REMARKS
ON SOME OF THE
CHARACTERS OF SHAKESPEARE
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BY
THOMAS WHATELEY

THIRD EDITION
Edited by
RICHARD WHATELEY

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PREFACE

Thomas Whately was a politician first, undersecretary to Lord North, a man of letters by avocation, and perhaps best known by contemporaries for his Observations on Modern Gardening, a peculiarly controversial treatise often reprinted, attacked, and praised. At his death in 1772 he left unfinished the present essay on Macbeth and Richard III, but the material was ordered and the work issued anonymously by a surviving brother, Joseph, in 1785. It occasioned in the following year a sharp reply by young John Philip Kemble, which was in turn enlarged and reissued in 1817.

A 'Second Edition' of Remarks, naming Whately as author, appeared in 1808, and notes that the 1785 printing received a 'small' impression, 'met with a quick sale,' and 'has long been extremely scarce.' Jaggard cites an interim appearance, 1790 (no locations, probably a ghost), which I have not seen. We have chosen to reprint the 'Third' edition, prepared by the grandson of Thomas, Archbishop Richard Whately—author himself of numberless tracts and editions, notably of Bacon—in 1839. The Archbishop calls his grandfather's Remarks 'one of the ablest critical works that ever appeared'; Charles Knight claims to have been spurred by it in 1811 to devote much of a lifetime to editing Shakespeare.

Before his death Whately apparently meant to extend his
study to some eight or ten of Shakespeare’s principal characters. Despite the prior appearance in print of William Richardson’s *Philosophical Analysis and Illustration of some of Shakespeare’s Remarkable Characters* (1774), Whately’s attempt may be the earliest ‘character study’ of Shakespeare in the modern sense; though subsequently far eclipsed by Morgann (1777) and later by Hazlitt, he ‘deserves more attention than he now receives’ (Nichol Smith).

The copy now reproduced is in the possession of the Publishers, and was dismantled by the General Editor. It has been collated with BM 20098.b.13 ([A]–H⁸, lacking [A₁]) and the Boston Public library copy (complete). There are no cancels. Leaf [A₁], not here present, is a half-title. The text of 1839 is a faithful reprint of 1785, the preface, appendix and notes being new.

April 1969

A.F.
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CHARACTERS OF SHAKESPEARE,

BY

THOMAS WHATELY ESQ.

THE AUTHOR OF "OBSERVATIONS ON MODERN GARDENING."

EDITED BY

RICHARD WHATELY, D.D.

ARCHBISHOP OF DUBLIN.

THE THIRD EDITION.

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JOHN W. PARKER, WEST STRAND.

M DCCLXXXIX.
PREFACE BY THE EDITOR.

The Work of which the third edition is now before the reader, was first published, after the author's death, by his brother, the late Rev. Dr. Joseph Whately, father of the present editor.

The parallel between the characters of Richard and Macbeth, was only one out of several in which the author had designed to illustrate the peculiar power of Shakespere in the delineation
of character; but he suspended his design, in order to finish and prepare for the press his well-known treatise on Modern Gardening, first published in 1770. Immediately after that time he was engaged in such an active scene of public life, (being private secretary to one of the Ministers,) as left him but little leisure for literary pursuits. In 1772 he died, leaving behind him, in manuscript, the work as it now appears; which, though but a small portion of what had been originally designed, is complete as far as it goes, and was "esteemed," (says the original editor,) "by all who have perused the manuscript, as too valuable to be suppressed."*

Subsequently, this decision has been fully confirmed by competent judges; who have con-

* The late Mr. Hazlitt mentions this work with approbation; though, through some unaccountable slip of memory, he speaks of the author under the name of "Mason." This mistake, though pointed out at the time in a Review, has been retained in a subsequent edition.
sidered this little volume, not only as entitled to a high rank among the commentaries on Shakespere, but as presenting some very curious and interesting views of that which the great dramatist so well delineated—human nature.

