INTRODUCTION

We have undertaken a study of the criticism of Shakespeare in the period stretching from Dryden to Morgan and the object we have in view is to trace and account for the overall unity of approach distinguishing this criticism and its anticipatory character, through an examination of the works of the more important critics - an examination that seeks to probe the critical principles involved and put the criticism in perspective by relating it to the temper of the age. In the process it may be possible, it is hoped, to see the essential sanity and soundness of much of this criticism. The examination of individual critics, carried out in separate chapters, will naturally draw attention to the limitations and drawbacks of the age's criticism as well. We shall, however, try to show that the essential merits could not be overshadowed by the limitations and that much of that criticism had an anticipatory character. Further, all the achievements together with whatever limitations there existed would be shown to have resulted from the various forces at work in the critical and artistic climate of the age. In short, our study will be carried out against the historical background.
It needs to be recognised that the neoclassical age had occupied itself with Shakespeare as never before, and that as a result of this deep involvement, and patient and systematic study, significant, even momentous conclusions followed. The almost continuous Shakespeare study during the period added enormously to whatever awareness had prevailed hitherto about the poet-dramatist. No doubt quite a few took liberties with his writings and rewrote them to suit their tastes. Incidentally, the adaptation of Shakespeare's plays started during the Restoration. Some of the most important names in this connection are D'Avenant, Dryden, Tate, and Colley Cibber. To quote Halliday, Nahum Tate "is best known for his adaptations of three of Shakespeare's plays. In 1680 his version of Richard II was produced at Drury Lane, but suppressed by the Government, who disliked the deposition theme .... He was more successful with Coriolanus, produced at Drury Lane in 1681-82 as The Ingratitude of a Commonwealth, a tragedy indeed: Aufidius is killed, young Martius is tortured to death, Volumnia goes mad, and Virgilia commits suicide. Meanwhile the most famous version, or preversion, of all had been produced at the Duke's theatre in 1681, The History of King Lear, in which the Fool is omitted, Edgar is made Cordelia's lover, and all ends happily with Lear restored and Cordelia married. Until 1823,
when Kean restored the tragic ending, Tate's version held the stage - with the approval of Johnson - to the exclusion of Shakespeare's which was only restored in full by Macready in 1838.¹

People like Tate were obviously unhappy with certain aspects of Shakespeare's works, which was why they took to the work of revision. We shall seek to explain this phenomenon in the following chapter "The Temper of the Age". Meanwhile it may be pointed out that even in the act of revision the reviser remained a Shakespeare-addict. Shakespeare, the grand charmer, remained triumphant.

Yet this age has never lacked detractors. Its most biting critic was its own successor, namely the 19th century. The critics of the 19th century had it for their pastime to debunk their predecessors of the earlier age, who were supposed not to know what emotion or imagination was. The neo-classical writers came to be regarded as a dry, intellect-ridden race who could give only a limited, even distorted view of those finer things which sprang from and were sustained by emotion and imagination. Carlyle grew wrathful to remember it and described it as the age of "infidelity, insincerity, spiritual paralysis" and of "Triviality, Formalism and Commonplace."²

Carlyle's criticism is understandable: the age that came in for his censure was the age that did

¹. A Shakespeare Companion 1564-1964 (Penguin) pp 484-85
². The Hero As a Man of Letters, 1840, in T. Carlyle (Sartor Resartus on Heroes & Hero Worship), Everyman Library, 278, 1956-57
not conform to his specifications. It was certainly nowhere near the passion and ecstasy of his utterances.

And not only did the 19th century condemn it; the 20th century also has found it wanting in certain respects. Thus Halliday observes:

"The critics of the classical school had viewed Shakespeare's work as a whole, but as it were from a distance, as though it were a building to be judged by Palladian and measurable standards of construction, and though they were bound to admit its power, and seen in certain lights its sublimity, they were appalled by its lack of plan, its sprawling irrelevancies, its extravagant and barbaric mixture of styles."¹

And in his essay "Changing Interpretations of Shakespeare" Kenneth Muir remarks: "The weighing of faults and beauties was the favourite exercise of eighteenth century critics."²

While there is much force in these observations, they with their slightly exaggerated emphasis on faults would yet seem to fail to do full justice to the achievements of the neo-classical critics of Shakespeare. We quote below two other passages which would seem to convey a better appreciation of the achievements of Shakespeare criticism during the period under investigation.

Thus Eliot remarks:

"We find it difficult, of course, to believe that the view of Shakespeare to be held 100 years hence can be very different from our own. On the other hand, we are inclined to assume that the criticism of Shakespeare

¹. Shakespeare And His Critics, 1968, P. 14.
written before the nineteenth century is less illuminating than that written since. Neither assumption is quite true. ¹

And Walter Raleigh observes:

"Since the rise of Romantic criticism, the appreciation of Shakespeare has become a kind of auction, where the highest bidder, however extravagant, carries off the prize. To love and to be wise is not given to man; the poets themselves have run to wild extremes in their anxiety to find all Shakespeare in every part of him; so that it has come to be almost a mark of insensibility to consider his work rationally and historically as a whole .... This is the very ecstasy of criticism, and sends us back to the cool and manly utterances of Dryden, Johnson, and Pope with a heightened sense of the value of moderation and candour."²

"These "cool and manly utterances", among other things, we shall discuss and explain with reference to the critical principles of the age.

Now to be a little more precise about the achievements of this age's Shakespeare criticism: the first thing that needs pointing out is the nature of its awareness of Shakespeare. Leaving aside Dryden, the 17th century's awareness of Shakespeare bears no comparison with that of the 18th century. Shakespeare would seem to have spread himself out over the age and to have written his name across it. He provokes and challenges and compels attention. And what is even more to the point is that critical attention is

². Shakespeare, 1963, PP 4-5.
paid in a generous measure. Secondly, notwithstanding
the strong rationalistic tendencies and the classical
indoctrinations of the period, the critics of Shakespeare
display remarkable insights and perceptive power.
In fact, their observations abound in examples to
show that the native sensibility of the race refused
to be ‹mothered under the weight of neo-classical sledge-
hammering.

