

# SHAKESPEARE SURVEY

AN ANNUAL SURVEY OF  
SHAKESPEARIAN STUDY AND PRODUCTION

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EDITED BY  
KENNETH MUIR

CAMBRIDGE  
AT THE UNIVERSITY PRESS

1972

Published by the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press  
Bentley House, 200 Euston Road, London NW1 2DB  
American Branch: 32 East 57th Street, New York, N.Y. 10022

© Cambridge University Press 1972

Library of Congress Catalogue Card Number: 49-1639

ISBN: 0 521 08528 4

*Shakespeare Survey* was first published in 1948. For the first eighteen volumes it was edited by Allardyce Nicoll under the sponsorship of the University of Birmingham, the University of Manchester, the Royal Shakespeare Theatre and the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

Printed in Great Britain  
at the University Printing House, Cambridge  
(Brooke Crutchley, University Printer)

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# THE PROBLEM PLAYS, 1920-1970: A RETROSPECT

MICHAEL JAMIESON

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A survey of attitudes since 1920 towards Shakespeare's Problem Plays or Dark Comedies, *Troilus and Cressida*, *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure*, invites two observations neither of which would be true of any other Shakespearian group. First, the plays – particularly *Measure for Measure* and *Troilus* – have undergone a revaluation so radical as to amount to a rediscovery, and this re-assessment itself reflects changes in literary and theatrical taste. Second, the aesthetic validity and critical usefulness of regarding these plays as a group has been increasingly questioned. A third point is that, while the study of texts and sources has advanced, research has unearthed no new fact about the original date of writing or the circumstances of first performance of any of the plays.

Today, when *Measure for Measure* and *Troilus and Cressida* are set books at 'A'-level, and when all three plays come up regularly, not just for a token staging, but for their full quota of performances in repertory at Stratford and elsewhere, it seems incredible that around 1870 William Poel (the first modern director ever to stage all three plays) was recommended by his tutor never to read *Measure for Measure* and *Troilus and Cressida*, as being improper; or that in 1906 townspeople in Oxford opposed an undergraduate performance of *Measure for Measure*; or that in 1913 F. R. Benson had such qualms about himself staging *Troilus* at Stratford that he preferred to invite Poel to revive his production for two performances

on a single day. *Measure for Measure* did, however, inspire Walter Pater's fine essay (1874) and Walter Raleigh's perceptive few pages in *Shakespeare*;<sup>1</sup> and in 1884 Bernard Shaw maintained before Furnivall's New Shakspeare Society that in *Troilus and Cressida* Shakespeare 'treated the story as an iconoclast treats an idol'. Shaw later liked to suggest connections between his *Plays Unpleasant* and Shakespeare's: 'in such unpopular plays as *All's Well*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Troilus and Cressida* we find [Shakespeare] ready and willing to start at the twentieth century if the seventeenth would only let him'.<sup>2</sup>

The three plays were first grouped together by Edward Dowden in *Shakespeare: his Mind and Art* and subsequent text-books as belonging to Shakespeare's 'third period: *In The Depths*'.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> London, 1907.

<sup>2</sup> See Robert Speaight, *William Poel and the Elizabethan Revival* (London, 1954), p. 192; Harold Child, 'The Stage History', New Cambridge *Measure for Measure* (Cambridge, 1922), p. 165; J. C. Trewin, *Benson and the Bensonians* (London, 1960), pp. 197-8; R. F. Rattray, *Bernard Shaw* (Luton, 1951), p. 147; G. Bernard Shaw, Preface to *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant*, 1 (London, 1898), xxi.

<sup>3</sup> In the first edition (London, 1875), Dowden found *All's Well* 'serious', *Measure for Measure* 'dark', and *Troilus* 'bitter' – and so puzzling that he deferred discussing it till later editions. The phrase 'In the Depths' does not occur in the 1875 text, and the embryonic theory of four periods was later expanded. S. Schoenbaum has stated: 'No biographical pattern imposed on Shakespeare . . . has made so profound an impact as Dowden's', *Shakespeare's Lives* (Oxford, 1970), p. 496.