It may be proper to notice in this place a remark which I have heard made on this work, and which, though not necessarily implying any disparagement of it, may yet be so understood. It has been suggested that some of the passages brought forward by Mr. Whately as characteristic, and as appropriate, respectively, to Richard and Macbeth, were probably not meant to be such by the poet himself, but may have dropped, as it were, from his pen, casually, and without any thought of exhibiting the peculiar character of the speaker.

It should be remembered, however, that, supposing this opinion to be perfectly correct, it
does not at all militate against anything that is maintained in these pages, nor in the least detract from their value. For Mr. Whately, it should be observed, is merely pointing out that such and such speeches do indicate character; not that they were, in each case, written with that design. If, then, they really are characteristic, the criticism is fully borne out, whatever may have been the design of Shakespere.

If I were called on to state my own conjecture as to that design, I should be disposed to go much beyond the remark above alluded to. I doubt whether Shakespere ever had any thought at all of making his personages speak characteristically. In most instances, I conceive—probably in all—he drew characters correctly, because he could not avoid it; and would never have attained, in that department, such excellence as he has, if he had made any studied efforts for it. And the same, probably, may be
said of Homer, and of those other writers who have excelled the most in delineating characters.

A man possessing, like Shakespere, a very vivid imagination, combined with an insight into human nature, will, when he figures to himself (to use a homely but expressive phrase) any fictitious personage, spontaneously and unavoidably conceive it with such a force and distinctness of form and colouring, that it will stand before his mind's eye, as an individual; and the image thus framed will suggest to him every expression and action that is characteristic of the imagined individual. The speeches, consequently, which he puts into the mouth of such a personage, and the conduct he attributes to him, will necessarily be characteristic, without any distinct effort or care in each case to make them so, but merely from the vividness of the original conception.
A similar process takes place in the mind of every man of ordinary good sense, in the case of any real individual whom he intimately knows. We usually conjecture pretty accurately concerning a very intimate acquaintance, how he would speak or act on any supposed occasion: if any one should report to us his having done or said something quite out of character, we should at once be struck with the inconsistency; and we often represent to ourselves, and describe to others, without any conscious effort, not only the substance of what he would have been likely to say, but even his characteristic phrases and looks.

Now Shakespeare's peculiar genius consisted chiefly, I conceive, in his forming the same distinct and consistent idea of an imaginary person, that an ordinary man forms of a real and well-known individual. Shakespeare could no more have endured an expression from the lips
of Macbeth inconsistent with the character originally conceived, than an ordinary man could attribute to his most respectable acquaintance the behaviour of a ruffian, or to a human Being, the voice of a bird, or to a European, the features and hue of a negro. Hence, characteristic conduct and language spontaneously suggested themselves to the great dramatist's pen. He called his personages into being, and left them, as it were, to speak and act for themselves.

I even doubt whether he was himself aware wherein his peculiar forte lay;—whether a collection of the "beauties of Shakespere," if one had been made by the poet himself, would not have omitted most of those marvellous touches of character for which we most admire him;—and whether such a volume as the present, if he could have seen it, would not, though he would have recognised its views as
correct, have afforded him the amusement of a startling novelty.

Some few persons, however,—among others the celebrated Mr. Kemble,—have dissented from Mr. Whately's view of the character of Macbeth; whose courage they consider him to have underrated. But this apparent dissent seems to have arisen from a misapprehension of the critic's meaning, notwithstanding the great perspicuity with which he has written. Mr. Whately merely denies to Macbeth that particular kind of courage which characterizes Richard the Third. But every one must admit that Macbeth, as described in the following pages, is such a character, that every general would congratulate himself in having under his command an army, composed of men, exactly (in respect of courage) resembling him.
The truth is, however, that "courage" and other cognate terms are commonly applied by different persons, (and sometimes by the same person,) to such different qualities, or different modifications of the same quality, as to give occasion to many disputes which, on attentive examination, turn out to be merely verbal.

