

Shakespeare: the Man

The ghost and the purgatory in *Hamlet* are evidently a mere part of the fiction. No belief is indicated in purgatory any more than in ghosts.

A Conformist we may safely take Shakespeare to have been; whether he was a church-goer, we have no means of telling. Atheistical or irreligious, he evidently was not. His general spirit is religious. With him, to be where "holy bells knoll to church," is synonymous with civilized life. The Almighty has fixed his canon against self-slaughter. In *Twelfth-Night* Malvolio, here evidently serious, when asked whether he assents to a degrading opinion of the soul, answers that he thinks nobly of the soul, and by no means assents to the opinion. In *Measure for Measure* there is a respectful allusion to the doctrine of the Redemption.

Isabella.—

Alas! Alas!

Why, all the souls that were, were forfeit once;
And He that might the vantage best have took,
Found out the remedy.

—II., ii.