

The Critical Scene of Shakespeare: A Study in Retrospect

Dr. GHAZALA AMBRIN KHANAM
PhD, M.A. & B.A (Hons.) in English Literature
Assistant Professor, Department of English
Jazan University, Gizan, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Abstract

Ever since Shakespeare's demise there has been a great variety of critical approaches to the discernment of his work. It's fascinating to observe the critical scene of Shakespeare, in perspective and perceive the various trends and approaches that superimposed the work of this supreme artist.

There are some approaches that are very popular in Shakespeare's studies. Like the impressionistic criticism, related to A. C. Bradley; the historical and intellectual study of Shakespeare based on the Elizabethan theatre and the back ground; then the poetic school of thoughts or the "New Criticism" their interpretative criticism. Efforts have been made to trace the insight that prevails in the 21st century. The earlier critical comments on Shakespeare will also receive attention as they are the edifice that started Shakespeare's critical analysis before it developed into a complete independent field of study. This paper makes an attempt to revive and refresh these important movements and approaches that impacted our understanding of Shakespearean plays. All these intellectuals and academics who are dexterously at work, analysing, interpreting the fascinating work of this enthralling artist. They deserve to be acclaimed, applauded and remembered from time to time for showing how amazing and fascinating Shakespeare is. Nevertheless this paper endeavours to concentrate both on the resilience and fragility, of these approaches and trends. Though it's evident that even in utter disagreement at times, in the contentions of these scholars and scribes one can find compliance and coexistence.

Key words: Critical Scene, Approaches and Trends, Augustan critic's Impressionistic criticism, Historical criticism & Interpretative criticism

INTRODUCTION:

It just can't be overlooked that every era has contributed towards the variety of approaches, methods and depth of Shakespeare's studies. If we are to engross and encompass our self completely into the intricacy of Shakespeare's criticism, then one can surely define and grasp the intellectual and cultural essence of the age itself. It is the intent of this paper to not just provide the commentary on the Shakespearean critical scene but also to highlight those critics and their movements that have caused the turning point in the history of Shakespearean criticism. This paper has also made mention to individual contributions, as they have emerged as a factor to reckon with, in Shakespeare's critical scene.

Reviews, comments and criticism has now acquired a new stature of an autonomous field of study and research. The study of Shakespeare's work has become so massive for the last century, which no single scholar, can hope, to keep abreast of everything, that's written about the Bard of Avon. There are so many trends and fashions in the field of literary criticism which are being applied by scholars and scribes of Shakespeare from different nation, and different times.

During his own life time Shakespeare was not very much written about though his erudition and scholarship was approved and accepted due to the eminence of his work. Indeed the bard owes a lot to his fellow actors John Heminge and Condell, who collected thirty six of his plays and published them in the form of a First Folio in 1623. It was sheer good fortune otherwise Shakespeare could have been lost to us forever, as it was considered more fashionable during the Jacobean period to amuse oneself with the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher or

rather preference was given to all of Ben Jonson's plays, as per the information taken from Shakespeare's Encyclopaedia.

The Early Critical Scene:

The earliest critical comment on Shakespeare was either "simply admiring or anecdotal". When the Columbia Encyclopaedia was consulted on the same then this information was found that: *During 17th and 18th century, Shakespeare was both admired and condemned*, this famous statement of Ben Jonson that included the remark "*Shakespeare wanted Arte*" sounded the theme of Shakespearean criticism for the rest of the century.

As a result Shakespeare was censured by his 17th century contemporaries for lacking learning and discipline that was thought necessary to elevate a work of Art, Even though at times he was proclaimed as a '*natural genius*'. The opinion about the rise of Shakespeare's influence on the drama of his age can only be collected in Shakespeare's Allusion-Book (A collection of Allusion to Shakespeare from 1591 to 1700), till date this record can't be replaced and remains a very handy work.

Augustus Ralli in his "History of Shakespeare Criticism" tells us that criticism itself was in an "*imperfect state*" and it wasn't recognized as a separate branch of literature. Hence those references made during Shakespeare's lifetime and even a century after are interesting generally but not fundamentally being far too fanciful and dominated by the rules of art.

Augustus Ralli enlightens us that, in 1623 Jonson pronounces Shakespeare as the "*Soule of the age*", even rating him above such poets as Chaucer, Spenser, Beaumont exalting him above Marlowe comparing him to the greatness of Aeschylus.⁶ Yet the critical tone trickles into the praise, he had "small Latin and less Greek" then summing up this remarkable genius. Ben Jonson said,

“He was not of an age but for all time” therefore D. Nichol Smith is of the opinion, we can conclude the 17th century criticism *“with all his faults Shakespeare was to Jonson the greatest of dramatists”*.

The lowest point of Shakespeare’s criticism was reached through the scathing attack of Thomas Rymer, literary critic and historian. He was a clever man but yet he ridiculed Shakespeare’s *“Othello”* and called it *“the tragedy of the handkerchief”* he made the mistake of judging the play ruthlessly according to the adherents of the neo-classical principles of dramatic construction. George Saintsbury describes him as *“the worst critic who has ever been”*.

Interestingly Rymer is of the view that Shakespeare is fit only for writing comedies and that tragedy is out of his scope. Furthermore Rymer blames the audience of Shakespeare’s plays, whom he points out were not learned but ignorant men like carpenters and cobblers. Rymer goes further on to hold Shakespeare accountable for not doing justice to the historical personality of Julius Caesar and *“coating a noble Roman figure in the garb of a fool”* to quote him exactly. (This Shakespeare’s Encyclopaedia p 155)

To sum up, Rymer he had some preconceived notions about what a tragedy should be, hence he just couldn’t bear Shakespeare’s mingling of the tragedy with comedy, and it was like a crime to Rymer. He was himself attacked by Charles Gildon who calls him a ‘hypercritic’; and also by Professor Saintsbury who rejects his worthiness as a critic.