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F. S. Boas in *Shakspeare and his Predecessors*<sup>1</sup> found links, some of them tenuous, between the three plays and *Hamlet*—‘we are left to interpret their enigmas as best we may’—and borrowed for them from the Ibsenist theatre the term ‘problem play’. It did not win currency until recirculated by W. W. Lawrence in *Shakespeare’s Problem Comedies*, a sane, slightly old-fashioned book,<sup>2</sup> dedicated to the octogenarian A. C. Bradley. Lawrence’s was the first study of *All’s Well*, *Measure for Measure* and *Troilus and Cressida* as a group. In each he perceived ‘a perplexing and distressing complication in human life . . . presented in a spirit of high seriousness’ and the problem he defined as ethical in that ‘complicated interrelations of character and action’ are probed ‘in a situation admitting of different ethical interpretations’. Lawrence argued that what is puzzling for modern readers would not have been so for the Elizabethan audience. E. M. W. Tillyard in *Shakespeare’s Problem Plays*,<sup>3</sup> though not wedded to ‘a highly unsatisfactory term’, exploited its analogy with ‘problem child’ to discuss *All’s Well* and *Measure for Measure* as ‘radically schizophrenic’ and *Hamlet* and *Troilus and Cressida* as dealing ‘with interesting problems’. A. P. Rossiter in lectures given in the early fifties (posthumously published as *Angel with Horns*<sup>4</sup>) put forward a rationale for treating the three comedies as problem plays. Ernest Schanzer argued cogently against current uses of the term, himself giving a rigorous definition of ‘problem play’ which fitted only three of Shakespeare’s plays, *Julius Caesar*, *Measure for Measure* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, which are the subject of his *The Problem Plays of Shakespeare*.<sup>5</sup> The term lingers on. Peter Ure, in his pamphlet *Shakespeare: the Problem Plays*,<sup>6</sup> continued to regard it as an accepted label for a group of plays, including *Timon of Athens*, which ‘have some features in common’. In *Shakespeare’s Problem Plays*<sup>7</sup> William B. Toole used the term only as ‘a

convenient tag for four plays’, including *Hamlet*, in which he traced, with little profit to his readers, the same theological pattern that governs the structure and meaning of the *Divina commedia*.

Biographical assumptions that Shakespeare underwent a psychological crisis in ‘the third period’ for long coloured some critics’ reading of the three plays. E. K. Chambers in three introductions to the Red Letter Shakespeare, 1906–8 (re-issued in *Shakespeare: a Survey*<sup>8</sup>) and in his much-read Shakespeare entry for the *Britannica*,<sup>9</sup> described them as ‘unpleasant’ and ‘embittered’—‘the three bitter and cynical pseudo-comedies’. C. J. Sisson in his British Academy lecture ‘The Mythical Sorrows of Shakespeare’ (1934) demolished all such biographical fallacies, and his defence of *Measure for Measure*, ‘one of Shakespeare’s finest acting plays’, contributed to that re-instatement of the problem plays which G. Wilson Knight had championed since 1929 in a changing climate of opinion. Bonamy Dobrée, reviewing *The Wheel of Fire* in *The Criterion*,<sup>10</sup> said that to his generation these plays and *Timon* did not seem ‘incomprehensibly gritty; most of us prefer them to the romantic comedies’.

### ‘*All’s Well That Ends Well*’

G. K. Hunter lamented in 1959 that ‘criticism of *All’s Well* . . . has failed to provide a context within which the genuine virtues of the play can be appreciated’. Certainly the New Cambridge edition<sup>11</sup> found *All’s Well* the most neglected play in the canon by editors (‘There

<sup>1</sup> London, 1896.

<sup>2</sup> London, 1931.

<sup>3</sup> London, 1950.

<sup>4</sup> London, 1961.

<sup>5</sup> London, 1963.

<sup>6</sup> London, 1961; revised 1964.

<sup>7</sup> The Hague, 1966.

<sup>8</sup> London, 1925.

<sup>9</sup> 11th edition (Cambridge, 1911).

<sup>10</sup> January 1931.

<sup>11</sup> Cambridge, 1929.

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is no money in it, since it is never read in schools and very rarely in universities') and possibly in the theatre. Dover Wilson looked on the Folio text as a Jacobean revision 'by Shakespeare and a collaborator' of 'an Elizabethan play perhaps by Shakespeare but . . . probably containing pre-Shakespearean elements', a view which induced neither editorial caution nor critical respect. Quiller-Couch dismissed the play as 'one of Shakespeare's worst', preferring Boccaccio's story as straighter and more dignified. He disliked 'the inept business with Parolles', thought Lafeu had 'no business in the play', that Lavache was 'nothing to any purpose' and Bertram ultimately 'a stage puppet'.

When 'Q' wrote his patronising introduction, G. P. Krapp's interesting article 'Parolles' had been published<sup>1</sup> and W. W. Lawrence's first thoughts on *All's Well* had appeared.<sup>2</sup> Lawrence traced two movements, centred on Helena and based on folk-themes: the Healing of the King and the Fulfilment of the Tasks. He showed that all the sources and analogues exalt the resourcefulness and devotion of the Clever Wench, and thus maintained that for the Elizabethans there was no impropriety in the bed-trick and Helena was wholly admirable. For Dr Tillyard *All's Well* was 'in some sort, a failure' – though probably not on the stage. He praised its construction, but followed Lawrence in stressing the rift between realistic characterisation and fairy-tale plot.