A question was raised, for instance, some years ago, whether Shakespere intended to represent Falstaff as a coward; the negative being maintained in an ingenious pamphlet, which some persons supposed to have been written merely in sport, by way of showing what could be advanced in favour of the most extravagant position. The author appears, however, to have been perfectly serious, and not to have differed materially in his idea of Falstaff's character, from the generality of the readers of Shakespere. He only used the term "coward" in a more restricted sense. Shakespere's Falstaff,
though deliberately preferring disgrace to imminent danger, is clearly a character of constitutional coolness and presence of mind. His cowardice, if it is to be so called, is altogether a contrast to that (for instance) of Sir Andrew Aguecheek. In his encounter with Douglas, the device to which he resorts is equally inconsistent with the character either of a man of chivalrous valour, or of one paralysed by fright.

On the different varieties of courage and of timidity, and on other points connected with the subject of this volume, there are some admirable remarks in several passages of a series of articles on Sir Walter Scott's Romances, which appeared in the Quarterly Review, and in the London Review of 1829. These articles are by the same hand; and as they are among the most valuable critical works in this, or perhaps in any language, I have taken the
liberty of extracting and subjoining, in an Appendix, the passages alluded to.

I cannot conclude without expressing a wish that the author of those articles, or some other similarly gifted writer, would employ some of his leisure hours in carrying on the illustration of Shakespere, designed and commenced by Mr. Whately. Several of the characters of the great dramatist—comic, as well as tragic,—afford materials for such parallels as that between Richard and Macbeth.

In these days, when every department of nature is scrutinized by men of eminent talents, and when the minutest researches, for instance of the anatomist and the physiologist, into things seemingly insignificant, are often found to lead to interesting results, and to throw light on subjects apparently unconnected with them, no apology can be needed for inviting attention
to any branch of that curious and interesting study, the anatomy, as it may be called, of the human mind.
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INTRODUCTION.

The writers upon dramatic composition have, for the most part, confined their observations to the fable; and the maxims received amongst them, for the conduct of it, are therefore emphatically called, The Rules of the Drama. It has been found easy to give and to apply them; they are obvious, they are certain, they are general: and poets without genius have, by observing them, pretended to fame; while...
critics without discernment have assumed importance from knowing them. But the regularity thereby established, though highly proper, is by no means the first requisite in a dramatic composition. Even waving all consideration of those finer feelings which a poet's imagination or sensibility imparts, there is, within the colder provinces of judgment and of knowledge, a subject for criticism, more worthy of attention than the common topics of discussion: I mean the distinction and preservation of character, without which the piece is at best a tale, not an action; for the actors in it are not produced upon the scene. They were distinguished by character; all men are; by that we know them, by that we are interested in their fortunes; by that their conduct, their sentiments, their very language is formed: and whenever therefore, the proper marks of it are missing, we immediately perceive that the person before our eyes is but supposititious. Experience has shown,
that however rigidly, and however rightly, the unities of action, time, and place, have been insisted on, they may be dispensed with, and the magic of the scene may make the absurdity invisible. Most of Shakespeare's Plays abound with instances of such a fascination. It is certain, too, that it is not always necessary strongly to affect, in order warmly to interest, the spectators; for many tragedies, which are not pathetic, are yet very engaging; and many comedies are amusing, though almost destitute of humour: and as to the beauties of poetry and of fancy, in some very fit subjects for a theatrical exhibition they cannot be properly admitted; and very few absolutely require them. But variety and truth of character are indispensably necessary to all, both to comedy and to tragedy; and none of them deserve their name any further than this merit belongs to them. Incidents, images, passions, language, and numbers, are common to dramatic and to
other compositions; they might all be introduced into the *relation* of an affecting story; but characters can never be perfectly exhibited, except in a drama. When they, therefore, are wanting, the want cannot be supplied, no can it be concealed; the delusion fails, and the interest ceases; the performers can only recite, they have nothing to act: for the performance is but a dialogue, not a representation; and must be received by the disappointed spectators, at the best, with indifference.