Rymer’s argumentative and adverse criticism (in the first half of the 18th century) did have some hostile effect on a generation of followers but when Dryden came into the picture Rymer’s perverse intellectualism was out smarted.

Dryden's endowment:

This review is found in Dryden's *Essay of Dramatic Poesy* which definitely launched its author as the prime critic of Shakespeare:

"To begin, then, with Shakespeare. He was the man who of all modern and perhaps ancient poets, had the largest and most comprehensive soul If I would compare him (Johnson) with Shakespeare, I must acknowledge him the more correct poet, but Shakespeare the greater wit. Shakespeare was the Homer, or father of our dramatic poets; Jonson was the Virgil, the pattern of elaborate writing; I admire him, but I love Shakespeare."

Although Dryden observed that many a times Shakespeare was "flat, insipid; his comic wit degenerating into clenches". We must give Dryden credit for his perception and for his appreciation of Shakespeare's drama, although he was bound by the custom of his age still he approved that in comedy as well as tragedy Shakespeare surpassed even the ancients.

This startling revelation was noted by T. S Eliot that "as soon as we enter the 18th century we become aware of a change in the atmosphere of criticism, Shakespeare is beginning to be more read than seen upon the stage".

The Augustan Critics:

The entire focus of attention of the Augustan critics were towards Shakespeare's education or lack of it. They forgot completely that Shakespeare's plays had been written to be staged and not read. The interest of these men were focussed above all on Shakespeare's neglect of the sacred "unities of time, place and action or on his learning and the obscurities of his language.

As we evaluate the Augustan critics we find they were bound by the 'neo-classical code of dramatic criticism' this is opined by Patrick Murray in his book, 'The Shakespearean Scene.' Hence naturally they found Shakespeare to be

inadequate when they judged him by these neo-classical criteria. Hence we can arrive at the following conclusion:

- They were interpreting Shakespeare in a literary vacuum that is without a historical perspective.
- These critics judged him according to a prescribed formula of classical dogma.
- The most solemn charge against Shakespeare was the absence of “poetical justice” in his plays.
- These rigid men of classical creed failed to acknowledge, the superb talent of character delineation which endowed Shakespeare.

Later on the unyielding neo-classical philosophies were exposed and they themselves became the victim to the censure of influential critics like Samuel Johnson. Aristotle's guidelines steadily began to lose their glitter and gleam, and now Shakespeare's criticism started to change and became more innovative and liberal. .

Alexander Pope's comment needs to be highlighted due to its significance: *“To judge therefore of Shakespeare by Aristotle's rules is like trying a man by the laws of one country, who acted under those of another”*

The Romantic Critics:

A new era in the study of Shakespeare's work was ushered, as the enthusiasm of Aristotle's rules had lost its spark. The rise of the Romantic school of thoughts submerged the classical philosophies and principles completely. P. Murray thinks that this century witnessed the greatest demonstration of Shakespeare idolisation he was pictured *“as supreme creator of characters”*.

Hence character study became a foremost area of study for these critics. This interest gave birth to curiosity that transformed to respect and gradually turned into awe. The Romantic Criticism which had started as a reaction against the

18th century neo-classicism transformed to erratic wild adulation and spread to the European countries like Germany France and England. These critics and scholars went so far as to presume that character creation was the one essential gift that the dramatist possessed.

The Shakespearean Encyclopaedia enlightens us:

But from 1815 in Germany and 1820 in England by which times Shakespeare had become universally accepted by critics, criticism ceased to be an active or important part of contemporary literary history, it became eulogium adoring, uncurious, sonorous, and above all redundant of the earlier decades of Coleridge and Schlegel, (p. 156)

Hence throughout the end of eighteenth century, this new craze can be seen in the works of some known and unknown critics and scholars like Kames, Mrs Montagu, Maurice Morgan, Thomas Whately and S. T. Coleridge, they had a common indulgence, which is their fascination with Shakespeare's Characters.

Maurice Morgan bequests:

The mention of Maurice Morgan can't be left behind as he studied the character of Falstaff very profoundly in his illuminating "Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff". This essay can be cited as a typical case of romantic fervour, perhaps first of its kind. Morgan seems intent on proving that Falstaff, that fat knight, who appears cowardly and offensive to his readers and critics is not so essentially. (For a better understanding of Morgan's stance one can consult D. Nichol Smith.)

Kenneth Muir, has rightly pointed out that Morgan treats Falstaff as if he was real. Muir further clarifies in his composition "Changing Interpretations of Shakespeare" that this feature of focussing on character study had existed long before these critics stumbled on this discovery with the advent of the romantics.

However it's perceived that Morgan's study wasn't just to defend Falstaff cowardice although on the surface it may seem so. It also presents a reflective study of Shakespeare's dramatic proficiency and workmanship. Even historian of A. Ralli's stature can't shrug off his work without acclaim and gives ample space to Morgan's valuable hypothesis.

Coleridge's attributes:

However, the dawn of the Romantic Movement had brought advancement and progress to the art of literary criticism. It is said about Coleridge by Augustus Ralli, that his writing is 'fragmentary' yet he is endowed with the stature of being the topmost critic of Shakespeare among the Romantics'.