Three essays of the early fifties advanced the critical study of *All's Well*. M. C. Bradbrook in 'Virtue is the True Nobility'<sup>3</sup> surmised that 'the dramatist and the poet . . . were pulling different ways': for her, the structure revealed a serious moral debate on 'the question of blood and descent versus native worth'. Clifford Leech, writing on 'The Themes of Ambition',<sup>4</sup> found 'the folk-tale stories and the Christian colouring . . . strongly companioned

by other elements' – including satire. His reaction to the ambitious Helena was critical. Harold S. Wilson in 'Dramatic Emphasis in *All's Well That Ends Well*'<sup>5</sup> defended its deliberate artifice as a play on the wronged wife, and as stage entertainment rather than something that stands up to reflection.

In the spate of articles from the later fifties and the sixties there are three currents.<sup>6</sup> Many writers seek to establish the unity of the play by exploring the Age/Youth/Regeneration complex, or by teasing out the imagery (including the erotic), or by developing the view that our response to characters is more ambiguous than Lawrence imagined. The defence of Bertram has been accompanied by a blackening of Helena, shown up as having comic faults to match his, as aggressive where he is snobbish, or as sensual and predatory like the Venus of *Venus and Adonis*. Critics tend to quote in title or epigraph: 'The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together . . .' (IV, iii, 68–9). The vitality of Parolles, and his acceptance of life on any terms has also been related to the play's themes.

Dramaturgical analyses include discussion of *All's Well* as a 'prodigal son' piece, and Bertrand Evans's discussion in *Shakespeare's Comedies*<sup>7</sup> of Helena's manipulative control

<sup>1</sup> In *Shakespearean Studies*, ed. Brander Matthews (New York, 1916).

<sup>2</sup> *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*, xxxvii (1922).

<sup>3</sup> *Review of English Studies*, xxvi (1950).

<sup>4</sup> *Journal of English Literary History*, xxi (1954).

<sup>5</sup> *Huntington Library Quarterly*, xiii (1949–50).

<sup>6</sup> See John Arthos, 'The Comedy of Generation', *Essays in Criticism*, v (1955); J. L. Calderwood, 'The Mingled Yarn of *All's Well*', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, lxii (1963) and 'Styles of Knowing in *All's Well*', *Modern Language Quarterly*, xxv (1964); Robert Hapgood, 'The Life of Shame', *Essays in Criticism*, xv (1965); and R. Y. Turner, 'Dramatic Conventions in *All's Well*', *PMLA*, lxxv (1960).

<sup>7</sup> Oxford, 1960.

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over the action which finally 'borders on witchery'. By contrast a third approach has stressed religious, even mystical reverberations. 'The Third Eye', Wilson Knight's long suggestive essay in *The Sovereign Flower*<sup>1</sup> is in his own late manner. He discerned two antithetical concepts of honour, one masculine and military (Bertram), the other feminine (chaste love). The active Helena unites or transcends both; Shakespeare, with the creative bisexuality of genius, presented her as his supreme expression of feminine love, as 'miracle worker' and 'medium'. Robert Grams Hunter has written rewardingly and more soberly of the play as 'a secular comedy . . . for a Christian audience' with Bertram as *humanum genus* in *Shakespeare and the Comedy of Forgiveness*.<sup>2</sup>

Different approaches sometimes yield contradictory conclusions. Richard David, reviewing in *Shakespeare Survey* 8 (1955), a stage production which guyed the older generation, welcomed 'the lightening and depersonalizing of the story' which revealed the play's kinship with the last romances. C. J. Sisson in 'Shakespeare's Helena and Dr William Harvey'<sup>3</sup> presented material to prove that Helena's medical conduct and her status as a female practitioner would have struck the Elizabethans 'as consonant with the realities of contemporary life and not an element of fairy tale invention'.

The most accessible account of the play's source, text etc., is G. K. Hunter's excellent new Arden edition<sup>4</sup> which defines the play's 'strongly individual quality' as 'a quality of strain'. His tentative dating of the play is 1603-4, just before *Measure for Measure*, but Josephine Walters Bennet in 'New Techniques of Comedy in *All's Well That Ends Well*'<sup>5</sup> thinks that this 'wise, tolerant, and beautiful play' is both later and technically superior.

Joseph G. Price has dealt comprehensively with the theatrical and critical fortunes in *The Unfortunate Comedy*<sup>6</sup> and has shown that *All's*

*Well* was adapted first as a farce about Parolles and then as a sentimental play about Helena. His own scene-by-scene defence of the play always keeps theatrical presentation in mind.

