable. They brought about a turning point in the study of Shakespeare’s characters and changed the very outlook of scholars and their orthodox ideas. Some of the well known problems that assailed these characters according to the Romantic viewpoint was Othello’s jealousy, Iago’s lack of motivation, Lear’s division of his Kingdom and the most favorite, Hamlet’s — delay. To have branded Stoll and Schucking’s movement with the title of ‘realist school’ has been a gross injury and a great error, because they desired to see Shakespeare’s drama as it really was during his tenure. Stoll and Schucking have also made a lot of immense effort to concentrate on the contradictions of Shakespeare’s plays and have done a good job illuminating and often making excuses for their technical flaws and one finds some similarity between them and Bradley here. Except that Bradley focused his attention on characters when these two took up all the other element for study. Furthermore to even present their movement only in reaction to Bradley would mean that these two critics also were an extension of the 19th century character analysis with a little difference.

One thing that Viswanathan observes intuitively is that; Stoll’s argument and reasoning regarding the characters in Shakespeare’s was considered provocative and generated a lot of adverse criticism but his achievement lies not in the strife but in highlighting the knowledge of an aspect of Shakespeare’s drama that had never been highlighted before.

‘…namely, the conventional basis of it techniques and modes, and their ‘primitiveness’ with a refreshing absence of patronage towards Elizabethan taste.'
Harry Levin’s analysis regarding Stoll was that, he was ‘audacious enough to resist the tug of Shakespearolatry….’18

Stoll appears to be a dissenter to his contemporaries and one of them is Kittredge. When asked to offer an opinion about him: “The trouble with him is that he thinks he’s superior to Shakespeare.”19

Stoll was in fact a lovely man having been abandoned by friends and colleague alike. When he died in the year 1959, “his complaint about being forgotten had become almost justified”.20

The above written review regarding Stoll’s personal life and his position among his contemporaries has been highlighted to lend authenticity to the point that is to be highlighted here.

It seems to me that Shakespeare has been bestowed the position of God. Hence any writer who tries to humanize Shakespeare gets sidelined and denigrated by them who have monopolized Shakespeare for their own requirement. There have been some lone voices in the history of Shakespeare criticism who have from time to time objected to this over-estimating, of Shakespeare’s importance and uniqueness but they have been quelled like Stoll has been. Back in the eighteenth century, Rowe and Pope could admit that ‘Shakespeare made mistakes’. But a century later such an attitude towards Shakespeare came to be considered disrespectful and even harmful. By the European scholars Shakespeare has been given the status of God and naturally, God does not make mistake.21

In Stoll’s case it seems to be this was, one very obvious reason why his doctrine could not be appreciated, though he was an eloquent pioneer of this
mode of particular criticism. There is another factor that could have prevented Stoll from making a mark, perhaps the upsurge of the poetic movement was too strong for Stoll’s doctrine to survive hence Stoll’s evolution towards a more balanced critic have just not been sufficiently noticed although:

E.E. Stoll writing during the 1920’s had put Shakespeare back on the stage. But this latest movement has again brought Shakespeare back into the study and also into the laboratory to be experimented upon. Thus Shakespeare the poet and philosopher has once more been revived and Shakespeare the actor and dramatist of Elizabethan era has long been forgotten.

The percussion of the new approach in Shakespeare criticism was so overpowering and so exacting that one was lured towards it without any question and its deceptions and hypocrisy went unnoticed because of exuberance that radiated on the surface. John Holloway may have been the first critic to have raised valid objection regarding their doctrine of rejecting all that was traditional and orthodox. One of their predecessors frailties was obvious in their own practice. For example, G.W.Knight assailed Bradley for personification of stage characters in his preface to The Wheel of Fire Yet illustration can be found in his own work of extreme character interpretation in the Bradleyian tradition. He writes regarding Hamlet.

"The consciousness of death, and consequent bitterness; cruelty and inaction, in Hamlet not only grows in his own mind disintegrating it as we watch, but also spreads its effects outward among the other persons like a blighting disease...."

L.C. Knight’s audacious essay in Bradley’s context can never be forgotten for the serious issue that it had raised in the year 1933 regarding ‘How
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Many children had Lady Macbeth'? Yet his comments regarding Macbeth and his declaration of a Shakespearean tragedy being a dramatic poem had already been anticipated by Bradley in his Shakespearean Tragedy.

What one can infer at this stage, is that because of their magnetic appeal and external sincerity and sophistication the new critics inadvertently may have hampered other more objective studies on Shakespeare to have made their presence felt. E.E. Stoll is one such critic who’s doctrine inspite of having all authenticity and objectivity was misrepresented and he was not able to introduce his doctrine in a profitable manner.

Finally the fifth chapter of this work traces the rise of the poetic approach. The ‘New critics’ have done commendable works, the poetic language of Shakespeare has been reconsidered and his imagery and symbolism have been deciphered, according to the present day requirements. Moreover, the endeavour of Wilson Kinghts, L.C. Knights and Caroline Spurgeon has a definite place in the history of Shakespeare criticism. But nevertheless this method of interpretative criticism has its own limitation and there is always the imminent danger of criticism becoming personalized as we have witnessed in Bradley’s criticism of Shakespeare. Hence what is required here is a disciplined control, by the historical and literary critics and even to some extent the textual scholars, because it is they who have brought us nearer to what Shakespeare wrote. The study of Shakespeare has to be re-founded within a boundary of control and discipline and also there has to be a synthesis and a synchronization in all kinds of attitude and approaches then only can we claim an achievement of true scholarship towards Shakespeare.
Reference:


2. Nichol Smith, Shakespearean Criticism, op.cit., p. 172

3. Ibid., p.240.

4. Ibid., p.172.


11. L.C. Knight’s op.cit., p.68.

12. Lewis op.cit., p.205.


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19. Ibid., p.17.
20. Ibid., p.18.
23 Wilson Knight, the Wheel of Fire, op.cit., p.32.