

duration confined to one place. A weaker and unsympathetic argument against the French, but an argument sufficiently powerful, is that this rejuvenation of Aristotle did not take place in Shakespeare's day. Still, Shakespeare, knowing the rules of which I have spoken, has left us a specimen of what his master-hand could do in the *Tempest*. There the scene is laid in front of Prospero's cell, and the action is confined to three hours, but we are conscious, in spite of the finest poetry, that events are speeding far too fast, and that Ferdinand's admiration leaps to its zenith.

The Unity of Action, then, Shakespeare scrupulously adheres to. The most distinctive mark of his genius has been said to be the perfect harmony in which his bye-plots, down to their most trivial details, stand in relation to the *central idea*; yet it was long before this harmony was recognized. How inexplicable the grandest of his dramas was to the best wit of the world for whom he wrote, can be learned from Voltaire's criticism of *Hamlet*. The brilliant Frenchman could not have penetrated beneath the surface, for he says: "Hamlet is mad in the second act, and his mistress is so in the third; the prince, feigning to kill a rat, kills the father of his mistress, and the heroine throws herself into the river. They bury her on the stage; the grave-diggers utter quodlibets worthy of them, holding skulls in their hands; Prince Hamlet replies to their disgusting follies with coarseness not less disgusting. During this time one of the actors makes the conquest of Poland. Hamlet, his mother, and his stepfather drink together on the stage; they sing at table, they quarrel, they strike, and they kill." To Voltaire the play seemed a perfect jumble of inconsistencies. The first English commentators saw very dimly what Shakespeare meant. Some thought Hamlet's madness was real, others that it was feigned, others again could not understand why even feigned madness was necessary. But when we take Hamlet to be the type of the man of powerful and cultured views, pious, reverent; who finds it impossible to break the fetters of a purely mental life and to leap forth to the awful task imposed upon him; who goes dallying on until his nervelessness makes him a murderer; who, delighted at the success of