Barbara Everett in her edition<sup>7</sup> has defined the tone as 'mature, subtle, haunting', and 'sober' and 'elegiac rather than saturnalian'. A different view occurs in R. A. Foakes's recent *Shakespeare: from satire to celebration*:<sup>8</sup> 'What a stage performance reveals is the degree to which the tonality . . . is governed by . . . figures like Parolles and Lavache, who persuade us . . . we are in a comic world.' Criticism has often taken *All's Well* too seriously and exaggerated its problems. After all, as Kenneth Muir has maintained, 'if the Clown were given better jokes and Bertram a better speech at the end, the play would leave us with feelings of greater satisfaction'.<sup>9</sup>

### 'Measure for Measure'

The bulk of criticism on *Measure for Measure* since 1930 almost rivals that on *Hamlet*. Much of it makes great claims for Shakespeare's achievement and some of it raises theoretical questions about the interpretation and evaluation of Renaissance plays. Writers fall into two categories: 'new critics' of different persuasions – there never was a 'School of Knight' – who regard the text as self-sufficient; and various 'historical critics' who assume that the meaning of the play, or important parts of it, can be elucidated only by recourse to prior knowledge about genres, Renaissance ethics,

<sup>1</sup> London, 1958.

<sup>2</sup> New York, 1956.

<sup>3</sup> *Essays and Studies*, n.s. XIII (1960).

<sup>4</sup> London, 1959.

<sup>5</sup> *Shakespeare Quarterly*, XVIII (1967).

<sup>6</sup> Liverpool, 1968.

<sup>7</sup> New Penguin Shakespeare (Harmondsworth, 1970).

<sup>8</sup> London, 1971.

<sup>9</sup> *Shakespeare's Sources*, I (London, 1957), p. 101.



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medieval or Renaissance theology, or Elizabethan law.<sup>1</sup>

The New Cambridge edition no longer serves the general reader. Dover Wilson held that the Folio text incorporated theatrical revisions and was corrupt. 'Q' in his critique ('What is wrong with this play?') judged the characters by the criterion of psychological consistency. Some of his points were restated with greater ebullience and critical sophistication by William Empson in 1938 as a reaction against the idealisation or deification of the Duke, whom Empson saw as 'playing God'.<sup>2</sup>

Wilson Knight's by now classic essay, '*Measure for Measure* and the Gospels',<sup>3</sup> approached the play as 'a parable' and 'a studied explication' of the theme 'Judge not, that ye be not judged'. Knight found that it *tended* 'towards allegory or symbolism', saw the Duke as 'the prophet of an enlightened ethic', and Isabella as a self-centred saint. W. W. Lawrence, however, postulated a *stage* Duke and a blameless Isabel. R. W. Chambers's forensic British Academy lecture, 'The Jacobean Shakespeare and *Measure for Measure*' (1937), represents, with C. J. Sisson's earlier one, the Establishment's rehabilitation of the play as a doctrinally Christian work of art. It defended Isabella.

Three separate studies appeared in *Scrutiny* during 1942. L. C. Knights, analysing words like 'scope', 'liberty', and 'restraint',<sup>4</sup> sensed in the play 'not paradox but genuine ambiguity', and was puzzled by both Claudio and Isabella, finding Angelo 'the admitted success of the play'. His qualified evaluation provoked from his co-editor, F. R. Leavis, an assertion of the play's value, 'The Greatness of *Measure for Measure*'.<sup>5</sup> Leavis maintained that there ought to be 'an element of the critical' in the way we regard Isabella, endorsed Wilson Knight's high view of the Duke 'the more-than-Prospero', and viewed Angelo sympathetically. In the third *Scrutiny* essay D. A. Traversi located a

poetic tension between Claudio's consciousness of the 'ravening' process of self-destruction and Lucio's 'great speech on Claudio's love'. In '*Measure for Measure*: A Footnote to Recent Criticism',<sup>6</sup> J. C. Maxwell found no imperfection in Isabel 'beyond that involved in creaturely limitation'; the play seemed 'one of Shakespeare's most perfect works of art'.

Their views on Isabella split critics into camps. By Warren D. Smith's count in 1962 'fourteen critics praise her nobility in the prison scene and thirteen . . . charge her with inhumanity towards her brother'.<sup>7</sup> Some have developed the parallel between her and Angelo with differing emphases. While to one critic they were 'those senators of virtue', Philip Edwards has seen them as 'trapped by their own kind of ethical idealism'.<sup>8</sup> Angelo has been sensitively presented as a tragic protagonist by W. M. T. Dodds, now Mrs Nowotny,<sup>9</sup> and exposed as a Puritan by D. J. McGinn.<sup>10</sup> Ernest Schanzer discussed the five main

<sup>1</sup> See O. J. Campbell, 'Shakespeare and the "New" Critics', *J. Q. Adams Memorial Studies* (Washington, 1948); L. C. Knights, 'Historical Scholarship and the Criticism of Shakespeare', *Further Explorations* (London, 1965); Robert Ornstein, 'Historical Criticism and the Interpretation of Shakespeare', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, x (1959); J. M. Newton, 'Scrutiny's Failure with Shakespeare', *Cambridge Quarterly*, 1 (1966).