The first and greatest of the romantic critics, he has transformed his subject. He is the Moon of Shakespearean criticism, so far accompanied by only one satellite-Maurice Morgan. The greatest of the others Dryden, Pope, Johnson are but shooting stars across the darkness. (Ralli, p. 142)

Coleridge's main involvement towards Shakespearian criticism was an unswerving petition towards accepting every work of art according to its own 'organic law': His *Biographia Literaria* (1817) is a literary autobiography, he dedicates only a chapter here to the study of Shakespeare's art, and the rest of his work is in the form of lectures notes and records of table talk. Essentially he started his quest by explaining poetry, but he actually materialises as an expert in character depiction. He also is impacted by the trend followed by the other scholastic men and critics from the last thirty years of eighteenth century. It is this aspect of his work particularly that leaves an indelible imprint on the 19th century scholars especially A. C. Bradley's 'Shakespearean Tragedy' (1904) which in a way carries the anticipation of the Coleridge tradition.

Can anyone forget Coleridge's admission about Hamlet?

"I have a smack of Hamlet myself if I may say so" (From T. M. Raysor's edition 1930)

Bradley emulating Coleridge embraced his 'over-reflective' modus of intellectualism while analysing Shakespeare's character. The greatest flaw as pointed out by the realist school of critics, was that he completely forgot to grasp the fact that Shakespeare's play was written to be enacted on the stage and can't be associated with real life. Alfred Harbage has paid his esteemed acknowledgement to Coleridge in the form of introduction and taken up a protective stance in his conclusion. He disapproves of the conflicting feedback towards Coleridge and Bradley who belong to the same convention.

Coleridge has often been compared to the German critic of Shakespeare: Schlegel it has been noted that the English critic was motivated by his brilliant writing at that time. This possibility was denied by Coleridge and instead he relays he was inspired by Lessing. Harbage again comes to the rescue of his protégé and gives his opinion regarding this matter that there was more a likelihood of Coleridge being influenced by Morgan's style of criticism rather than Schlegel. Just to make things distinct, during this era Johnson became the 'whipping boy' for both the German and the English Critics and Scribes. (Alfred Harbage, Coleridge on Shakespeare p.29)

During this phase, when the commencement of the Romantic period was happening, Samuel Taylor Coleridge loomed above all other scribes, critics and scholars. He became very essential and until the emergence of Bradley's 'Shakespearean Tragedy' in 1904. Some other contemporaries of Coleridge were attracted to Shakespeare, but this interest was only to serve themselves. Hence, poets such as Wordsworth, Byron, and Keats have nothing significant to contribute in the field of Shakespearean Criticism. It is only Coleridge, Lamb

and Hazlitt who have endorsed this approach of Romantic Criticism in Shakespeare. (Shakespeare's Encyclopaedia, p.156)

Coleridge's most significant contribution was in reply to Johnson's censure of Shakespeare's 'moral and verbal grossness'. Coleridge demonstrates Shakespeare's language as being 'poetic and integral' and not just descriptive. He de-emphasised the unity of time and place and instead sees the plays as having 'unity of feeling' in his work on Shakespeare.

That's why perhaps Harbage gives credit to Coleridge for having to some extent been responsible for "the programme of the historical criticism" not only this but according to Harbage, Coleridge also had predicted the coming of the 'new criticism' as it was Coleridge who started to examine the consequence of puns and word play and also concerned himself with the 'imagery' (The Columbia Encyclopaedia).

Before we move on from Coleridge it should be noted that his criticism of Shakespeare was based on the following discernment:

- First of all, he emphasised the philosophical nature of Shakespeare's drama.
- Shakespeare interested Coleridge not merely as an imitator but, as an original thinker.
- He stressed upon the organic nature of Shakespeare's play in opposition to the mechanical as adopted by the neo-classical men of learning.
- He upholds the doctrine that the Bards plays are the product of imagination.

Hence, this is the reason why Coleridge surpasses all other Romantic critics, when he recommends that in order to evaluate Shakespeare's work one should depend upon inner reflection rather than external criteria. This understanding of Coleridge towards Shakespeare was due to the thinking of the age he lived in, which was based on subjective poetry that reflected or gave expression to one's inner feelings. Therefore the

irregularity of Shakespeare's language were considered as very deep feelings of expressions by Coleridge. He goes a step further and declares Shakespeare as an artist above all and his skill or craftsmanship is not 'mechanical' no not even 'true to life' but its 'unconscious' or 'organic' and not manipulated. Coleridge as the critic of this universal genius, is so much in awe and admiration that he even adopts the role of an interpreter. Hamlet doesn't appear to be a stage character to him as he is personified, it is assumed that Shakespeare speaks through him just as the trend prevalent among the poets of that age.

It has been noted that from time to time there were certain German admirers of Shakespeare who were working industriously on the other side of the boundary. Although the scope of this paper is limited to only the English critics and scribes of Shakespeare. But they deserve mention because they crept into the world of Shakespearean Criticism and made themselves heard.

It was Augustus Wilhelm Von Schlegel who "first elucidated the structural unity of Shakespeare's plays, a concept of unity that is developed much more completely by the English poet and critic Samuel Coleridge." There were other German Critics like Gotthold Lessing who recognised Shakespeare as a Romantic; George Gervinus and Edward Dowden found 'positive moral tendencies in the plays' of Shakespeare. (Ibid)

William Hazlitt's characteristics:

William Hazlitt, also an English critic of the 19th century has preferred to follow the tradition of character study in Shakespeare. Though this custom was started by Samuel Johnson but it's the Romantics who advanced and refined this skill of evaluating and appraising the Bard of Avon's characters.

