

Characteristics of Shakespeare's Works

Taken as a whole, ~~Shakespeare's~~ Shakespeare's plays constitute the greatest single body of work which any writer has contributed to our literature. Perhaps their most salient feature is their astonishing variety. Other men have surpassed him at this point and that, but no one has ever rivaled him in the range and versatility of his powers. He was at home in tragedy and comedy, and his genius took in innumerable aspects of both, he was supreme, not only as a dramatist, but also as a poet whom the worlds of high imagination and delicate fancy were alike open and while not himself a very profound or very original thinker, he possessed in a superlative degree the faculty of digesting thought into phraseology so memorable and so final that as we all know, he is

the most often quoted of all of our writers. He was almost entirely free from dogmatism of any kind and his tolerance was as comprehensive as his outlook. In the vitality of his characterisation in particular he is unparalleled no one else has created so many men and women whom we accept and treat not as figments of a poet's brain, but as absolutely and completely alive. His unique command over the resources of the language must also be noted his vocabulary is computed to run to some 15,000 words while that of Milton contains scarcely more than half that number.

The greatness of Shakespeare's work is apt to blind critics to his limitation and defects, but these must, of course be recognised in any estimate of him or otherwise we shall get him out of his proper focus. Broad as he was, he was

essentially a man of his ~~time~~ time, and while his plays are remarkable for their general truth to what is permanent in human nature still his interpretation of human nature is that of an age in many respects very different from our own. He wrote hurriedly and signs of hasty and ill considered production are often apparent. Designing his plays expressly for the stage, and anxious to secure their success under the actual conditions of stage representation, he was willing at times to sacrifice consistency of character and the finer demands of art to the achievement of a telling theatrical effect. In his occasional coarseness he reflects the low taste of the 'groundlings' to whom he had to appeal. At places his psychology is hopelessly crude and unconvincing his style vicious, his wit forced and

poor, his tragic language bombastic. These and other faults will be conspicuous to anyone who reads him in the least critically. But they are small things after all in comparison with those paramount qualities which have given him the first place among the world's dramatists.

The end.

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