The ability to perceive and appreciate the
imaginative aspects of great literature remained alive.
Which explains why, among other things, there is
repeated mention of Shakespeare's magic in the critical
literature of the time. The great magic of his style
has under its spell such critics as Dryden, Pope, Gray,
Addison and Morgan, among others. Thirdly, the
criticism of the age combines acute observation of a
general nature with penetrative and sometimes illuminating
analysis of characters and scenes. To be precise, to
the Augustan age belongs the credit of giving a new
direction to Shakespeare criticism. Detailed criticism—
whether in the form of analysis of character or of
individual plays or in the form of comparative study of
two or more characters or plays—has its origin in
this age, and even determines to a very great extent
the trend of criticism in the age to follow. Besides,
this criticism has the credit of talking in terms of
historical approach. The emphasis that was increasingly
being laid on the historical background, the social condition, the tastes and standards of the age in which a work of art was produced, with a view to a proper appreciation of it, indicated a growing scientific temper informing the critical climate, and consequently an advance in the mode and method of critical appreciation. Both Pope and Johnson emphasise this critical attitude, however imperfectly, and may therefore be considered to be the distant precursors of the historical school of criticism in existence today - a school which insists on a thorough understanding of the social and cultural climate of the Elizabethan age as a pre-requisite for the right understanding of Shakespeare's works.

But by far the most distinctive characteristic of the Shakespeare criticism of the classical age would seem to be its levelheadedness, its balance and poise. In other words, its sense of proportion gives to this criticism its peculiar charm and its central sanity. There is considerable emotion or enthusiasm even in such critics as Pope and Johnson and Maurice Morgann, and yet their admirable sense of restraint never gives way. Consequently, the language becomes a charming blend of passion and self-restraint, especially in the case of Morgann. In this respect, they offer a sharp and refreshing contrast to their immediate successors, namely the Romantics who would scarcely know what it was to be
quiet-spoken, and who would always fly on the wings of ecstasy or fevered imagination—things to which Raleigh's words quoted above draw attention. To be in the company of a Coleridge or Hazlitt for some length of time is apt to make one feel uneasy, their heady eloquence and endless eulogy being a shade bewildering. To return from such company to the world of a Pope or a Johnson is very much a return to reality. It is a reassurance that one is in the company of men, and Shakespeare, incidentally, was a man, whatever his greatness.

We now turn our attention to the Shakespeare criticism written before Dryden. This we do in order that we may be able to see the worth of the classical criticism of Shakespeare all the more clearly. That Shakespeare was immensely popular as a playwright and that his great popularity was the object of both praise and envy, seem beyond a doubt. Even when a contemporary reference to him has a touch of jealousy, it points to an indirect admission of uncommon merit. And such is the reference of Robert Greene in his Groatsworth of Wit (1592) where he mentions Shakespeare as an upstart crow beautified with the feathers of the University Wits. Incidentally, this constitutes the first criticism of Shakespeare's works. Greene just could not conceal his chagrin at being
surpassed by Shakespeare. In 1698 Francis Meres, a Cambridge man, brackets Shakespeare with Ovid, Plantus, and Seneca and considers him to be the 'most excellent' among the English in both tragedy and comedy. In the same year Richard Barnfield praises Shakespeare's 'hony-flowing valne' and wishes him immortal fame. John Weever speaks in a like vein in 1699:

"Honie-tong'd Shakespeare when I saw thine issue I swore Apollo got them and none other...."

A character in Parnassus (a series of three plays performed at Cambridge, probably at Christmas, 1698, 1599, 1601) proclaims unhesitatingly that he esteems Shakespeare far above Chaucer, Gower, and Spenser and that he will, to honour the poet, lay *Venus and Adonis* under his pillow.

About the same time Gabriel Harvey states in his Marginalia:

"The younger sort takes much delight in Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis* but his *Lucrece* and his tragedy of *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, have it in them, to please the wiser sort."

In 1614 Thomas Freeman pays his tribute to Shakespeare's versatility saying that he is unequal to the task of praising the poet highly enough ('But to praise thee aright I want thy store'). Notwithstanding

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1 Epigrammes in the Oldest Cut, and newest Fashion, 1599.
all this praise it can perhaps be said with some
justice that until we come to Ben Jonson we do not
know what a tribute is or how rich it could possibly
be. As Kenneth Muir says: "The elegy he contributed
to the first folio (1623) is perhaps the most
magnificent tribute ever paid by one poet to another..."¹
Shakespeare's writings were confessed to be such 'as
neither Man, nor Muse can praise too much.' He is
the 'soul of the age,' the 'applause! delight! the
wonder of our stage!' Even though he has "small Latin
and less Greek" he is easily superior even to the
ancient Greeks such as Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides.
Again, "he was not of an age but for all time". What
is even more important is that immediately after
noticing Shakespeare's native genius (his 'nature')
Jonson sings a high eulogy of the fellow poet's art
(in which Shakespeare had always been held deficient):

"Yet must I not give Nature all: Thy Art,
My gentle Shakespeare, must enjoy a part.
For though the poet's matter Nature be
His Art doth give the fashion........."²

It is the same Jonson who in reply to the
exclamations of uncritical Shakespeare fans would
pinpoint Shakespeare's faults. Thus when it was exclaimed
that Shakespeare "never blotted out line", Jonson

2. Ben Jonson's Elegy prefixed to the First Folio, 1623.
quipped: "Would he had blotted a thousand". The point is that Jonson is not the man to countenance uncritical adulation. On the other hand, when the turn came, it was again he who went so far as to put his follow-poet on the very highest pedestal. Jonson's Eulogy, coming as it does from a man of his stature, has a special place in the history of Shakespeare criticism. We shall see how many subsequent critics echo Jonson's views on Shakespeare.