Hazlitt's writings are a sure tribute to William Shakespeare. While Kenneth Muir classed Hazlitt as the best of

Shakespeare's critics. Ralli assigned him as 'the third of the greatest critics'. Hazlitt in his book "Characters of Shakespeare's plays" (1817) expresses essentially what he feels about the characters in the play. According to a critic of the Romantic era Mr Jeffry, instead of elucidating Shakespeare or his style of writing, his focus had been his own feelings regarding the characters. Yet Hazlitt is commendable because for the first time it's him who gave a full account of nearly all of Shakespeare's plays and characters. His discussion on Macbeth and Twelfth Night is worth reading, he also put emphasis upon the enjoyment and love of Shakespeare's plays in the form of poetry. This has been stated by both K. Muir and the historian Ralli.

So the first quarter of nineteenth century saw these two writers emerge as important William Hazlitt and Thomas De Quincey. Quincey in his essay "On knocking at the Gate in Macbeth" (1823) selected just one moment, in one play to demonstrate Shakespeare's genius which has undoubtedly given him a celebrity status. De Quincey through this sole essay has presented his spiritual journey into Shakespeare's poetry and he is worth comparing to Lamb and Coleridge, and a good example of Romantic Criticism.

Dowden's bequeathal:

This paper has taken up the task of making an objective journey through the critical world of Shakespeare and highlighting the important critics of Shakespeare that have given us something new and challenging, which resulted in changing our view point. Therefore if Edward Dowden's contributions aren't mentioned, the study of Romantic critics would remain incomplete. Hence he needs to be talked about ardently since his book "Shakespeare His Mind and Art" (1875) has made its mark on the 20th century and is popular even today.

It was Dowden's idea completely to divide Shakespeare's 'art life' into four periods: the years of experiment; the period when "he was gaining a sure grasp of the positive facts of life the last one was the tranquil period when after years of turmoil he reached serenity." According to Dowden, these phases of Shakespeare's life gets reflected into his various plays. Dowden wanted to project this emotional transition of his plays coincided with Shakespeare's personal life, Dowden's work was estimated as a good sample of Victorian criticism by his fellow criticisers. (This book of Dowden needs to be mentioned, Shakespeare: A Critical Study of His Mind and Art)

Dowden's work still incites interest in the current world. However his belief that Shakespeare revealed his thoughts and feelings in his work is not shared by Sidney Lee. In his book "Life", Lee does not find any similarity between Shakespeare the artist and Shakespeare the Man. He was of the opinion that Shakespeare besides being a playwright was first and foremost, a bread earner for his family. Hence, the success that he achieved at the theatre meant more to him than his 'literary attainments'.

In fact Lytton Strachey in his well-known essay "Shakespeare's Final Period" (1903) has found Dowden's literary work to be childish. Actually to project his own work as correct, critics at times try to prove one another wrong. By his argument Strachey tries to prove that in his later years Shakespeare's mood wasn't grim, not even serene but rather he was afflicted by boredom and disgust. Hence his creative spirits soared and the result was the 'vision of loneliness.' However Strachey's piercing, brilliant essay may have had a shattering effect but Dowden's bearing towards the understanding of the supreme artist can't be underestimated.

Kenneth Muir comes out in support of Dowden and in his 'Fifty years of Shakespearean Criticism' has stated clearly that perhaps: *"Dowden was certainly a sentimentalist, but it is nevertheless arguable that he was near to the truth."*

A very important point to be noted is that this period produced no major critic of the stature of Coleridge. The most essential aspect that interested these men immensely, was Shakespeare's morality. These Critics believed fervently in Shakespeare as an instructor.

A.C. Bradley's dynamics:

A. C Bradleys may have come after Hazlitt and Morgan but his work is rated as the best among the Romantic school of critics. In fact Kenneth Muir has very aptly described his "Shakespearean Tragedy" as the culmination of 19th century Criticism. This paper intends to trace the powerful impact that Bradley made on the critical scene of Shakespeare. This study desires not only to epitomize Bradley's unique approach but to demonstrate its beauty and shortcomings.

It can't be forgotten that it was Coleridge who began this trend of character analysis but the finishing point was achieved by Bradley's "Shakespearean Tragedy". Even today "Shakespearean Tragedy" is a very impressive book, its writer Professor A. C. Bradley reminisced as the greatest of Shakespeare's critic.

It is important to note that Bradley's belonged to a certain tradition, with a definite background, he hadn't emerged out of time and space. The dimension with which he wrote the "Shakespearean Tragedy" had a very definite and firmly profound purpose:

It was to the richness and profundity of Shakespeare's characters that Bradley above all responded: the elaborate springs of their conduct and the elaborate and brilliant plays of their consciousness. Here he is at his best, often both penetrating and exhilarating; and his interest also helps to place Bradley in his own age, in the period of the 19th century novel with its elaborate and often magnificent development of the individual character. (Shakespearean. Encyclopaedia. p. 158)

The significance of “Shakespearean Tragedy” further gets amplified, when one takes into account that this book is a sure example of impressionism in Shakespearean criticism. This work of Bradleys discusses Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth and King Lear, essays on “The Rejection of Falstaff” (1902); Anthony and Cleopatra (1906) and a lecture on Coriolanus (1912). In spite of his limited work on Shakespeare, he has been able to make his mark as being the last and the best of the Romantic critics.

Even today Bradley’s “Shakespearean Tragedy” remains outstanding. It is a very compact, handy book, and no doubt very intelligently written. The books opening chapter creates an impression of opening new possibilities or vistas in the study of Shakespeare’s tragedies. Bradley in his “Shakespearean Tragedy” does appear to be tracing the perception of tragedy but running parallel to his contention of what a Shakespearean tragedy has to be; there is another concealed objective of tracing a concept of tragedy that agrees very well with his interpretation of the four major tragedies of Shakespeare and the leading characters in them.

