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Lily Bess Campbell

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### Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes

Lily Bess Campbell (1883-1967) was a professor of English at UCLA. She won the achievement award from the American Association of University Women in 1960 and was named Woman of the Year by the Los Angeles Times in 1962. One of the most eminent literary scholars of her generation in the United States, she published mostly on Tudor literature. This study, first published in 1930, examines how the passions were understood in the Renaissance and why they were a central concern in the philosophy and medical studies of the period. After several chapters exploring moral philosophy and tragedy more generally, Campbell analyses the characters of Hamlet, Othello, Lear and Macbeth in relation to their guiding emotions: grief, jealousy, wrath and fear. She argues that Shakespeare, in his major tragedies, reflected the latest thinking of his time about the passions and their role in shaping the human mind.

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# Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes

*Slaves of Passion*

LILY BESS CAMPBELL



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SHAKESPEARE'S  
TRAGIC HEROES

SLAVES OF PASSION

By

LILY B. CAMPBELL

CAMBRIDGE

*At the University Press*

1930

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*The first Design of Dramatic Poetry, was to amend the Heart, improve the Understanding, and, at the same Time, Please the Imagination. To Tragedy, one Species of the Drama was allotted, the Description of those Passions, which, when loose and ungoverned, are productive of the most terrible Consequences on the one Hand; but if, on the other, they are kept within their proper Limits, and chuse Reason for their Guide and Director, they become Highly conducive to the Happiness of Mankind. To Comedy was assigned the Correction of Vices and Follies of an inferior sort.*

*In the first Instance, we are taught, by a Collection of fatal Events, to avoid Ruin and Misery; in the last, by a Representation of fashionable Foibles, and particular extravagant Humours, to shun Ridicule and Absurdity.*

SAMUEL FOOTE, *The Roman and English Comedy Consider'd and Compar'd.* 1747.

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## PREFACE

IT was in 1898 that Sir Sidney Lee summarily disposed of future Shakespearean interpreters in the preface to his *Life of William Shakespeare*: "Aesthetic studies of Shakespeare abound, and to increase their number is a work of supererogation". But in spite of this anathema the end was not yet. And in the criticism of the intervening thirty years there are two lines of interpretation that are to be specially remarked. In 1904 Professor A. C. Bradley's interpretation of Shakespearean tragedy, partly psychological and partly metaphysical, was to serve as a new landmark and a new point of departure in Shakespearean criticism—one may almost say in literary criticism. In 1907 Professor Dowden published in the *Atlantic Monthly* a paper on "Elizabethan Psychology", which pointed toward an ideal of criticism on the basis of contemporary thought.

Professor Bradley began his analysis of Shakespeare's conception of tragedy by a discussion that implicitly accepted Aristotle's *Poetics* as the basis for differentiation. He questioned the mediaeval idea of tragedy, "a story of exceptional calamity leading to the death of a man in high estate", as inadequate to explain Shakespeare in full, and he specifically affirmed that "the tragic world is a world of action, and action is the translation of thought into reality". He concluded: "The tragic suffering and death arise from collision, not with a fate or blank power, but with a moral power, a power akin to all that we admire and revere in the characters themselves". It is this conception of tragedy as action, and of the plot of tragedy as a statement of metaphysical belief that has so much interested later critics. A further quest along these lines is to be seen in the recent

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work of Professor Farnham in connection with *A Mirror for Magistrates*.

The line of inquiry launched by Professor Dowden called attention to the need for understanding Elizabethan psychology if we were to interpret Shakespeare's characters aright. And although Hamlet and Othello, Lear and Macbeth, are still psycho-analysed or enrolled with pro-Germans or classified with the Rotarians according to the preconceptions of the critic, yet since the Dowden paper there have been spasmodic attempts to study one or other of the Shakespearean characters in something of the light in which Shakespeare must have thought of them. In the papers of Professor Stoll this desire has been particularly apparent. Further studies by Professor Hardin Craig and Professor M. W. Bundy have indicated a tendency to go more curiously into the matter. A recent thesis by Miss Ruth Anderson, which I have only seen since completing this manuscript, carries the study further.

I myself had thought to claim at least the negative distinction of not contributing any supererogatory interpretations of Shakespeare. But each time that I read and taught the tragedies of Shakespeare I became more dissatisfied with my interpretations. I became convinced that Shakespeare in all his tragedies was primarily concerned with passion rather than with action. I determined to find what was known and thought about passion in the sixteenth century. I went trustingly to my philosophical friends and asked for guidance, only to be told that the researches of the historians of philosophy ended with the Middle Ages and began again with Descartes. I perceived, therefore, that my task was to take on the nature of an adventure in searching for the philosophy that was moulding the thinking of men in England during the great humanistic period.

Gradually, therefore, my work seemed to call for three separate studies: a study of the philosophical thinking of

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Shakespeare's day in regard to passion; a study of the way in which this thinking was related to the current conceptions of literature and the purposes of literature; and a study of Shakespeare's incorporation in his tragedies of the prevailing ideas of the humanists in regard to passion. This book is accordingly divided into three parts: I have put first the consideration of the purposes to be served by literature as Shakespeare's contemporaries thought of such purposes; next I have tried to show how the passions were understood and why the passions were the pivotal point for discussion by physicians and philosophers of the period; and finally I have discussed the embodiment of passion in the four great tragic heroes of Shakespeare, in each of whom a dominating passion is analysed in accordance with the medical and philosophical teaching of the period. The result of my research has been the conviction that Shakespeare, much more than has generally been thought, was a man familiar with the learning of his day, a student of philosophy, and a purposive artist.

To trace the history of Shakespearean scholarship is a task of a lifetime. The student of Shakespeare, therefore, who would add to the comments made through the centuries is forced almost to the necessity of seeming to ignore the mass of material already contributed; he must indeed fix his eyes upon Shakespeare as though there had been no others gazing upon the sun. This is my reason for trying to present my theory of the central design in Shakespearean tragedy without specific mention of the common thought that has appeared in the comment of Shakespearean critics for two centuries. To correlate my own hypothesis fully with what has gone before would necessitate, I believe, losing sight of Shakespeare in the confusing assembly of his commentators. This is my apology as I bring my bucket to the sea.

The great riches of the Henry E. Huntington Library have afforded me my chief material for study. My indebted-

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ness to Mr Cecil K. Edmonds and to Mr Robert Schad or this library is beyond possibility of definite acknowledgment, for without their help I could not have established the necessary bibliography. To the Library of Congress I am also indebted for the loan of necessary books. To the British Museum I owe gratitude for the kindness which is the common experience of students. To Mr Paul Jordan-Smith I am indebted for generous help in many difficulties, particularly in the second part of this work, where his experience in the editing of Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* was of invaluable service. To Professor John M. Manly, who has read the manuscript in its entirety, I am once more indebted for counsel and advice as I have been indebted throughout my life as a student. And finally, to Mr Merritt Williams, my pupil and friend, I owe the assistance that has made possible the completion of my work.

I have quoted much in the course of this study, and I have tried to make quotations accurately represent the works from which they were taken. I have not modernized quotations save that I have interpreted the old type-forms, *j, s, u, m*, etc., in accordance with modern usage; punctuation and spelling otherwise appear as in the original works. I have used uncritically the Cambridge edition of Shakespeare with its basic acceptance of the Globe numbering of lines.

L. B. C.

LOS ANGELES,  
CALIFORNIA

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