As we pass from Pope to Warton, we become rather sharply aware of an altered critical temper. Warton would seem almost to set a pattern. He refuses to talk generalities. He sees Shakespeare in his concrete, compelling particularities. As we have noted, the criticism of Shakespeare in the 18th century is by and large of a general nature, refraining from anything like an elaborate treatment of a play as a whole. Joseph Warton is among the first to have realised the futility of being confined to general observations, and consequently saw the vital and imperative need for detailed, relatively comprehensive critical analysis of Shakespeare's works, specially of characters.

Now this interest in characters is explainable in terms of neo-classical pre-occupations. They of the neo-classical age were greatly interested in the nature and life around them; they took intense and abiding interest in men and things. And on coming to Shakespeare, they were struck by the extraordinary naturalness and lifelikeness of his characters and of the passions they embody. They discovered and triumphantly recognised this lifelikeness even in Shakespeare's supernatural characters — creatures
that were born purely of his imagination having no counterpart in visible nature. Leaving aside Rymer, character analysis is first seen in Nicholas Rowe. In his detailed criticism Warton follows in the footsteps of Rowe. Besides, in more than one respect, he echoes Dryden, Rowe, Addison and Pope, more particularly Rowe and Addison. In his emphasis on Shakespeare's "creative imagination, his strokes of nature and passion, and his preservation of the consistency of his characters," he shows the heritage of both Rowe and Addison. In his references to Horace and Longinus, again, he shows his neo-classical critical temper.

Thorough understanding is demanded by any considerable writer's work; it is all the more necessary in the case of such an all-comprising genius of a writer as Shakespeare. Warton writes:

"General criticism is on all subjects useless and unentertaining, but is more than commonly absurd with respect to Shakespeare, who must be accompanied step by step, and scene by scene, in his gradual developments of characters and passions, and whose finer features must be singly pointed out, if we would do complete justice to his genuine beauties."1

General reflections can often be a cheap substitute for illuminating, sustained exploration, and may, to the great harm of the reader, succeed in

withholding his attention from the intricate subterranean workings of the springs of character.

To put it in a different way, this method is apt to prevent deeper and fuller understanding, which can only spring from a painstaking study of details.

This is what Warton means to convey when he says:

"It would have been easy to have declared, in general terms, 'that the madness of Lear was very natural and pathetic,' and the reader might then have escaped, what he may, perhaps, call a multitude of well-known quotations; but then it had been impossible to exhibit a perfect picture of the secret workings and changes of Lear's mind, which vary in each succeeding passage, and which render an allegation of each particular sentiment absolutely necessary."

Thus he takes up *The Tempest* and *King Lear*, and bestows upon them a good deal of critical reflection, bringing to light, in the process, great beauties in these works. His five papers in *The Adventurer* on these two plays have, as Nichol Smith points out, "the historical interest of being the first pieces of Shakespeare criticism to form a series in a periodical. In this respect, they correspond to Addison's paper on Milton in the Spectator."

Before we proceed to consider his appreciation of Shakespeare, it is worth-emphasising that by abandoning the beaten track and breaking fresh grounds in the direction of a comprehensive treatment of Shakespeare, Warton becomes one of the fore-runners of the great 19th century analysts of the poet's works.

1. Ibid, PP 68-69.
As a path-finder — as one suggesting possibilities of a wider and deeper exploration, his contribution is far from negligible.

From one view-point, however, Warton is a typical 18th century critic who is conscious of both "transcendent beauties" and "gross imperfections" of Shakespeare who is by reason of these "a most proper and pregnant subject for criticism." This would seem to be an exact echo of Pope's opinion according to which "of all English poets Shakespeare must be confessed to be the fairest and fullest subject for criticism, and to afford the most numerous, as well as most conspicuous instances, both of Beauties and Faults of all sorts."\(^1\) And much like others of his time, he announces his intention to examine Shakespeare's "merit as a poet, without blind admiration, or wanton invective."\(^2\) Even then he is quick to point out where the beauties lie — beauties which are such as to render the faults look innocuous. Like Rowe and Addison before him, he finds the most considerable and noteworthy features of the author's works, the happiest aspects of his dramatic genius, in his imaginative power, the naturalness, passions and the inner consistency of his characters. Like Addison

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1. Pope's Preface to *Shakespeare*.
2. The Adventurer no 93, 1753, in *Shakespeare Criticism 1623-1840*, ed. D.N. Smith, W.C.,1858, P. 52.
and Pope, again, he allows him that freedom from rules which is the birthright of the genius of the highest order and which is peculiarly English in its conception. To quote Warton:

"His characteristic excellences may possibly be reduced to these three general heads: 'his lively creative imagination, his strokes of nature and passion; and his preservation of the consistency of his characters.' These excellencies, particularly the last, are of such importance in the drama, that they amply compensate for his transgressions against the rules of time and place, which being of a more mechanical nature, are often strictly observed by a genius of the lowest order; but to portray characters naturally and to preserve them uniformly, requires such an intimate knowledge of the heart of man, and is so rare a portion of felicity, as to have been enjoyed, perhaps, only by two writers, Homer and Shakespeare." 1

This altogether unwise criticism which does not, and is not prepared to, make a fetish of the rules naturally evokes our approbation and incidentally puts us in mind, among other similar thoughts, of Dryden's sarcastic comment on law-abiding authors who are capable of producing no beauty whatever.