<sup>2</sup> *The Structure of Complex Words* (London, 1951).

<sup>3</sup> *The Wheel of Fire* (London, 1930).

<sup>4</sup> Ernest Leisi in his semanticist's 'old spelling and old meaning edition' (1964), lists as key-words: *authority, scope, liberty, restraint, mercy, grace, weigh and seem*.

<sup>5</sup> *The Common Pursuit* (London, 1952).

<sup>6</sup> *Downside Review*, LXV (1947).

<sup>7</sup> 'More Light on *Measure for Measure*', *Modern Language Quarterly*, XXIII (1962). Smith also claimed that Isabella's 'More than our brother is our chastity' is the only non-royal use of *our* save for Julius Caesar's. J. C. Maxwell noted earlier that the Folio printed it as a *sententia*.

<sup>8</sup> *Shakespeare and the Confines of Art* (London, 1968).

<sup>9</sup> *Modern Language Review*, XLI (1946).

<sup>10</sup> In *J. Q. Adams Memorial Studies* (Washington, 1948).

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characters and their interplay, and revealed that German scholarship anticipated some American and British interpretations.

Miss Bradbrook in 'Authority, Truth, and Justice in *Measure for Measure*'<sup>1</sup> detected a medieval Morality structure: 'The Contention between Justice and Mercy, or False Authority unmasked by Truth and Humility.' A learned and extreme allegorical interpretation, with the Duke as the Incarnate Lord, by Roy W. Battenhouse in '*Measure for Measure* and Christian Doctrine of the Atonement'<sup>2</sup> has lately been faulted by the combative Roland Mushat Frye<sup>3</sup> on the grounds that Battenhouse drew on patristic and scholastic rather than Renaissance authorities. Elizabeth Marie Pope's paper, 'The Renaissance Background of *Measure for Measure*',<sup>4</sup> presented material from text-books and sermons of Shakespeare's day to suggest that the play is concerned with the duties of the Prince or Ruler and his privilege to use extraordinary means in tempering justice with mercy. This kind of approach produced a rejoinder from Clifford Leech 'The "Meaning" of *Measure for Measure*'<sup>5</sup> in which he argued against the narrow interpretation of plays as 'embodying theses' and demonstrated how complex this play is. More recently Marco Mincoff has denounced critical orthodoxies by declaring that as Providence the Duke 'is even less satisfactory than as ideal ruler'. In the closely argued '*Measure for Measure: Quid pro Quo?*' A. D. Nuttall showed that the Duke is a White Machiavel and that Angelo is morally 'worth four Dukes'. He also distinguished a different atonement pattern.<sup>6</sup>

Lawrence found law in Shakespeare 'a queer business'. Scholars have explained Claudio's 'offence' with Juliet and Angelo's betrothal to Mariana in the light of Elizabethan law, ecclesiastical and secular. Others have clarified Escalus's mid-way stance between Angelo (Justice) and the Duke (Mercy) by reference to Renaissance concepts of Equity.<sup>7</sup>

O. J. Campbell extended his theory about *Troilus and Cressida* to include *Measure for Measure* as a 'comical satyre'.<sup>8</sup> R. G. Hunter discerned a pattern by which the main characters judge one another and are judged in 'a comedy of forgiveness'. Two dramaturgical analyses confirm Tillyard's view that the play 'changes its nature half way through'. Herbert Weil, Jr claims that Shakespeare deliberately terminated 'the dramatic intensity of his early acts' and that the play's 'descending action' ought to be played 'in a light comic, even farcical vein'.<sup>9</sup> Bernard Beckerman also sees the dramatic shift as deliberate but the play as a not entirely successful experiment in tragicomedy.<sup>10</sup>

Some critics have felt that Shakespeare never reconciled his vivid characterisation or his new learning with the pre-existing plot. The rela-

<sup>1</sup> *RES*, xvii (1941).

<sup>2</sup> *PMLA*, Lxi (1946).

<sup>3</sup> *Shakespeare and Christian Doctrine* (Oxford, 1963), pp. 35-6. Frye attacked less scholarly men than Battenhouse for their union of subjective criticism with a naive understanding of theology. He also showed that Father William Sankey, the English Jesuit, excised the whole of *Measure for Measure* from the Folio, c. 1641-51, at the English College at Valladolid, Spain.