Heminge and Condell in their preface to the First Folio, 1623, spoke of Shakespeare as a 'happy imitator of Nature' whose 'mind and hand went together'.

In his poem in the Second Folio of Shakespeare's plays, 1632, Milton honours the Elizabethan without any reservation:

"Dear son of memory, great heir of Fame
What need'st thou such weak witness of thy name?
Thou in our wonder and astonishment
Has built thyself a live-long monument.
For whilst to th' shame of slow-endeavouring art,
Thy easy numbers flow, and that each heart
Hath from the leaves of thy unvalu'd Book
Those Delphick lines with deep impression took..."

It is practically in the same strain that Milton refers in his L'Allegro to Shakespeare's "native woodnote wild".

Webster in his Epistle to the White Devil, 1612, had extolled Shakespeare's "worth", though he bracketed him with Dekker and Heywood.

Michael Drayton in his *Elegy to Henry Reynolds*, 1627 refers to Shakespeare's "smooth comic vein".

Thomas Heywood in his *Hierarchie of the Blessed Anges*, 1635 utters an unreserved praise of Shakespeare:

"Mellifluous Shakespeare, whose inchanting quill Commanded Mirth or Passion, was but will."

In *The History of the Worthies of England* (1662) Thomas Fuller notices Shakespeare first as a compound of Martial, Ovid, and Plautus, then as an equal of both Heraclitus (in the comic vein) and Democritus (in the tragic vein) and finally as one whose "learning was very little, so that as cornish diamonds are not polished by any lapidary, but are pointed and smoothed even as they are taken out of the earth, so nature itself was all the art which was used upon him."¹

He also takes a generous note of "the quickness" of Shakespeare's "wit" as against the higher "learning" of Ben Jonson. Truly does Kenneth Muir observe: "Through the whole of the seventeenth century Jonson's art and learning were contrasted with Shakespeare's natural gifts."²

In 1664 Margaret Cavendish (Letter CXXIII) pays a most warm-hearted tribute to the Universality of Shakespeare's genius. "... So well he hath Express'd

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¹. Ibid, p. 11.
in his Playes all sorts of Persons, as one would think he had been Transformed into every one of those Persons he has Described..... and in his Tragick Vein, he Presents Passions so naturally, and Misfortunes so Probably, as he Pierces the souls of his Readers with such a True sense and Feeling thereof, that it forces Tears through their Eyes.... Indeed Shakespeare had a clear Judgment, a Quick Wit, a spreading Fancy, a subtilt Observation, a Deep Apprehension... truly, he was a Natural Orator, as well as a Natural Poet."¹

When after all this we reach Dryden's appreciation of Shakespeare we realise that here is something which is different from all that has gone before. His criticism bears the stamp of a mind deeply exercised by brooding over literary principles, more especially those of the drama. His Shakespeare criticism reads like a significant prelude to the 18th century's. He will be found discussed at length in a separate chapter.

The man who may be regarded as standing at the end of 17th century Shakespeare criticism is Thomas Rymer. Rymer would indeed appear to be a phenomenon. For while almost all others saw their

way to crying up Shakespeare he stood apart and mounted a virulent attack on the Elizabethan. He is all for the ancient Greeks and Romans and the modern French; he is, as a corollary, heart and soul against the non-conformist tradition in the English drama, more particularly in Shakespeare's tragedies.

His *Short View of Tragedy* (1693) contained but an emphatic reiteration of what he had earlier said in *The Tragedies of the Last Age Consider'd and Examin'd by the Practice of the Ancients and by the Commonsense of All Ages* (1678).

Rymer held that the English should have built on the same foundation as Sophocles and Euripides, or after their model, and that the Chorus is the most necessary part of tragedy. He was a learned man, clever, and boisterously witty, but when he attacked 'Othello' with ridicule he knew that it was his last weapon. He called it the 'Tragedy of the Handkerchief'; he found in it the moral that wives should look well to their linen, and he poured biting scorn into his summing up of the play, which, according to him, has some burlesque, some humour and comic wit, some show and mimicry, while the tragic part is little else than a bloody farce, without salt or savour. Rymer was certainly without aesthetic
perception and a reactionary. About him L.C. S Knights remarks:

"But perhaps Rymer is not sufficiently representative for his work to be called as evidence. He had a following which included such critics as Gildon and Dennis, and even Pope was influenced by him, but he was censured by Dryden, Addison and Rowe, amongst others, and the rules he stood for never gained anything like complete ascendancy in the criticism of the eighteenth century."1

He further observes:

"I cannot understand Mr. Eliot's remark that he has 'never seen a cogent refutation of Thomas Rymer's objection to Othello' (Selected Essays, P. 141). A narrow sensibility, a misunderstanding of the nature of dramatic conventions and the command of a few debating tricks (e.g. the description of the play in terms of the external plot, which would make any tragedy look ridiculous) are sufficient to account for his objections."2

But it is well to remember, as Halliday would have us remember, that there were not many Rymers. Thomas Rymer was indeed a lonely figure.

Perhaps it would be legitimate to make two inferences from the above survey: first, that Shakespeare was generally well received in the critical circle. And second, that none of these critics even thought it worth his while to launch upon a critical analysis adequate to the magnitude of Shakespeare's achievement. Most of these appreciations were more like obituary notices than real pieces of literary criticism.

1. Explorations, 1951, P. 7.
2. Ibid, P. 7 footnote.
Against this background the 18th century critics of Shakespeare would seem to appear with noteworthy achievements to their credit. Their work, taken together, would seem to constitute the first major endeavour in the annals of Shakespeare appreciation. They display both bulk and penetration, sustained labour and pioneering zeal.