To say that of all his plays The Tempest is the most striking proof of Shakespeare's creative power, is perhaps no proof of any breath-taking insight. 2

1. Ibid, PP 52-53.
2. Addison, as already noted, had observed: "It shows a greater genius in Shakespeare to have drawn his Caliban than his Hotspur or Julius Caesar: The one was to be supplied out of his own imagination, whereas the other might have been formed upon tradition, history and observation." The Spectator 279, 1712.

And Rowe had remarked: "And that extravagant character of Caliban is mighty well sustained shows a wonderful invention in the author, who could strike out such a particular wild image....."
But when Warton goes ahead to analyse the many compelling expressions of that creative power, he is certainly doing something which had never been done before. Rowe had only shown the way; Warton goes far ahead.

It needs to be noticed how while recognising the play of a "boundless imagination" in the work, Warton is moved to pay a special tribute to the art of character portrayal, especially of Caliban. As a rule, when the imagination reigns supreme as it does in The Tempest, it becomes particularly difficult to achieve the goal of a fully organic character which may credibly pass the test of consistency. But even in this extra-difficult task "Shakespeare has wonderfully succeeded in his Tempest." 1

Warton quotes Horace in this connection — Horace, the much-quoted authority for the neo-classicists. We may quote Aristotle here to support Horace's emphasis on the need for consistency in character portrayal. 2 Thus:

"In character-drawing, as in putting together the incidents of a play, what one should do is to keep an eye always on the necessary or the

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2. "All the characters should remain consistent throughout the play; if the original to be imitated is inconsistent, then his character should be consistently inconsistent." (Aristotle, Poetics, Everyman's Library, 1963, P. 26.)
probable, so that whenever such-and-such a personage says or does such-and-such a thing it shall be the probable or necessary result of his character, and whenever such-and-such an incident follows upon such-and-such another, it shall do so as the necessary or probable consequence thereof. ¹

Caliban is entirely a creature of the author's imagination, having no counterpart in reality, at any rate within the ambit of the poet's experience. And yet when he acts and speaks, he appears throughout all of a piece. This rather astonishing quality about Caliban becomes the subject matter of an elaborate treatment by Warton. As the son of a witch begotten by a demon, Caliban is "represented as a prodigy of cruelty, malice, pride, ignorance, idleness, gluttony, and lust."² And this character is maintained with amazing accuracy till the end.

Rowe's observations on this aspect of Caliban's character which are so strikingly similar to Warton's, may be recalled in this connection. Warton takes pains to prove his point through more than one quotation from Shakespeare's text. He shows how Caliban's hatred and fear, glee and sympathy — his many reactions to the things surrounding him are entirely true to the description the author first gives of him.

². The Adventurer no 97, 1763.
Thus to quote Warton:

"He (Caliban) is introduced with great propriety, cursing Prospero and Miranda whom he had endeavoured to defile; and his execrations are artfully contrived to have reference to the occupations of his mother:

As wicked dew, as e'er my mother brush'd

... All the charms

Of Sycorax, toads, beetles, bats, light on you."

The grotesque advice he gives to the two drunken men so that they may succeed in wresting the island from Prospero .......

There thou may'st brain him, etc. .......

is strikingly in character. So also in his word of caution:

Pray you tread softly, that the blind mole may not Hear a foot-fall.

Indeed, Warton's choice of the passages quoted above bears convincing testimony at once to his power of perception and his indebtedness to Rowe and Addison.