<sup>4</sup> *Shakespeare Survey* 2 (Cambridge, 1949).

<sup>5</sup> *Shakespeare Survey* 3 (Cambridge, 1950).

<sup>6</sup> *Shakespeare Studies*, II (1966) and IV (1968) respectively.

<sup>7</sup> See Davis P. Harding, 'Elizabethan Betrothals and *Measure for Measure*', *Journal of English and German Philology*, XLIX (1950); Ernest Schanzer, 'The Marriage Contracts in *Measure for Measure*', *Shakespeare Survey* 1.3 (Cambridge, 1960); S. Nazarian, '*Measure for Measure* and Elizabethan Betrothals', *Shakespeare Quarterly*, XIV (1963); John Wasson, 'A Play of Incontinence', *ELH*, XXVII (1960); and J. W. Dickinson, 'Renaissance Equity and *Measure for Measure*' and Wilbur Dunkel, 'Law and Equity in *Measure for Measure*' - both in *Shakespeare Quarterly*, XIII (1962).

<sup>8</sup> *Shakespeare's Satire* (New York, 1943).

<sup>9</sup> 'Form and Contexts in *Measure for Measure*', *Critical Quarterly*, XII (1970).

<sup>10</sup> 'The Dramaturgy of *Measure for Measure*', *The Elizabethan Theatre*, II, ed. David Galloway (Toronto, 1970).

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tion between *Measure for Measure* and various possible sources, discussed by L. Albrecht (1914) and W. W. Lawrence, has been further explored by Mary Lascelles, Madeleine Doran, Kenneth Muir, J. W. Lever, and Geoffrey Bullough, whose *Narrative and Dramatic Sources*,<sup>1</sup> includes the relevant materials. Mary Lascelles's humane and penetrating *Shakespeare's 'Measure for Measure'*<sup>2</sup> is responsive to the departures Shakespeare made, and to the distinctive role of the heroine, denied the self-revelation of soliloquy. J. W. Lever's compressed, informative introduction to the new Arden edition<sup>3</sup> copes with such folk-themes as 'the Disguised Duke', and with the play's ideas. He finds much less textual corruption than his predecessors and dates the play between May and August 1604, before its performance at Court on 26 December.

David Lloyd Stevenson in *The Achievement of 'Measure for Measure'*<sup>4</sup> gives an undoc-trinaire, open, ahistorical account of a 'schematic' and 'disturbing' play about living people. Historically informed, he is ironic about 'neotheologians' and 'historical reconstructionists'. He relegates to an appendix, as irrelevant to our understanding the play, his revival of the theory that the Duke reflects King James.<sup>5</sup> Josephine Walters Bennet in '*Measure for Measure*' as *Royal Entertainment*<sup>6</sup> builds the many-tiered hypothesis that Shakespeare as author-actor-director complimented King James, who is shadowed in the Duke, whom Shakespeare played. Some of her insights were anticipated by Miss Lascelles and chime with suggestions by Anne Righter.<sup>7</sup> Acceptance of the theories would give us a light-toned, topical, witty comedy, centred on absurd situations 'like *The Mikado*'.

Writers have not agreed about the tone, meaning, or value of *Measure for Measure*. To Miss Lascelles it is 'this great, uneven play', to Dr Lever 'a flawed masterpiece', to Dr Leavis 'one of the very greatest of the plays'.

Its shrewdest critics believe that it possesses that *complexity* in which Miss Lascelles found 'the very proof of its integrity'.

### '*Troilus and Cressida*'

Both *All's Well* and *Measure for Measure* have a two-part structure, source-materials in folklore and Italian literature, and comedic resolutions which involve the bed-trick. Virgil K. Whitaker has linked *Troilus and Cressida* with *Measure for Measure* ('radically faulty as drama, but . . . the most explicitly learned plays that Shakespeare ever wrote'<sup>8</sup>), but J. C. Maxwell's view that *Troilus* is 'the most isolated of the Middle Plays' has won assent. To Sir Walter Greg it was 'a play of puzzles, in respect of its textual history, no less than its interpretation'.<sup>9</sup>

Bibliographical and theatrical speculations about Bonian's and Walley's Quarto and the play's ultimate position in the Folio have led to disagreement over the play's genre. Scholarship has now established that the first title-page of the Quarto was cancelled *before* publication and that the Folio printers originally intended *Troilus* to follow *Romeo and Juliet*. Thus two factions can each claim some Jacobean authority for regarding *Troilus* as comedy or as tragedy. Nevill Coghill's questioning of the credibility of the Bonian and Walley preface led to correspondence in *The Times Literary Supplement* in

<sup>1</sup> Vol. II (London, 1958).