The ‘realist’ or Historical school of Critics were not the only reaction, which was instigated against Bradley’s contention. This rebuff was further impelled by the ‘poetic’ critics like L. C Knight and F. R. Leaves, these inducements continued to be tossed at Bradley till the sixties. However, Bradley’s reputation is no longer under threat, in the current age, as he is recognised as a worthy critic of Shakespeare and not a psychological one. “Shakespearean Tragedy” still remains a potent and profound book.

This study of the Shakespearean Critical Scene and its major critics discloses that each of these movements and its critics could not have existed without each other’s rejections, objections and agreements.

If Johnson, and the neo-classical critics were the scapegoat of Coleridge and other critics, then Bradley in the 20th century became a target of ridicule for the champions of the

realist school of critics: Stoll and Schucking. L. C. Knights in his essay "How many Children Had Lady Macbeth" has upbraided and reprovved Bradley and his followers strongly. So far these same critics who berate Bradley so badly for such an offence have frequently, indulged themselves with the perusal of character study.

These critics actually wanted to establish their own intensive movement by denouncing the tradition of over interpretation and speculation that crept into the criticism of Shakespeare. If we look back in perspective, many of Bradley's successors had become victims of this kind of speculative approach.

Impressionistic criticism was opening up to some very disreputable kind of involvement towards Shakespearean criticism. Some very degrading kind of literature was seen breeding out of the illustrations in Bradley's "Shakespearean Tragedy", one very apt sample is Mary Cowden's Clark's *Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines*".

Although when in 1904, this book was first published, it was received with extraordinary show of appreciation and it definitely made a sensational impact. It can be reasoned that during this time people did not know any better. Hence Bradley did not come across any stiff opposition. Muir in his 'Changing Interpretations of Shakespeare', apprises one that his work was hailed as "the wisest and truest interpretation of the plays that had ever appeared".

During that time it became the fashionable craze of all other critics to follow in his foot step. But after the advent of historical scholarship in Shakespeare's studies, the critics were now better equipped to understand the works of Shakespeare. Hence the following insufficiency was found in Bradley's work. Admitting that the flaws found in Shakespearean Tragedy was common to his time and age.

1. Bradley writes like Coleridge in a historical vacuum.
2. He over-psychologizes Shakespeare. He makes Shakespearean characters psychologically more rational than they actually are.
3. He totally ignores the theatrical and dramatic condition of Elizabethan drama at times his approach becomes archaic.
4. Taking and developing a hint from Coleridge, Bradley has philosophised 'Shakespearean Tragedy'.

Nevertheless the purpose of this research is to revive and reminisce the approach of Bradley in the twenty first century and not merely to point out his inadequacy as a critic of Shakespeare. While highlighting Bradley, it is also the purpose of this work to stress that Shakespeare cannot be studied in forgetfulness of the past as suggested by the 'New critics' of Shakespeare.

Historical Criticism of Shakespeare:

R. W. Babcock in the journal of "Modern Language Quarterly" has said this that perhaps the most important type of Modern Criticism of Shakespeare, is the Historical Criticism. He names two critics for whom the work of the historical critic "is just a handmaid to aesthetic criticism". He goes on to uphold this standpoint that "without historical knowledge no aesthetic criticism of Shakespeare is likely to be valid."

However in order to comprehend the work of the historical critics of Shakespeare one must discern what is Historical criticism. Historical criticism takes up the daunting task of studying and placing "Shakespeare's work in the light of historical evidence or based on the context in which a work was written, including facts about the author's life and the historical and social circumstances of the time." As per the explanation of the "The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica". Therefore the historical critics are found to be "in contrast to other types of criticism, such as textual and formal, in which

emphasis is placed on examining the text itself while outside influences on the text are disregarded”.

The Critics who arise as the voice of this particular criticism are Edgar Elmer Stoll and L. L. Schucking since both of them expressed their divergence with Bradley’s method of dispensing with the characters in Shakespeare’s major tragedies. These two men were seen as the representatives of a historical school of Shakespeare’s criticism.

Actually Stoll’s main contention was regarding the conditions and the conventions of the Elizabethan stage, which the impressionistic critic, Bradley fails to comprehend in his assertion. It was indeed Stoll’s intense observation, when he pointed out that what Bradley indicates as discrepancies or failings in Shakespeare’s plays are not so. For example the delay in Hamlets action to take revenge for his father’s murder. Stoll in all his writings has argued determinedly that the defect that these men of learning have interpreted as ‘problem’ in the play and characters is just conventions of poetic drama prevalent during Shakespeare time that he was following. It was assumed by most critics that Stoll was writing so as to oppose Bradley’s claim in his ‘Shakespearean Tragedy’.

But Stoll was in fact, trying to place Shakespeare back to the stage where he belonged and to remind these critics that besides being a universal genius, a poet, a delineator of characters, a naturalist, he was above all a playwright, a performing artist and a bread earner too.

His disputation in all his writings (particularly ‘Art and Artifice’) were to prompt and retell that Shakespeare were written to be staged and in doing so, he often had to dispense with ‘realism’ and make do with ‘artifice, craftsmanship’ etc. Stoll was terrible concerned that critics were overlooking that the characters in Shakespeare’s plays were first and foremost dramatic personae and not real people. Of course the task he undertook of restoring Shakespeare’s study to his time and tradition was phenomenal. But he diligently worked towards

this objective and the result was series of books in which he argued vociferously regarding his contention.