By the feeble attempts which every dramatic writer makes to characterize his personages, and by the rude sketches which some critics have drawn of a few dramatic characters, the truth of these principles is acknowledged, but the extent of them is not illustrated: for general marks of distinction do not denote the individual, but only shew the class he belongs to. Men differ as much in their minds as in their faces; and to
each man belong some general marks of distinction in both: his complexion is brown, or it is fair; his features are hard, or soft; and there is an expression of vivacity, of sensibility, or of vacancy, in the construction and motion of his eyes. But faces, agreeing in many such circumstances, are not therefore, upon the whole, like to each other: nor would a picture be the portrait of any individual, to whom, in all these, and in many more particulars, it were similar, unless the painter had also caught those peculiarities of countenance, which distinguish that person from all others who have the same cast of features, and the same tint of complexion. In like manner do the minds of men differ from each other. There are in these also general marks of distinction; quickness, or clearness, or want of apprehension; a severity or a mildness of temper; tenderness or violence in the passions. But no assemblage of these will together form the character of any indi-
vidual: for he has some predominant principle; there is a certain proportion in which his qualities are mixed; and each affects the other. Those qualities check that principle, though at the same time they are themselves controlled by it: for nothing is absolutely pure and simple in its composition; and therefore if his peculiarities do not appear, no resemblance of him can be seen.

The force of character is so strong, that the most violent passions do not prevail over it; on the contrary, it directs them, and gives a particular turn to all their operations. The most pathetic expressions, therefore, of the passions are not true, if they are not accommodated to the character of the person supposed to feel them; and the effect upon the spectators will be weak, when so much of the reality is wanting in the imitation. Such general expressions of the passions, are, in poetry, like those which in
painting are called *studies*, and which, unless they are adapted to the features, circumstances, and dispositions of the several personages, to whose figures they are applied, remain mere studies still, and do not connect with the portrait or history-piece into which they are introduced.

Yet the generality of dramatic writers, and more especially of those who have chosen tragedy for their subject, have contented themselves with the distant resemblance, which indiscriminate expressions of passion, and imperfect, because general, marks of character can give. Elevated ideas become the hero; a professed contempt of all principles denotes a villain; frequent gusts of rage betray a violence, and tender sentiments show a mildness, of disposition. But a villain differs not more from a saint, than he does in some particulars from another as basic as himself: and the same degrees of anger,
excited by the same occasions, break forth in as
many several shapes, as there are various tem-
pers. But these distinguishing peculiarities
between man and man have too often escaped
the observation of tragic writers. The comic
writers have, indeed, frequently caught them;
but then they are apt to fall into an excess the
other way, and overcharge their imitations: they
do not suffer a character to show itself, but are
continually pointing it out to observation; and
by thus bidding the spectator take notice of the
likeness, tell him all the while that it is but a
representation. The former is commonly the
defect of the French tragedies, which are there-
fore insipid, even when they abound with poetry
and passion: and the latter is a fault common
in the English comedies, which makes them dis-
gusting, though they are full of wit, good sense,
and humour. The one falls short of character,
the other runs into caricature; that wants re-
semblance, and this is mere mimicry.
Shakespere has generally avoided both extremes; and, however faulty in some respects, is in this, the most essential part of the drama, considered as a representation, excellent beyond comparison. No other dramatic writer could ever pretend to so deep and so extensive a knowledge of the human heart; and he had a genius to express all that his penetration could discover. The characters therefore which he has drawn, are masterly copies from nature; differing each from the other, and animated as the originals, though correct to a scrupulous precision. The truth and force of the imitation recommend it as a subject worthy of criticism: and though it admits not of such general rules as the conduct of the fable, yet every several character furnishing a variety of remarks, the mind, by attending to them, acquires a turn to such observations; than which nothing is more agreeable or more useful in forming the judgment, whether on real characters in life, or
dramatic representations of them. To give the mind this turn is the design of the following pages.