An equally perceptive study is made of Miranda whose character is found to be truly adequate to the dramatic purpose. What Warton remarks on

1. The Adventurer no. 97, 1753.
Miranda's exclamation to her father at the first sight of Ferdinand is worth-quoting:

"Her imagining that as he was so beautiful he must necessarily be one of her father's aerial agents, is a stroke of nature worthy of admiration: as are likewise her entreaties to her father not to use him harshly, by the power of his art."\(^1\)

The singular charm of the expression through which Miranda indicates her passion for Ferdinand in later scenes equally elicits the critic's admiration. He sets Shakespeare's language over against that of Dryden and Rowe in the same circumstances, and declares his superiority over them. "It is by selecting such little and almost imperceptible circumstances, that Shakespeare has more truly painted the passions than any other; affection is more powerfully expressed by this simple wish (...... 'If you will sit down I'll bear your logs the while......') and offer of assistance, than by the unnatural eloquence and witticisms of Dryden, or the amorous declamations of Rowe."\(^2\)

It is unquestionably a remarkable fact that an 18th century critic found Shakespeare delightfully natural and his own contemporaries grossly unnatural and declamatory in the delineation of the same passion and the same scene. The passage quoted above is worthy of record as an example of the basic sanity and clear-sightedness of much of Augustan criticism of Shakespeare.

The quality of Varton's critical faculty is further demonstrated when he quotes Prospero's celebrated speech on the insubstantial nature of all

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2. Ibid, P. 57.
s spectacles, and characterises the following lines:

........................................... We are such stuff
A dreams are made on; and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep .................

as “a short but comprehensive observation on human
life, not excelled by any passage of the moral and
sententious Shrtpldes.”

Warton’s handling of Lear does him credit
as does his treatment of The Tempest. The manner in
which he opens his discussion of the play indicates the
keenly alert mind that he brings to bear upon it. He
notes a difference between it and the common run of
tragedies — a difference that is fundamental. He
notes that King Lear’s theme is clean out of the
ordinary, and has little to do with the passion of love
which is generally found to be the staple element of
tragedies. Shakespeare has shown by this play that
given the true dramatic genius, it is quite possible to
treat of another theme than love in such a way as to
raise it to the heights of a great tragedy. Indeed,
by his actual achievements he has given the lie to
Boileau who exhorts writers to treat of love which
“best insures success and engages the heart.” Warton
says:

“Shakespeare has shown us by his Hamlet, Macbeth, and
Caesar, and above all by his Lear, that very
interesting tragedies may be written, that are not
founded on gallantry and love.”

1. Ibid, P. 58.
2. The Adventurer no 113, 1753, in Shakespeare Criticism,
1623-1840, ed. D.N. Smith, W.C., 1958, P. 60.
Again, "The distresses in this tragedy (Lear) are of a very uncommon nature and are not touched upon by any other dramatic author." 1

So overwhelming indeed is the impact of King Lear upon the critic that he allows himself words of the very highest praise so that even Romantic critics such as Lamb and Coleridge would seem unable to surpass him in this respect. Just before setting about the task of examining the judgment and art of the poet as displayed in this play, Warton gives emphatic utterance to his opinion that in the matter of the delineation of the character of Lear, "he (Shakespeare) has succeeded better than any other writer; even than Euripides himself, whom Longinus so highly commends for his representation of the madness of Orestes." 2 The reference to Longinus must be considered significant in view of his increasing influence, as we have noticed again and again in the foregoing chapters, on the critical thought of the time, particularly in regard to its liberalising power.

In course of a long, searching analysis of the character of King Lear Warton makes stimulating observations, which also point to his critical heritage and bearings. At one stage he makes a particularly happy comment. Leaving Goneril, Lear, in a state of fury, bends his way to the castle of the earl of Gloucester with the fond hope of finding grateful welcome there. But the very first object he sees in the

1. Ibid, P. 66.
2. Ibid, P. 60.
castle is his servant in the stocks—a sight which makes him furious, but the experience he has just undergone has had its mellowing effect upon him; he applies the brake on his angry passion, sizes up the tragic situation in an instant, and permits himself the use of the fewest possible words to give vent to the inexplicable anguish of his mind and heart:

'O me, my heart! my rising heart! but down.'

Warton can well see the marvellous judgment of the poet in exercising such a stiff economy of language. Thus it is that he observes that whereas "Rowe and modern tragic writers" would have used long and laboured speech, "Nature, Sophocles, and Shakespeare, represent the feelings of the heart in a different manner: by a broken hint, a short exclamation, a word, or a look." 1

This equation of Shakespeare and nature is again an echo of the critics we have already discussed. From Ben Jonson to Alexander Pope the supreme tribute to Shakespeare has consisted in explaining his genius and his works in terms of nature and her mysterious and endlessly various ways of productivity.

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1. Ibid, P. 62.
It will have been clear from the foregoing discussion how Warton, while bearing a deep imprint of the temper of his age, turns out to be at once an inheritor of his predecessors' legacy and a pioneer in the direction of character criticism.

In the next chapter devoted to Lord Kames, even though there is no character criticism of the sort we have dealt with here in this chapter, there is all the evidence of the same pre-occupation with the unique naturalness of Shakespeare's genius and characters, his language, and irregularities and blemishes. We shall see how Kames uses his neo-classical legacy in arriving at his distinctly individual readings of Shakespeare.