<sup>2</sup> London, 1953.

<sup>3</sup> London, 1965.

<sup>4</sup> Ithaca, 1966.

<sup>5</sup> That the *Basilicon Doron* was a source had been suggested by George Chalmers (1779) and by L. Albrecht (1914) who did not convince W. W. Lawrence. Peter Alexander, who believed that 'Shakespeare did not neglect . . . to show his knowledge of his sovereign's philosophy', found James often 'muddle-headed and inconsistent', *Shakespeare* (London, 1964), p. 152.

<sup>6</sup> New York, 1966.

<sup>7</sup> *Shakespeare and the Idea of the Play* (London, 1962).

<sup>8</sup> *Shakespeare's Use of Learning* (San Marino, 1953) p. 194.

<sup>9</sup> *The Shakespeare First Folio* (Oxford, 1955).

## SHAKESPEARE SURVEY

1967. E. K. Chambers in 1906 had speculated that *Troilus* might have been produced for an academic audience at Cambridge, and Peter Alexander, to explain the nature of the copy for the Quarto, conjectured that the play was commissioned for some Inns of Court festivity.<sup>1</sup> Alfred Harbage is adamant that there is 'no recorded instance . . . when a regular play was bought, rehearsed and acted by a professional company exclusively for a special audience'.<sup>2</sup> That the first audience could tell a true argument from a false remains an attractive hypothesis; that they could also distinguish between histrionics and sincerity is suggested by Patricia Thomson's essay 'Rant and Cant in *Troilus and Cressida*'.<sup>3</sup> A remarkable feature in the re-discovery of the play since 1920 has been its undergraduate appeal.

Unlike *Measure for Measure* this play seems to have had no early enthusiasts. Wilson Knight implicitly suggested its new importance in 'The Philosophy of *Troilus and Cressida*' in *The Wheel of Fire* where he elucidated its central idea – 'almost a "thesis"' – as the opposition between 'intuition' and 'emotion' (the Trojans) and 'intellect' and 'reason' (the Greeks). His coherent if over-simplified reading is imaginative and exciting alongside W. W. Lawrence's more cautious source-study of *The Love-Story and The Quarrels of the Chieftains*. William Empson's deeper perceptions about the operation of double plots<sup>4</sup> and Caroline F. E. Spurgeon's detailed charting of the iterative imagery of food and disease<sup>5</sup> also gave methodological leads. Theodore Spencer mentioned aspects of the play that were 'sympathetic to a generation that found expression in *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*' in a long 'Commentary'<sup>6</sup> which he regarded as superseded by *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man*.<sup>7</sup> There he found in the case of *Troilus* 'a worse kind of tragedy than death . . . continued existence after everything that matters has been destroyed'. At the end of the war Una Ellis-

Fermor wrote of her own revised view of *Troilus and Cressida* as a unity, and was reprimanded by Harley Granville-Barker for ceasing 'to distinguish between Shakespeare's better plays and his worse'.<sup>8</sup> Her essay, 'The Discord of the Spheres', suggested the paradox that, though the play's thought 'is an implacable assertion of chaos as the ultimate fact of being', its form testifies to order.<sup>9</sup>

The antithesis in content and in structure, and the play's preoccupation with Time, have led to other schematic and thematic readings along lines adumbrated by Wilson Knight. D. A. Traversi's analysis, written for *Scrutiny* in 1938, re-appeared without the limiting evaluation 'not, on any view, a successful play' in the enlarged editions of *An Approach to Shakespeare*.<sup>10</sup> He regarded the play as 'a dramatic statement of the emotional ambiguity whose resolution was to be the motive of the great tragedies'. L. C. Knights in 1951, taking Appearance and Reality as the theme, viewed the play as vital in the development of Shakespeare's thought.<sup>11</sup> In a subtle reading, "Opinion" and "Value" in *Troilus and Cressida*, W. M. T. Nowotny saw between Ulysses and Troilus the 'great antithesis between two approaches to life, that of the statesman and that of the individual creative imagination'.<sup>12</sup> Frank Kermode replied in 1955 by suggesting a different antithesis, itself 'a simplification of something appallingly diffi-

<sup>1</sup> *The Library*, 4th series, IX (1929).

<sup>2</sup> *Shakespeare and the Rival Traditions* (New York, 1952), p. 116

<sup>3</sup> *Essays and Studies*, n.s. XXII (1969).

<sup>4</sup> *Some Versions of Pastoral* (London, 1935).

<sup>5</sup> *Shakespeare's Imagery and What it Tells us* (Cambridge, 1936).

<sup>6</sup> *Studies in English Literature* (Tokyo, 1936).