This work when it studied Stoll's point of view one can't help supporting his valuable insight of placing Shakespeare's in his real world. But criticism has since progressed into fresh possibilities and new ways are being explored and discovered. Stoll's work is now being censored as being incomplete and deficient as he failed to appreciate Shakespeare's art that made him more popular and prosperous than his contemporaries.

Now Shakespeare's criticism prepares to enter a new realm in its history, in this phase Shakespeare as a supreme delineator of characters or even Shakespeare the Elizabethan writer of plays will all be shrugged aside and instead his symbolism and imagery will become a matter of great interest.

This absolutely first-hand aspect of study starts appearing in the year 1930. R. A. Foakes in his remarkable essay 'Suggestion for a New Approach to Shakespeare's Imagery' enlightens that, 'In Spite of a variety of methods and aims this view that a play should be regarded primarily as a poem has been the governing principle of nearly all writings on Shakespeare's imagery.' (Shakespeare Survey. 5)

The comprehensive involvement of the first three decades of the 20th century is recounted as having been the theatrical conditions of Shakespearean criticism. Then it was overtaken by increasing awareness and interest in the language and style of Shakespeare's plays and sonnets. Hence this kind of examination into Shakespeare's language cleared the way for profounder contemplations of the imagery and symbolism not only for artistic reason but 'historic terms' as well.

Although Kenneth Muir wants to give recognition to Walter Whiter for pioneering the Poetic movement or the New Criticism through his work 'A specimen of a Commentary' but this did not arouse any interest in the world of criticism.

All at once in the 1930, as if there was a prior agreement, works relating to this aspect of style started getting printed. Una Ellis-Fermors in her Notes, some Recent Research in Shakespeare's Imagery mentions many other originators of this approach. She is important and needs mention because she earnestly tried to present a combination of the work of scholars such as Spurgeon, Knight and Clemen.

Most importantly, this approach came to be recognized as the 'New criticism' and its adherents were known as the 'New critics'. A number of critics ranging from Muir to Bethall, O.J. Compbell's, 'Shakespeare and the "new" critics, W.T. Hastings, 'the new critics of Shakespeare' have all contributed towards the understanding of this new approach.

The name of R.A. Foakes cannot be left behind, his article illustrates the very conceptual understanding of this criticism. "Suggestions for a New Approach to Shakespeare's Imagery." The champions of this movement were the following as presented in Bradbrook's Shakespeare survey, 7:

"The work of Caroline Spurgeon beginning with a couple of essays in 1930 and 1931, culminated in her book Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us (1935). It was preceded by the writings of Colin Still, F.C. Kolbe and Elizabeth Holmes, and contemporary with those of Wilson Knight and Wolfgang Clemen."

Most importantly, prominence has not been given to any one critic in this discussion since it is believed that they all together consist of this novel approach and hence remain indispensable.

According to the logical and reasoning temperament of the current scientific era it never accepts without raising doubts, hence critics, have been vocal and strident in questioning the validity of this method of studying imagery and symbolism.

Such critics who have achieved great acclaim in analysing the details of Shakespeare's imagery, shall be highlighted. The contribution of Miss Spurgeon, L.C. Knight, Wilson Knight,

Cleanth Brooks and to some extent Wolfgang Clemen have caused ripples in the world of Shakespeare's criticism, hence, their illuminating work shall be highlighted here.

This movement above all saw Shakespeare as a poet. That Shakespeare had been a playwright and an actor as well, was of no consequence to these imagery hunters. This is the reason why reviewers observe this approach as a reaction to the Historical school of thought, who have laid excessive emphasis on the study of Elizabethan Jacobean tradition and also the theatrical situation of Shakespeare's age and time.

Many other factors were also responsible for the poetic school to have made its appearance. It can be said to have flourished under the patronage of Eliot and Yeats. The all-pervading, influential critical theories propounded by Eliot, had a definite impact on the study of dramatic imagery as a new development. There were some poets like T.E. Hulme who were under the impact of Mallarme and the symbolist movement that had come from France.

So much so that it was given the form of a book by Herbert Reads, which was much further enhanced by Robert Graves. The most intense impact could be felt on the powerful work of I.A. Richards. It needs to be mentioned that this movement was totally independent and did not depend on Shakespeare for its existence. Even T.S. Eliot's writing was for general use, he may have taken Shakespeare as an example here and there. But the impact of his writing on the 17th century's style of verse was felt on Shakespeare's criticism.

I. A. Richards when he wrote his 'Principles of Literary Criticism' in 1925, it was the playwright from Elizabethan time whose writings was selected and quoted as an example when he wanted to illustrate a model. F.R. Leavis undertook to write about the 'texture of language essential to poetry' he would seek confirmation from Shakespeare's verses whenever he had to endorse a point of view, since he knew that this genius of a man had stood the test of time.

Another man responsible for this change from character analysis to poetic study: has declared with great emphasis in 'How many children had Lady Macbeth?' (1933): that Shakespeare could be understood only after the study of rhythm and imagery is applied to Shakespeare.

The first quarter of the Twentieth century had given us a dramatist Shakespeare, the credit goes entirely to the toils and tribulation of Stoll, Schuking and others like Dover Wilson and Granville Barker. It was the unique achievement of the critics who came after the thirty's, under the epithet of 'New criticism' to have presented Shakespeare as a 'dramatic poet'.

In their eagerness, these writers tried to explore and exploit situations that never was before. In their hands Shakespeare's characters became obscure because the realm of realism had been crossed. They belonged to no one and nowhere, their very purpose became metaphorical.