At this stage it would be worthwhile saying a word about the necessity of the chapter that we have devoted to the age itself. Nothing can be properly understood in isolation. Whatever is sought to be understood must first be set against its natural background. There is no doubt that the distinctive character of the Shakespeare criticism written in the 18th century and its several manifestations are essentially due to the peculiar temper of the age itself—its social, literary, and artistic tastes and standards, its ruling preoccupations as also the natural genius of the race. Both Pope and Johnson pleaded for a study of Shakespeare against the Elizabethan background. We attempt an evaluation of Shakespeare criticism in the context of the time which produced it. The chapter on the age is necessary also to show that the critical tenets of the age did not prevent the critics from making a fairly uninhibited estimate of Shakespeare.
The pattern of criticism that emerges with Dryden culminates in Morgann. This is why this study begins with Dryden. Indeed Dryden's Shakespeare appreciation significantly foreshadows the following age's, so much so that it is difficult to imagine how the 18th century England might have looked upon Shakespeare if Dryden had not made known his views about him. As will be made clearer later, both the peculiar merits and drawbacks of 18th century Shakespeare criticism are, by and large, also the merits and drawbacks of Dryden's findings of Shakespeare. He set the tone and temper of what was to follow.

Now to take a more detailed view of the criticism of the age: Certain critics stand out by reason of the importance of the work they did, and we have singled out some — indeed those who really matter from the interpretative point of view — for detailed study, devoting a separate chapter to each of them. They are Dryden, Nicholas Rowe, Joseph Addison, Alexander Pope, Joseph Warton, Lord Kames, Thomas Whately, and Maurice Morgann, besides Johnson, the very greatest of them all. Our study of these critics has chiefly been aimed at bringing out the nature and quality of their individual contributions. Naturally, therefore, attempts at drawing attention to the peculiar merits of each of them will be found in the individual chapter.
concerned. How they stand related to each other will also be brought out there. Here we can only glance at some of their distinctive achievements. Since a few introductory remarks have already been made about Dryden, we shall proceed with Nicholas Rowe.

Nicholas Rowe, perhaps the earliest of 18th century Shakespeare critics as also the first "Critical editor" of Shakespeare, is a pioneer in more than one sense. He introduced the plays with the first formal life of Shakespeare. Rowe's short Life remained the standard biography until the appearance of Malone's Life at the end of the century. As a critic he not only takes note of and makes appreciative references to the liveliness of Shakespeare's images, but opts for detailed criticism in preference to general. He is the very first in the century to take up individual characters for critical comments and illuminating comments at that. He is also the first to make valuable observations on Hamlet pointing out both where this play agrees with Sophocles's Electra and where it excels the latter.

Addison is perhaps the most eloquent in pleading for the liberties of genius. He cries up the incomparable splendour that Shakespeare achieved in pursuit of the inimitable laws of his own genius and caring little for the rules that have come down from antiquity. He is also all praise for the great
naturalness of the poet's works, for the untutored character of his genius which, instead of being a drawback, was a singular boon in that it enabled him to remain beyond the pale of imitation. Addison emphasizes the point that Shakespeare was uniquely original.

Alexander Pope, the greatest poet and one of the most important critics of the age, writes interesting criticism of Shakespeare. He is struck by the astonishing fecundity of Shakespeare, by the unmistakable naturalness of his creations, by his fluency and versatility. He also notes and pays his feeling tributes to Shakespeare's marvellous manner of depicting passion so as to make it most affecting. Besides, he remarks on Shakespeare's portrayal of characters and on his uncommon capacity to endow them with their unforgettable individuality. It certainly speaks of an unusual perceptive power on the part of Pope to have discovered individuals rather than types in Shakespeare. Also, he has something very sensible to say on why Shakespeare and Ben Jonson were set over against each other by their admirers.

Joseph Warton ranks as a pioneer in character criticism, and in the criticism of individual plays. In this new direction of Shakespeare analysis he seems to stand midway between Nicholas Rowe and
Johnson. Whereas Rowe had only done some little spade work, Warton did a rather real job of it. His five papers in the *Adventurer on the Tempest* and *King Lear* have a real historical importance in the annals of Shakespeare criticism in the sense that they are indication enough that the 18th century was getting more intimately involved with Shakespeare and getting prepared to take a much deeper plunge in him than ever before. In particular, his incidental comparison of Shakespeare and Dryden as playwrights pointing out the former's striking naturalness as distinguished from "the unnatural eloquence and witticisms of Dryden" speaks volumes for his critical insight.

Lord Kames also displays remarkable critical faculty. He is the very first to draw attention to the fact that Shakespeare is incomparably superior to any other dramatist because of the manner in which he delineates passion. Whereas others can be said merely to describe passion, Shakespeare imitates it. In other words, while other playwrights deal with passion rather from the angle of an outsider, he treats it as one who is involved in it. Thus with Shakespeare a character grows from within and bears the authentic touch of creation, while most other dramatists only impose things
from without. Besides, Karnes makes special mention of the distinctly individual character of Shakespeare's images.

Thomas Whately's comparison between Macbeth and Richard III can be regarded as a veritable landmark in the history of Shakespeare criticism. The first study of its kind, it stands as a lasting monument, however humble, to the clearly extraordinary critical acumen of the Government official that Whately was. Whately proves to the hilt how under the garb of apparent similarity these two dramatic personages concealed fundamentally opposite character and laws of being. In the relevant chapter we shall see how Whately influenced Hazlitt where study of Macbeth and Richard III looks like an exact copy of the 18th century critic's work. Whately's work is another convincing proof that the century was fast getting out of the groove of general reflections on Shakespeare and was taking rather seriously to relatively elaborate criticism of plays and characters as the means to a proper understanding of the poet-dramatist.

Another piece of criticism written about this time which was to prove of immense suggestivity and lasting importance was an essay by Maurice Morgann who was also a Government official. An admirer of Falstaff, Morgann was prompted by the desire to prove, contrary
to the general notion, that this great comic figure was certainly no coward. Whether or not he succeeded in establishing his point is not of much importance today, though it has to be admitted that he makes some extremely sensible observations on the character—observations which show the depth of his understanding of the subtlety of Shakespeare’s conception of Falstaff and of his execution of it. This work on Falstaff is undoubtedly the greatest piece of character criticism in the 18th century, and when we look beyond the century, it may as well be regarded as a progenitor of a long and celebrated series of character studies that came to distinguish the Shakespeare criticism of the next century. What is of no less importance is that Morgann was so full of Shakespeare that he delivered himself more than once of some thrillingly impassioned utterances on the dramatist himself—utterances which by their high animation and profundity of meaning make it unmistakable that Falstaff was only the occasion while Shakespeare was the real subject of discourse. Morgann also alludes to the magic of Shakespeare’s poetry. In all this there is a clear foreshadowing of the Romantic temper and taste.