<sup>7</sup> New York, 1942.

<sup>8</sup> *RES*, XXII (1946).

<sup>9</sup> *The Frontiers of Drama* (London, 1945).

<sup>10</sup> New York, 1956; 2 volumes (London, 1969).

<sup>11</sup> *Some Shakespearean Themes* (London, 1959).

<sup>12</sup> *Essays in Criticism*, IV (1954).

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cult'. A. S. Knowland<sup>1</sup> accused critics of over-simplifying and over-conceptualising the play and of over-stressing the Time theme, in his own effort to establish 'our total dramatic experience of the play'. R. J. Kaufmann's 'Ceremonies of Chaos: the Status of *Troilus and Cressida*'<sup>2</sup> shows that a thematic approach can still yield insight.

In *Comical Satyre and Shakespeare's 'Troilus and Cressida'*<sup>3</sup> O. J. Campbell connected the play with the satirical plays of Jonson and Marston which flourished from 1599, but his response to the text, especially in *Shakespeare's Satire*,<sup>4</sup> was insensitively moralistic: the lovers' 'adventures . . . exemplify lust' leading to 'deserved disaster'. That the play is a tragedy was argued by Brian Morris in 'The Tragic Structure of *Troilus and Cressida*'; he complained that the problem plays 'have been forcibly and unequally yoked together' and he regarded the 'monolithic design' of the generals' plot as the 'backcloth against which the lovers' tragedy is played out'.<sup>5</sup> Alice Walker in 1957 endorsed Campbell's view. R. A. Foakes, reconsidering the play, first in *The University of Toronto Quarterly*<sup>6</sup> and later in *Shakespeare: from satire to celebration*,<sup>7</sup> put the emphasis on the comical-satirical tone, on the play's 'three endings', and on the part played by the audience's prior knowledge of a familiar story. Bertrand Evans from a technical standpoint reported that 'our advantage over Troilus, Cressida, and Pandarus . . . depends upon our extra-dramatic knowledge of outcomes', thus establishing a distinctive technique. Earlier G. F. Reynolds had proved that the play makes no elaborate stage-demands.<sup>8</sup>

The massive Variorum edition by H. N. Hillebrand and T. W. Baldwin<sup>9</sup> is replete with secondary materials. The New Cambridge editor, Alice Walker, admits a bias towards the Folio text; hers is the main critical edition.<sup>10</sup> Robert Kimbrough's *Shakespeare's 'Troilus and Cressida' and its Setting*<sup>11</sup> is a comprehensive

study and it relates *Troilus* to works in the repertory of public and coterie theatres. A wide range of sources, studied before 1920 by J. S. P. Tatlock and Hyder E. Rollins, has been reconsidered by, amongst others, R. K. Presson in *Shakespeare's 'Troilus and Cressida' and the Legends of Troy*<sup>12</sup> which stressed the Homeric influence through Chapman. Geoffrey Bullough, for reasons of space rather than genre, dealt with the sources in his volume on *Other 'Classical' Plays*.<sup>13</sup> Miss Bradbrook has suggested that 'What Shakespeare did to Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*' included the 'lacerative destruction of Chaucer's whole vision'.<sup>14</sup> The 'play of puzzles' continues to be seen as comedy, 'comical satyre', tragedy, and tragic satire.

Any outline of the critical fortunes of the three plays has to be selective, and much comment in books on the comedies and in wider studies has here been ignored. Writers on the separate plays or on three works 'which ingenious absurdity has thrown together' have no monopoly on critical insight; indeed anyone taking as his subject Shakespeare's word-play or his bawdy, his use of learning or of stage-convention, or his treatment of the Renaissance concept of honour, is bound, from that perspective, to see something distinctive in each of the three. Do we persist in seeing differences between these and other plays of Shakespeare's where his contemporaries saw none? Have critics in the Age

<sup>1</sup> *Shakespeare Quarterly*, x (1959).

<sup>2</sup> *ELH*, xxxii (1965).

<sup>3</sup> San Marino, 1938.      <sup>4</sup> New York, 1943.

<sup>5</sup> *Shakespeare Quarterly*, x (1959).

<sup>6</sup> xxxii (1963).

<sup>7</sup> London, 1971.

<sup>8</sup> 'Troilus and Cressida on the Elizabethan Stage', *J. Q. Adams Memorial Studies* (Washington, 1948).

<sup>9</sup> Philadelphia, 1953.

<sup>10</sup> Cambridge, 1957.

<sup>11</sup> Cambridge, Mass., 1964.

<sup>12</sup> Madison, 1953.

<sup>13</sup> London, 1966.

<sup>14</sup> *Shakespeare Quarterly*, ix (1958).