This paper presently confines itself to tracing the impact of the New critics of the 1930 onwards. The demand for improvement in the understanding of Shakespeare does not end here. This search for Shakespeare's play as a dramatic poem gives birth to more challenging and modern ways of examining Shakespeare's works. As we commence further into the twentieth century; the study of Shakespeare's imagery and style starts losing its appeal and the need for a more 'comprehensive and interpretative work appears to be the first priority.' (Shakespeare Survey. 7) The time is ripe for a volume which should stand with Chambers on the stage, with Pollard and McKerrow and Grey on the texts.

The interest in Shakespeare's use of symbolic language has extended its tentacles to a more novel avenue of approaches. Among them, the most noted are the psychological, anthropological, mythological and Jungian metaphysics, and the religious aspect which considers the Christian point of view. (The Religious aspect of Shakespeare's criticism see P. Murray)

The Freudian psychology has given the psychologist of the recent times some food for thought. The critics of Shakespeare have now been provided with ample reason to explain Shakespeare's character' with bono wed new tools and terminology.

The worthy sample of such an approach can be collected from Ernest Jones, Hamlet and Oedipus. The delay in Hamlet's action to carry out his duty as a revenge to his father's murder, is seen by Dr Jones as an 'Oedipus complex.' Hamlet because of all these confusion is presented as a living person by him and the real life, psychological laws and real life behaviour is applied to a dramatic personae in order to justify his stance as a psychological critic.

The Formalistic approach went under the banner of 'New Criticism' the advent of this approach has already been discussed and more space shall be provided as the thesis progresses further. This formalist approach was not exclusively applied to the study of Shakespeare criticism, only but the impact was felt on all the genre and was not the achievement of an individual only but was a general movement of the 1920's.

The Russian formalists for the first time in the 1920s gave the doctrine of formalism. They felt that poetry had to be studied as a special kind of language and a lot of concentration focused on its use of metaphor, metonymy, rhyme, and alteration. This legacy of the Russian formalists was brought to the United States by some emigrants of this school of thought, some of them like Rene Welleck and Roman Jakobson brought this profound influence to the States which gave, birth to the existence of the New Criticism during the 1940s and 1950s. Its repercussion was felt not only on Shakespeare's work but all literary criticism.

Indeed all these transformation from one place to another, and the replacement of literary genres is mind boggling? There was a time when the history of criticism was a part of literature and Shakespeare, the supreme artist.

But today at every step one has to know what a certain critic has said about a particular work and how he also was refuted, the theme and style, the theory that he projects has to be understood. There are critics today who freely think it is not their job just to interpret a work of art of a certain artist but they have gone 'beyond interpretations'. They leave a feeling of helplessness in the students mind and the readers estimate. The critics seem to have grown in stature so much so that their theories and reviews have dwarfed the real work of the artist.

The 1970s saw the emergence of the outburst of the theory of Deconstruction. This has resulted in many other theories and methodologies cropping up and making their presence felt in the criticism of Shakespeare. Derrida the propagator of this idea can be explained by M.H. Abrams: Deconstruction as applied in the criticism of literature designates a theory and practice of reading which claims to 'subvert' or 'undermine' the assumption that the system of language provides adequate grounds to determine the meanings of a text."

The climax in this state of deconstruction is reached which is described as 'Aporia,' a term derived from Greek, which has best been described by Shakespeare in Hamlets soliloquy 'to be or not to be,' by the followers of Deconstruction theory. An irresolvable logical difficulty that becomes a reference for this 'Aporia' of Derrida. A definite departure from the rules of logic that is applied when interpreting a text. According to this theory a critic is free to choose his direction, it's an affirmative state with multiple choice. The theory of Deconstruction is an eye opener. Its scope is very vast. It is a startling revelation that the 'Aporia' creates a new 'aporias' in a never ending process of creation.

The advent of structuralism and post structuralism has changed even our ways of reading. LA. Richards and many others like Northrop Frye, Terrence Hawkes and Roland Barthes have revolutionized our very ways of even reading a

page or a passage. 'Structuralism, Deconstruction, Gender-Theory, New Historicism, Reader-Response Criticism and the Speech Act theory- these are the subjects taught and studied, discussed and debated and not the plays and poems of the great creative artist. Hence, we can sum up that excessive use of any theory or approach is not justified and one should strike a balance.

No matter which school of thought the critics belonged to, they have all turned to Shakespeare's work when in need of specific example in order to explain their shapeless and obscure ideas. Harry Levin informs us just how even the 'literary gospel' of our time *Anatomy of Criticism* is compelled to make such a statement in order to present a value-judgement. "Shakespeare, we say, was one of a group of English dramatists working around 1600 and also one of the great poets of the world."(Harry Levin *Shakespeare and the Revolution of the Times*).

Mr Levin takes offence and thinks this statement to be some kind of a sarcasm upon Shakespeare's greatness. In spite of what Mr Frye may personally think about Shakespeare, the fact remains that this practicing 'structuralism' was drawing illustrations from Shakespeare freely than from any other writers. And Mr Harry Levin points out, (in his zeal to defend Shakespeare's primacy) that Shakespeare gets mentioned on 209 pages by Mr Northrop Frye in his, 'The Anatomy of Criticism.'

Shakespeare's reputation increases by the growing years. It does not matter how harsh or crude critics can be, they have always used him to polish their own insight and left him bereft. But Shakespeare has come out with flying colours and the proof lies in the ever bulging editions of bibliographies monographs, articles, translations, productions and the scholarly works of professors and students which are getting multiplied day by day.

