His characters are not modified by the cuſtoms of par­ticular places, unpractiſed by the reſt of the world ; by the peculiarities of ſtudies or profeſſions, which can operate but upon ſmall numbers ; or by the accidents of tranſient faſhions or temporary opinions : they are the genuine progeny of common humanity, ſuch as the world will always ſupply, and obſervation will always find. His perſons act and ſpeak by the influence of thoſe general paſſions and principles by which all minds are agitated, and the whole ſyſtem of life is continued in motion. In the writings of other poets, a character is too often an individual ; in thoſe of Shakespeare, it is commonly a ſpecies.

“ It is from this wide extenſion of deſign that ſo much inſtruction is derived. It is this which fills the plays of Shakeſpeare with practical axioms and domes­tic wiſdom. It was ſaid of Euripides, that every verſe was a precept ; and it may be ſaid of Shakeſpeare, that from his works may be collected a ſyſtem of civil and economical prudence. Yet his real power is not ſhown in the ſplendor of particular paſſages, but by the progreſs o! his fable, and the tenor of his dialogue ; and he that tries to recommend him by ſelect quotations, will ſucceed like the pedant in Hierocles, who, when he of­fered his houſe to ſale, carried a brick in his pocket as a ſpecimen.

“ Upon every other ſtage the univerſal agent is love, by whoſe power all good and evil is diſtributed, and every action quickened or retarded. But love is only one of many paſſions ; and as it has no great influence upon the firm of life, it has little operation in the dra­mas of a poet who caught his ideas from the living world, and exhibited only what he ſaw before him. He knew that any other paſſion, as it was regular or exorbitant, was a cauſe of happiness or calamity.

“ Characters thus ample and general were not eaſily diſcriminated and pieſerved ; yet perhaps no poet ever kept his perſonagcs more diſtinct from each other.

“ Other dramatiſts can only gain attention by hyper­bolical or aggravated characters, by fabulous and unex­ampled excellence or depravity, as the writers of bar­barous romances invigorated the reader by a giant and a dwarf; and he that ſhould form his expectations of human affairs from the play, or from the tale, would be equally deceived. Shakeſpeare has no heroes, his ſcenes are occupied only by men, who act and ſpeak as the reader thinks that he ſhould himſelf have ſpoken or acted on the ſame occasion : Even where the agency is ſupernatural, the dialogue is level with life. Other writers diſguiſe the most natural paſſions and most fre­quent incidents ; ſo that he who contemplates them in the book will not know them in the world : Shake­ſpeare approximates the remote, and familiarizes the wonderful ; the event which he represents will not hap­pen, but if it were poſſible, its effects would probably be ſuch as he has aſſigned ; and it may be ſaid, that he has net only ſhown human nature as it acts in real exi­gencies, but as it would.be found in trials to which it cannot be expoſed.

“ This therefore is the praiſe of Shakeſpeare, that his drama is the mirror of life ; that he who has mazed his imagination, in following the phantoms which other writers raiſe up before him, may here be cured of his delirious ecstasies, by reading human ſentiments in hu­man language ; by scenes from which a hermit may estimate the transactions of the world, and a confeſſor pre­dict the progreſs of the paſſions.”

The learning of Shakeſpeare has frequently been a ſubject of inquiry. That he posseſſed much claſſical knowledge does not appear, yet he was certainly ac­quainted with the Latin poets, particularly with Terence, as Colman has juſtly remarked, which appears from his uſing the word *thraſonical.* Nor was he un­acquainted with French and Italian. We are indeed told, that the paſſages in which theſe languages occur might be impertinent additions of the players ; but is it probable, that any of the players ſo far ſurpaſſed Shake­ſpeare ?

That much knowledge is ſcattered over his works is very juſtly obſerved by Pope ; but it is often ſuch knowledge as books did not supply. “ There is, how­ever, proof enough (ſays Dr Johnſon) that he was a very diligent reader ; nor was our language then so indigent of books, but that he might very liberally in­dulge his curioſity without excurſion into foreign lite­rature. Many of the Roman authors were tranſlated, and ſome of the Greek ; the Reformation had filled the kingdom with theological learning ; most of the topics of human diſquiſition had found Engliſh writers ; and poetry had been cultivated, not only with diligence, but ſucceſs. This was a flock of knowledge sufficient for a mind ſo capable of appropriating and improving it.”

The works of Shakeſpeare conſiſt of 35 dramatic pieces. The following is the chronological order which Mr Malone has endeavoured to eſtablish, alter a minute inveſtigation, in which he has in general been ſucceſsful :

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| --- | --- | --- |
| I. | Firſt Part of King Henry VI. | 1589 |
| 2. | Second Part of King Henry VI. | 1591 |
| 3∙ | Third Part of King Henry VI. | 1591 |
| 4. | A Midſummer Night’s Dream | 1592 |
| 5∙ | Comedy of Errors | ’593 |
| 6. | Taming of the Shrew | 1594 |
| 7. | Love’s Labour Loll | 1594 |
| 8. | Two Gentlemen of Verona | 1595 |
| 9. | Romeo and Juliet | 1595 |
| 10. | Hamlet | 1596 |
| I I. | King John | 1596 |
| 1 2. | King Richard II. | 1597 |
| 13. | King Richard III. | 1597 |
| 14. | Firſt Part of King Henry IV. | 1597 |
| 15. | Second Part of King Henry IV. | 1598 |
| 16. | The Merchant of Venice | 1598 |
| 17. | All’s Well that Ends Well | 1598 |
| 18. | King Henry V. | 1599 |
| 19. | Much Ado About Nothing | 1600 |
| 20. | As you like it | 1600 |
| 21. | Merry Wives of Windſor | 1601 |
| 22. | King Henry VIII. | 1601 |
| 23. | Troilus and Creſſida | 1602 |
| 24. | Meaſure for Meaſure | 1603 |
| 25. | The Winter’s Tale | 1604 |
| 26. | King Lear - | 1605 |
| 27. | Cymbelline | 1605 |
| 28. | Macbeth | 1606 |
| 29. | Julius Cæsar | 1607 |
| 30. | Antony and Cleopatra | 1608 |
| 31. | Timon of Athens | 1609 |
| 32. | Coriolanus - ■ - | 1610 |