The critic we have so far left out but who is by far the greatest of the century is Samuel Johnson whom naturally we will discuss in a separate chapter later. His Preface to Shakespeare and his
Notes on the Plays are an invaluable part of our great heritage of Shakespeare criticism. In Johnson may be found the representative 18th century mind at work, and, so viewed, his work may be taken as containing the age's verdict on Shakespeare. But his work is even more than that. As we shall see, Johnson's master mind very often makes short work of and rises superior to the limitations of the age. His achievements are many-sided, and his observations are informed by vigour and a penetrative intellect. Like Dryden before him, he justifies Shakespeare's disregard of the unities of time and place, his tragedies, and salutes him as an established classic.

He speaks of Shakespeare as a perfect mirror of nature, calls attention to the remarkable humanity of Shakespeare's characters, and calls for a total grasp of his plays as against the tendency to fasten on individual scenes and expressions. His joining issue with Voltaire on the relative merits of Cato and Othello is significant and memorable. With all his admiration for Shakespeare, he would never commit himself to such hyperboles as the following age came to delight in. In Johnson the old criticism and the new combine. If his Preface is in the tradition of general reflections on the poet, his Notes by virtue of their minute analysis of characters and plays help to inaugurate a new era and indeed go a
long way to anticipate the character-centred investigation of the following age.

William Richardson's "Philosophical Analysis and Illustration of some of Shakespeare's Remarkable Characters" (1774) is another example of the growing interest in character conceived as the necessary means to unravelling Shakespeare. Richardson's intention was "to make poetry subservient to philosophy, and to employ it in tracing the principles of human conduct."¹

Like Lord Kames, Richardson commends Shakespeare's "power of imitating the passions" which is distinguished from the power of description. To quote Richardson:

"There are several writers, as there are so many players, who are successful in imitating some particular passions, but who appear stiff, awkward, and unnatural, in the expression of others..... the genius of Shakespeare is unlimited. Possessing extreme sensibility, and uncommonly susceptible, he is the Proteus of the drama, he changes himself into every character, and enters easily into every condition of human nature."²

This is unquestionably a brilliant piece of observation and puts one in mind of what Keats had to say about Shakespeare - of his idea of Negative Capability which means that the true poetic character is one which has no self, is everything and nothing, and capable of assuming any form and shape in any situation and

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². Ibid, PP 150-51.
at any given time. This Negative Capability is the quality necessary to supreme imaginative achievement, and provides the best description ever given of Shakespeare's poetic character. Thus viewed, Richardson's observation would appear to be singularly creditable.

Shakespeare according to Richardson, distinguishes himself most eminently "by imitating the passion in all its aspects, by pursuing it through all its windings and labyrinths, by moderating or accelerating its impetuosity according to the influence of their principles and of external events, and finally by combining it in a judicious manner with other passions and propensities, or by setting it aptly in opposition. He thus unites the two essential powers of dramatic invention, that of forming characters; and that of imitating, in their natural expressions, the passions and affections of which they are composed."¹

The widely held view that the classical age was, by and large, insensitive to the appeal of Shakespeare's language is not without foundation. Nevertheless it must needs be pointed out that the era is not altogether devoid of any reference to the beauty of the poet's language. For example, Thomas Gray, who did not write much on Shakespeare, makes special mention of his

language in a letter to Richard West dated April, 1742. His recognition is not only not half-hearted but indeed so deeply felt that he would think the language of his own time "greatly degenerated" since Shakespeare is untranslatable in the 18th century idiom. "In truth", says Gray, "Shakespeare's language is one of his principal beauties." Gray even goes a step further and observes "Every word in him is a picture." Perhaps it may not be too much to suggest that Gray's comments involve an anticipation, however dim, of some of the 19th and 20th century approaches to the language of Shakespeare. In the Progress of Poesy (1757) Gray calls Shakespeare "Nature's Darling" and "immortal Boy".

On Shakespeare's language one of the earliest studies.... was W. White's A Specimen of a Commentary on Shakespeare, 1794 with '(1) Notes on As You Like It, and (2) An attempt to explain and illustrate various passages on a new principle of criticism, derived from Mr. Locke's Doctrine of The Association of Ideas.' White did give a number of examples of Shakespeare's use of imagery, particularly of his repeated employment of the same cluster of images. White had no uncertainty about the importance of his own work: 'I have endeavoured to unfold the secret and subtle operations of genius from the most indubitable doctrine in the theory of metaphysics. As these powers of the imagination have never, I believe, been adequately conceived, or systematically discussed, I may perhaps be permitted, on this occasion, to adopt the language of science and to assume the merit of DISCOVERY.' Unfortunately, White was left neglected both by the romantic critics

1. Thomas Gray, Poetic Diction (From a letter to Richard West, 1742), English Critical Essays XVI-XVIII Centuries, ed. E.D. Jones, 1955, P. 266
2. Ibid, P. 266.
3. Pope's feeling for Shakespeare's language and Dryden's rather unexpected admiration of it (in his preface to All for Love) will be found discussed in the relevant chapters. We use the word 'unexpected' advisedly in the context of Dryden's general attitude to the subject.
and by more recent writers. Whiter therefore may be said to have been a pioneer in the field where Caroline Spurgeon's *Shakespeare's Imagery* (1835) and Dr. Wolfgang Clemen's *Shakespeare Bilder* (Bonn, 1836) are landmarks.