The perusal of the Shakespearian survey No.51 should definitely make us aware of the change in the atmosphere of Shakespearean criticism. Shakespeare is no longer an Elizabethan Jacobean playwright or even an Englishman. He has transcended all barriers. He has become international: "...that is to say, that Shakespeare binds nations together, but that each national culture transmutes what it receives and enhances that totality in which it shares." (John Russell Brown, Shakespeare Survey 51, 1998)

Shakespeare no longer can be found only in the pages of critics, but his plays are more and more being performed in the theatres. He can be watched on the screen, and in the film world too. John Russell Brown, a prolific writer of the present time, designates Shakespeare with the name of 'International currency'. (Ibid) Mr Brown very simply tells us that Shakespeare's universality is never going to end. Since this author who lived four hundred years ago is still being performed in the theatres more than any other playwright and that too, all around the world.

The most respected theatre director's turn repeatedly to Shakespeare's scripts as if nothing modern has so fired their imagination. Giorgio Strehler Ariane Mnouchkine, Peter Brook, Peterstein, Suzeuki Tadashi, Robert Lepage: all these, each from a different country, have mined Shakespeare repeatedly for productions that are startling in effect, contentiously modern, and, often, sensuously beautiful as well. (Ibid)

If, the poetic school of critics were to be consulted regarding this continuous popularity of Shakespeare, they will definitely say that the merit lies in the poetry that he wrote. The linguist may claim, the language that Shakespeare used, that is the example of how the superb English language has worked wonders for him. But other poets and playwrights have used this language but they have not crossed the boundaries of time, place and culture.

What Shakespeare had written for one of his characters can be applied to him too:

"All the world's a stage...."

Perhaps, the process of defining and redefining Shakespeare's work has become quite a profitable industry for the Europeans to perpetuate their brand of literary superiority and domination.

CONCLUSION

The Critical Scenario of Shakespeare is so enormous that only a glimpse of it has been presented, by this paper, but then again a definite attempt has been made to identify some of the forces and counter forces operating on each stage in the chronology of the Shakespeare's criticism.

First of all it is firmly believed that Shakespeare cannot be studied without his preceding years, this idea gets more concrete when one reads the observation of Shakespeare's learned scholars. The New image that Shakespeare has been bestowed upon by the modern scholars, is a welcome change, but one must not forget that this change in Shakespeare did not exist all by itself. This was generated by the former analysis of Shakespeare. And whether we accept it or not this new image of Shakespeare is actually based on many of the worn-out interpretations that are now considered out-dated and hence rejected. The past cannot be absolutely rejected or eradicated, in some form or the other it does exist. Hence, the appeal that needs to be established here is that, in order to interpret Shakespeare's his background cannot be eluded. It becomes inevitable to trace his lineage back to the middle of the seventeenth century. If one ignores the past and fails to relate it with the present the future perspective becomes myopic.

The history of Shakespeare criticism has evidenced various rise and falls of movements, methods and approaches.

A time had come in the history of Shakespeare criticism, when the only object of interest were characters. But however there were out-right rejection of such an approach due to extreme manifestations in the form of Anna Jameson and Mary Cowden Clarke's, *Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines*.

In the third quarter of the 18th century, Shakespeare's character surfaced occasionally to receive scattered remarks but they never became a matter of extreme enthusiasm and contest, like in the nineteenth twenties. In the Age of Reason Shakespeare was mainly censured for his lack of learning and observance of the unities. Yet in spite of the harsh critical commentaries, Shakespeare flourished and continued to entertain his audience and readers. But as time progressed these concepts regarding the importance of learnedness and abiding by to the rules of the ancients proved wrong. Shakespeare's eminence was established and his treatment of drama was seen to have been correct and thus 'the Aristotelians with their decorum and, their three unities were put in their proper place'.

This significant fact should be accepted that it was the work of organised and efficient scholarship that has from time to time generated enormous development in the field of Shakespeare studies and has also helped in diminishing the bias and authoritarian attitudes of scholars and researchers. After the powerful attack of Samuel Johnson on the 'unities' of time place and action, in his Preface to Shakespeare (1756) the glitter and gleam of Aristotle's rules started to fade into insignificance. This was definitely a turning point in the interpretations of Shakespeare's plays. The controversy about Shakespeare's learning was swept over by the Romantic Movement and its creed of personal individuality started to be reflected in the criticism of Shakespeare. Thus this tradition of immense interest in character studies was transported to the twentieth century.

Another point that has to be emphasised is that, A.C. Bradley's publication of *Shakespearean Tragedy* (1904) was not out of time and place, he had behind him the rich inheritance of the romantic tradition. Whenever one appreciates Bradley's work and his significant contribution in regard to Shakespeare, it is not possible to overlook the concerns and predilections of his ancestors who were before him.

Hence in order to explain Bradley's philosophy in *Shakespearean Tragedy*, one has to understand Coleridge, Hazlitt and Maurice Morgann as well. At the same time Nevertheless this new criticism brought evolution and progress in its wake, and was not a mere divergence from orthodox criticism. The contribution of G. Wilson Knight, L.C. Knight and Caroline Spurgeon has been very significant and essential in the field of Shakespeare's criticism.

Therefore, the highlights of this work conveys one message very explicitly that each of these authors, critics and movements are consciously or unintentionally associated with each other. Thus, we find how these critics and the movements they endorse were inter-related, on surface they may appear to be totally opposing but actually unconsciously they were providing ample scope and range and even inspiration and inadvertent co-operation to each other in an implicit manner. The beauty of Shakespeare's work is illuminated and made enchanting and more thought-provoking because of his Scholars and Critics.

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