

to give gold and fame to any one who can worthily put our age upon the stage—and yet no great play has been written since Shakespeare died.

Shakespeare pursued the highway of the right. He did not seek to put his characters into a position where it was right to do wrong. He was sound and healthy to the centre. It never occurred to him to write a play in which a wife's lover should be jealous of her husband.

There was in his blood the courage of his thought. He was true to himself, and enjoyed the perfect freedom of the highest art. He did not write according to rules, but smaller men make rules from what he wrote.

How fortunate that Shakespeare was not educated at Oxford—that the winged god within him never knelt to the professor. How fortunate that this giant was not captured, tied and tethered by the literary Lilliputians of his time.

He was an idealist. He did not—like most writers of our time—take refuge in the real, hiding a lack of genius behind a pretended love of truth. All realities are not poetic, or dramatic, or even worth knowing. The real sustains the same relation to the ideal that a stone does to a statue, or that paint does to a painting. Realism degrades and impoverishes. In no event can a realist be more than an imitator and a copyist. According to the realist's philosophy, the wax that receives and retains an image is an artist.

Shakespeare did not rely on the stage-carpenter or the scene-painter. He put his scenery in his lines. There you will find mountains and rivers and seas, valleys and cliffs, violets and clouds, and over all "the firmament fretted with gold and fire." He cared little for plot, little for surprise. He did not rely on stage effects, or red fire. The plays grow before your eyes, and they come as the morning comes. Plot surprises but once. There must be something in a play besides surprise. Plot in an author is a kind of strategy—that is to say, a sort of cunning, and cunning does not belong to the highest natures.

There is in Shakespeare such a wealth of thought that the plot becomes almost immaterial—and such is this wealth that you can hardly know the play—there is too much. After you have heard it again and again, it seems as pathless as an untrodden forest.

He belonged to all lands. "Timon of Athens" is as Greek as any tragedy of Æschylus. "Julius Cæsar" and "Coriolanus" are perfectly Roman: and as you read, the mighty ruins rise and the Eternal City once again becomes the mistress of the world. No play is more Egyptian