One name that must not go unnoticed in this study is that of Garrick, "the only actor I ever saw whom I could call a master both in tragedy and comedy." (Johnson) In a letter to Garrick dated May 18, 1765, Johnson writes: "I know that great regard will be had to your opinion of an edition of Shakespeare. I desire therefore to secure an honest prejudice in my favour by securing your suffrage and that this prejudice may really be honest, I wish you would name such plays as you would see, and they shall be sent...."

He revolutionised the art of acting by substituting speed, variety, and naturalism for the traditional declamatory style. He did more than all the scholars to popularise Shakespeare, producing twenty-four of the plays at Drury Lane, and himself playing seventeen Shakespearean parts. Besides, he abandoned many of the Restoration versions of the plays and returned very nearly to the text of Shakespeare. Incidentally, as we have noted in connection with Nahum Tate, it was Macready who went further than Garrick in restoring the original text of Shakespeare.

It is likely that much of the interest, noticed above, in Shakespeare's characters was stimulated

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1. The Language of Shakespeare's Plays - B. Ifor Evans, University Paperbacks, 1966, Introduction P. VII.
by Garrick through his productions. In 1769 he organised the Shakespeare Jubilee at Stratford. It should be noted however that in his production of Macbeth he could not resist writing a dying speech for Macbeth, that he produced his own version of Hamlet, omitting the grave-digger and Ophelia's funeral, and that he made new and pretty adaptations of some comedies, namely, A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Tempest, The Taming of the Shrew, The Winter's Tale.

We cannot yet claim to have given anything like a full account of the classical criticism of Shakespeare. Several works which are not considered particularly important as pieces of aesthetic criticism have not been noticed yet. We now proceed to provide an account of such works if only to draw attention to the kind of interest the age was taking in Shakespeare.

Thomas Rymer might have been a solitary detractor of Shakespeare, and yet he was a force to reckon with. In Some Reflections on Mr. Rymer's Short View of Tragedy, 1694, Charles Gildon replies to Rymer calling him a 'hypercritic' and maintaining that Shakespeare's excellence is built on innate worth. He confidently rates Shakespeare above Greek and Latin poets, which shows that Dryden's opinion had prevailed, and he is liberal-minded in seeing nothing wrong in Shakespeare not following Aristotelian rules.
In his Essay on the Art, Rise, and Progress of the Stage in Greece, Rome, and England, 1714, Gildon laments that to Shakespeare were denied those advantages of learning which knowledge of the ancients would have given him. The natural excellence of his writings would not have been spoiled, but he would have become a dangerous rival to the greatest poets of antiquity. His witchery proceeds from his characters and reflections, heightened by the harmony of his verse, in which no man has excelled him. The learned Ben Jonson never reached his command over the emotions of joy, and his sprightly dialogue.

In the Impartial Critic (1693), a reply to Rymer's Short View of Tragedy, Dennis had sought to point out the absurdity of Rymer's plea for adopting the Greek methods in the English drama. Dennis had, however, great respect for Rymer's ability.

In his Essay on the Genius and Writings of Shakespeare, 1711, John Dennis hails Shakespeare as "one of the greatest Genius's that the world e'er saw for the Tragick stage." He was under greater disadvantages than his successors, but excelled them in beauties; and his beauties he owed to his own nature, his faults to his education and age. If Shakespeare had such qualities by nature, what might he not have

been with the art and learning which would have saved him from the gross mistakes he made in historical characters. "He who allows that Shakespeare had learning and a familiar acquaintance with the Ancients, ought to be looked upon as a detractor from his extraordinary merit and from the glory of Great Britain."^1 Further, challenging Rymer's contention that Shakespeare was a failure in tragedy, Dennis maintains that though Shakespeare succeeded very well in comedy, yet his "principal Talent and his chief Delight was Tragedy."^2

The question of Shakespeare's learning for the 18th century a matter of seemingly endless argument. Thus Rowe observes:

"Whether his Ignorance of the Ancients were a disadvantage to him or no, may admit of a Dispute. For the knowledge of 'em might have made him more correct, yet it is not improbable but that the Regularity and Deference for them, which would have attended that correctness, might have restrain'd some of that Fire, Impetuosity and even beautiful Extravagance which we admire in Shakespeare."^3

Addison has a similar view to express.

Richard Steele's criticism of Shakespeare, although it is not anything quite substantial, is still lit up with some flashes of insight. He praises without stint Shakespeare's art of tragedy which, he

2. Ibid, P. 38.
is certain, is incomparably superior to that of any other dramatist. In the Tatler no 47 he speaks admiringly of Shakespeare's delineation of passion in Henry IV and remarks:

"The way of common writers in this kind (tragedy) is rather the description than the expression of sorrow." He particularly refers to Northumberland's grief on hearing of his son's death. In the Tatler no 53 he is all praise for the refreshing naturalness of Shakespeare's presentation of characters and scenes. "In the tragedy of Caesar he introduces his hero in his night gown. He had at that time all the power of Rome; deposed consuls, subordinate generals and captive princes, might have preceded him; but his genius was above such mechanic methods of showing greatness. Therefore, he rather presents that great soul debating upon the subject of life and death with his intimate friends, without endeavouring to propound his audience with empty show and pomp."

In the Tatler no 188 Steele calls attention to Shakespeare's extra-ordinary power of depicting man in the opposing moods of "the most anxious vexation" and "the highest satisfaction." Shakespeare has admirably represented "both the aspects...... in the most excellent tragedy of Othello." In the Tatler no 35 he glances approvingly at Hamlet, although he does not speak of the tragedy as a whole. "The great errors in playing are admirably well exposed in Hamlet's directions to the actors who are to play in his supposed tragedy."
But it is in the **Spectator** no 141 (Aug 11, 1711) that Steele speaks in the most glowing and delightful terms about Shakespeare's genius:

"The Gentleman who writ this Play (Shadwell's *Lancashire Witches*), and has drawn some characters in it very justly, appears to have been misled in his witchcraft by an unwary following the inimitable Shakespeare. The incantations in *Macbeth* have a solemnity admirably adapted to the occasion of that tragedy, and fill the mind with a suitable Horror..... Subjects of this kind, which are in themselves disagreeable, can at no time become entertaining, but by passing thro' an Imagination like Shakespeare's to form them; for which reason Mr. Dryden would not allow even Beaumont and Fletcher capable of imitating him.

