

This Unity which makes Shakespeare what he is let us call the Unity of Character. The Unity of Character leads us to the hidden source from which the actions spring, to the mental workings of the actors themselves. Yet Shakespeare was not a subjective dramatist—quite the reverse. He did not evolve from his inner consciousness or mould from book-knowledge the creations which have amazed and charmed three centuries of men. If he needed a king he did not fetch a patch of royalty from this corner and a patch from that and piece them together with some oddity from his own brain, producing only an awkward automaton at the best. He seems to have gone out into the world to sound the soul of humanity to its depths. Anatomize his kings: the finest nerve-fibril is royal, and when you have laid bare the very core itself, the life spot of majesty, you will find it is the quintessence of that which pervades the whole. Shakespeare needs a king, and lo! a king speaks, speaks naturally, speaks *outwards*. Other kings, for the most part, are kings to the eye, but their words and acts become them not; their speech is only an unnatural laboured effort to point inwards to the soul which should animate them, but does not exist; in short, they are effigies, are not true. When, nearly fifty years after Shakespeare's death, the great French dramatists were asserting their power, and Corneille was writing his famous essay on the Three Unities, the dramatic criticism of Europe bitterly accused the English of neglecting these golden rules of art. In that dark hour of the English drama, Dryden was so far subservient to French influence, though he professed to repudiate it, as to argue on behalf of rhyme only in plays against Sir Robert Howard, who took the side of blank verse, a memorable and prolonged controversy, and one very interesting to the student; so far subservient, too, as to copy the intrigue—and meaningless plots with which the French and the Spanish literature of his time abounded. But the foreign attack against our writers was weak. Shakespeare and his contemporaries felt that all the world was a stage, and that in making the stage the world they must portray the incidents of human life as they naturally happen, and not as a spasm of twenty-four hours