"But Shakespeare's Magick cou'd not copy'd be, Within that Circle none durst walk but He"**

In his *Preface to the Works of Shakespeare*, 1733, Lewis Theobald confesses himself dazzled by the wide Shakespearean prospect, and wonders in how many branches of excellence to consider and admire him.

"Whether we view him on the side of Art or Nature, he ought equally to engage our attention: Whether we respect the Force and Greatness of his Genius, the Extent of his knowledge and Reading, The Power and Address with which he throws out or applies either Nature, or Learning, there is ample scope for both our wonder and Pleasure. If his Diction, and the Clothing of his Thoughts attract as, how much more must we be charmed with the Richness, and Variety, of his Images and Ideas..."**

Sir Thomas Hanmer in his *Preface to the Works of Shakespeare*, 1744, speaks of Shakespeare as one "who does great honour to his country as a rare and perhaps a singular genius; one who hath attained an high degree of perfection in these two great branches of Poetry, Tragedy and Comedy, ...... and who may be said without partiality to have equalled, if not excelled, in both

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kinds, the best writers of any age or country who have thought it glory enough to distinguish themselves in either. ¹

In his Preface to the Works of Shakespeare, 1747, William Warburton observes: "The whole a Critic can do for an Author who deserves his Service, is to correct the faulty Text; to remark the Peculiarities of Language; to illustrate the obscure Allusions; and to explain the Beauties and Defects of sentiment or composition. And surely, if ever an Author had a claim to this Service, it was our Shakespeare." ²

The imaginative touch which we noted in Theobald is absent from Warburton. He concentrates upon words, and his interest is rather in the controversies that have arisen round Shakespeare. He does not impress as an aesthetic critic of Shakespeare.

In 1747 Thomas Edwards published his Supplement to Warburton's Edition of Shakespeare, renamed the following year The Canons of Criticism. It is an able exposure of Warburton's shortcomings as an editor of Shakespeare.

Peter Whalley in his Enquiry into the Learning of Shakespeare, 1748 contends that Shakespeare was unlearned only in the dead languages, and that in characters and manners Shakespeare is invincible, thanks to his comprehensive mind and exact knowledge of the world.

¹. Ibid, P. 87.
². Ibid, P. 93.
Charlotte Lennox in her *Shakespeare Illustrated* (1753-54) maintains that Shakespeare's characters are real men with human passions, not stage phantoms, and his reputation is therefore safe till human nature gets changed. Her work is particularly important as the first published collection of the sources of more than half of Shakespeare's plays. Johnson, who had a high opinion of her, wrote a dedication for *Shakespeare Illustrated*.

Hugh Blair in his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres*, 1769 speaks of Shakespeare who like Sophocles and Euripides touches the heart by setting before us the plain and direct feelings of nature in simple language. The word 'Bombast' which Blair uses recalls Dryden, and he speaks of Shakespeare's supernatural world very much as did Addison. His preternatural beings—witches, ghosts, fairies, and spirits—have a language of their own.

In his *Review of Dr. Johnson's New Edition* of *Shakespeare*, 1765, William Kenrick set out to defend the text of Shakespeare from the 'persecution' of his commentators.

Richard Farmer's *Essay on the Learning of Shakespeare*, 1767 was written as a refutation of those critics who, like Upton and Grey, had too vehemently emphasised the learning of Shakespeare, and in it he showed that Shakespeare's Greek came from North and Chapman, not from Plutarch and Homer, his Latin from Golding,
his Italian from Painter, and his Spanish from Shelton. His "studies were most demonstratively confined to Nature and his own Language." But his want of learning was a cause of strength rather than a disadvantage. That Samuel Johnson thought highly of Farmer's work is evidenced by the letters he wrote to Farmer praising his Essay ("an opinion which you have already placed above the need of any more support") and seeking his help in Steevens's work.  

Mrs. Montagu in her Essay on the Writings and Genius of Shakespeare, 1769 replies to Voltaire's work and affirms that Shakespeare is not to be tried by any set code of critical laws. Johnson, it may be remembered, had already defended Shakespeare against Voltaire's attack in his Preface.  

William Cooke's Elements of Dramatic Criticism (1775) is largely an echo of Johnson's views.  

Edward Taylor's Cursory Remarks On Tragedy, on Shakespeare, etc. (1774) seeks to defend the dramatic rules against the criticism of Johnson. This work is historically interesting because it follows the school of Rymer and because it typifies a certain 18th century manner of thinking that culminated in the revised Lear with its happy ending.  

Thomas Warton in his History of English Poetry (1774) traces Shakespeare's undisguised frankness of  

1. Ibid, P. 201.  
diction to the lack of criticism in Elizabethan times. Though Warton did not deal fully with Shakespeare, his work was invaluable for scholars like Capell, Steevens, and Malone who were trying to relate Shakespeare to his age. Johnson greatly valued Warton's scholarship.¹ Vol VIII of Johnson's Shakespeare has an appendix consisting of notes contributed by Warton and others.

Elizabeth Griffith in her Morality of Shakespeare's Drama Illustrated, 1775 places Shakespeare correctly as the greatest poet of the world, etc. and she absolves his dramatic methods from pedantic restrictions. But she disappoints when she persistently searches for morals. She has true intuitions, but a wrong critical system.

Edward Capell in his Notes and Various Readings to Shakespeare, 1779, is mostly concerned with suggestions for emending the text. He shows little understanding for the whole of Shakespeare, but some of his critical remarks are worth preserving. He is impressed by the wonderful drawing of Cleopatra who was only exceeded by Falstaff.

In his Supplement to 1778 Edition of Shakespeare, 1780, Malone whose name is a landmark in verbal criticism, says prophetically that we must discover Shakespeare's whole library, trace to sources the plots of all his dramas, point out every allusion, elucidate every obscurity, before we can understand him. Malone is not happy in aesthetic criticism, being matter-of-fact.

unimaginative and unconscious of the new breezes that were stirring the leaves of the Shakespearean forest.

Henry Mackenzie makes a highly perceptive study of Hamlet. He perceives correctly that the seat of the tragedy is Hamlet's mind, and the action is ruled by its complexities. His surmise that Shakespeare was drawn away from pre-conceived plans to develop a character that interested him is proof of sympathetic understanding. Modern research has shown that the original play was a tragedy of revenge, and Shakespeare rewrote his first draft under the spell of the thought of what such a character might become.

Joseph Ritson's Remarks on the Text and Notes of the Last Edition of Shakespeare, 1783 is a feeling defence of Hamlet against the charges of Steevens who found fault with Hamlet on various grounds. Ritson calls it a severe and unexpected attack on Shakespeare's favourite character - a character whom both tradition and his own sentiment and feelings have made us admire and esteem. The very fact that Ritson defends Hamlet shows that Shakespeare had not worked his miracle in vain.

In the Lounger (Edinburgh), Nos 68 & 69, May, 1786, Mackenzie discusses Falstaff, comparing him with Don Quixote. Mackenzie stresses Falstaff's grossness at the expense of his charm, and this is because he has

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1. The Mirror (Edinburgh), No XCIX, 18th April, 1780; No C, April 22, 1780.
an imperfect appreciation of Shakespeare's imagination. However, the comparison with Don Quixote gives a creative touch to the figure of Falstaff.

In his Imperfect Hints towards a New Edition of Shakespeare, 1787, Samuel Felton extols Shakespeare's many-splendoured genius. He frequently alludes to Shakespeare's fancy and the 'wildness' of his imagination.

Thomas Robertson in his Essay On The Character of Hamlet, 1788 remarks that for the first time in history we see a man of genius on the stage, and that Hamlet alone eclipses the whole action of the drama. Robertson naturally puts us in mind of Mackenzie and Ritson. Malone's Dissertation on Henry VI, 1780 (Vol XVIII of Boswell's Edition of Malone's Variorum Shakespeare, 1821) anticipates in a limited way the modern 'disintegrators' of Shakespeare. He finds the hand of Shakespeare in the 2nd and 3rd parts, but is far from admitting that they were originally and entirely composed by him. Part I, suggests Malone, was clearly not by Shakespeare. Malone carries our minds forward to the days of J.M. Robertson.

Bishop Thomas Percy in his Essay On the Origin of the English Stage, 1788 maintains that Shakespeare's histories being a legitimate species, distinct from tragedy and comedy, should not be judged by the general laws of tragedy or comedy.

In his Observations on Hamlet, 1796: Appendix, 1797 James Plumptre sees several contemporary personages disguised in the play. Gertrude is Mary Queen of Scots and Hamlet is James I.
Besides, several outstanding personalities of the age evinced keen interest in Shakespeare.

Of Thomas Sheridan's love for Shakespeare we come to know from both Johnson and Boswell. He was both Shakespearean scholar and actor. Boswell's reporting of Sheridan's remarks on Hamlet and Henry IV may appear to be of particular interest.

Long before Sheridan there was Thomas Betterton who had distinguished himself as a Shakespeare performer. His acting of Hamlet and certain other characters seems to have been memorable. Rowe refers to him as follows:

"I cannot leave Hamlet, without taking notice of the Advantage with which we have seen this Master piece of Shakespeare distinguish itself upon the stage, by Mr. Betterton's fine fine Performance of that Part ...... No man is better acquainted with Shakespeare's manner of Expression .... his Veneration for the Memory of Shakespeare .... engaged him to make a journey into Warwickshire."  

The great popularity of Shakespeare with the 18th century reading public is vividly testified to by John Hughes (The Guardian No 37, 23rd April, 1713) and by Theobald in Shakespeare Restored. It is not surprising, therefore, that Gibbon could later allude to the "idolatry for the gigantic genius of Shakespeare, which is incalculated from our infancy as the first duty of an Englishman."

The censure implied in the following words of Goldsmith conveys but an indirect admission of Shakespeare's country-wide vogue: "I am afraid we will have no good plays now. The taste of the audience is spoiled by the pantomime of Shakespeare...."¹

Fielding bears witness to Shakespeare's popularity when he shows Hamlet being staged when Tom Jones takes Partridge to the gallery of Drury Lane.

Lyttleton in his Dialogues of the Dead (1765) says that "a veneration for Shakespeare seems to be a part of your national religion, and the only part in which even your men of sense are fanatics", and that "he who can read Shakespeare, and be cool enough for the accuracy of sober criticism, has more reason than taste".²

Before we bring our introductory remarks to a close (indeed, most of what has been said so far is more by way of introduction than in the regular manner of criticism. This particularly applies to our quick survey of the less important works cited above), it should be made clear that this is a study of the aesthetic criticism of Shakespeare during the classical period and not its Shakespeare scholarship as revealed in the editings and textual criticism of the time.

This has been stated in the Preface also.

It will be clear from the survey made above that not only were Shakespeare's works studied painstakingly and with veneration, but serious investigations were launched into their social and literary backgrounds, into the poet's life, and, in fact, into whatever might conceivably have affected the quality and direction of his versatile genius. The efforts, it is true, suffered from certain characteristic limitations which, however, could not overshadow the many splendid results. The findings are born of what may be called the uncommon commonsense of the age, they at the same time speak of the age's imaginative sympathy which was never scarce in the matter of Shakespeare exploration.

While our principal object, as already stressed, is to bring out, through a detailed treatment, the full nature of this exploratory understanding, the next chapter is devoted to an examination of the various tendencies of the age so that its Shakespeare understanding may appear in a clearer focus in the subsequent chapters in which we study the individual critics in intimate relation with the temper of the age.