

1988

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Recommended Citation

Moore, Rayburn S. (1988) "A Soul that Took in All Humanity"—Hayne on Shakespeare," *Studies in English, New Series*: Vol. 6 , Article 16.

Available at: https://egrove.olemiss.edu/studies_eng_new/vol6/iss1/16

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‘A SOUL THAT TOOK IN ALL HUMANITY’—
HAYNE ON SHAKESPEARE

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Paul Hamilton Hayne (1830-1886) was the best-known Southern man of letters in the late nineteenth century. With the death of William Gilmore Simms in 1870, Hayne became the leading spokesman for the South on literary matters. As an editor before and after the Civil War, as the author of three collections of poems before the war and of three more afterwards and of numerous contributions in verse and prose to magazines both north and south, and as the friend and correspondent of many prominent writers in both sections, Hayne's reputation was gradually asserting itself before the war, but after Simms's death and the publication of *Legends and Lyrics*, Hayne's first post-war book of poems in 1872, Hayne's position as the representative Southern poet or laureate was confirmed.¹ As a central figure, then, in Southern culture for a period of thirty-five years—first as a young poet and editor and subsequently as a leading literary spokesman for his region—Hayne's attitude towards, experience with, and view of Shakespeare should be of interest and importance to any consideration of Shakespeare in the nineteenth-century South.²

From early to late, Shakespeare meant a lot both to Hayne the man and to Hayne the writer. One of his earliest letters describes for a cousin's delectation a presentation of scenes from Shakespeare's plays by local performers in Pendleton, South Carolina, in 1848. While visiting in the "up-country village," Hayne, a young man of eighteen, attended a "Theatrical Entertainment" put on by "the young men" for an audience of "at least 200 persons":

The 1st act of Richard III & the *last* act of Julius Caesar were the plays chosen. I arrived at the scene, just as the curtain rose & Richard...with a huge hump on his back stalked on the stage. Elevating one hand & solemnly regarding the audience, he commenced appropriately with "Now is the winter of our discontent" &c—The death of Caesar though was the ludicrous part. Something very much resembling a *hump*, but intended I was told to represent Pompey's statue (poor Pompey!) was deposited in the centre of the stage. Four of five young men attired in *blue & red*, rushed on Caesar, as he got opposite the Statue & so precipitate was their attack, that not only Caesar himself, but Brutus, Cassius, Casca & Pompey's

representative, all went rolling down on the floor, kicking like a parcel (excuse my comparason [sic]) of pigs in a gutter—This set the whole audience in a roar, but the *Conspirators* nothing daunted rose to their feet & dragging Caesar's recumbent body into a corner, proceeded to act their several parts with a coolness, perfectly admirable. Brutus delivered his speech to the Mob & then came forward Mark Antony, who got through his oration tolerably, until he came to the portion—"Oh! now you weep & I perceive you feel &c"—when some of his auditors became so seriously affected as to drown his words by their vociferous grief—& completely (you know how nearly the ridiculous borders on the sublime) to upset his gravity—He hesitated—hemmed—came to a dead stop & then rushed from the scene amid a perfect roar of applause—a spontaneous tribute I suppose to the genius capable of converting tragedy into the most ludicrous of Comedies.³

Such an account of Shakespeare in the Up Country should not imply a mere bit of condescension on the part of a sophisticated playgoer from the city who may have seen Forrest, Macready, the elder Booth, and others—Hayne may indeed have or have not seen these players perform in Charleston—but it does suggest a certain knowledge and appreciation of the Bard on Hayne's part at a fairly tender age. Though the Pendleton performers are not up to Falstaff and his friends in trickery and braggadocio, they offer a balance in naiveté and amateurishness, qualities the young writer catches in his account.

From this early experience until the last months of his life when Andrew Adgate Lipscomb, a well-known Methodist minister and former Chancellor of the University of Georgia (1860-74), lectured on Shakespeare in his honor before the Hayne Circle in Augusta, Georgia, in March 1886, Hayne was an avid admirer of "glorious Will," and his writings abound with references to Shakespeare's work and life.

Hayne's letters, in particular, are filled with references and allusions to the plays and sonnets. Many of the better plays are referred to frequently, and over the years *Hamlet* is mentioned more often than any other play—parts of lines and fragments are sprinkled throughout the correspondence.⁴ "Flat and unprofitable" appears in a letter of 17 September 1856; the "ills to which flesh is heir" in 23 February 1869; "whips and scorns" (reversed in the text by a slip of the pen) in 3 April 1878; and "more things in heaven and earth" in 7 March 1879.⁵

Hayne's interpretation of *Hamlet* is also worthy of notice, though his view is expressed in his reaction to another critic's "treatise" on the character and the play. In a letter to A. A. Lipscomb, 14 November

1884, he praises his friend's recent essay on *Hamlet* in the *Methodist Quarterly Review* as a specimen of "creative criticism," and he continues:

You have made *some points*, in fact, unrecognized & untouched upon (as far as I know), by any previous Shakspearean [*sic*] critic, the Germans not excepted.

For example, the very *key-note* of *Hamlet's nature, & his destiny*, is struck, when you remark that his extreme *temperamental sensitiveness* is *wholly dissociated from sensuousness*, & nothing could be finer than your illustrations of Hamlet's introspective soul, his indifference to even legitimate forms of sensuous enjoyment; the enormous unconscious *Egoism* of the man, leading him to make his spirit, a scenic edifice, for the display of "*a drama of nerves*, etc."

I am glad, too, that while you exhibit Hamlet as subjected to "an overmastering hysteria," you show with equal clearness, that he was *not insane!*

Then Hayne takes his place with Lipscomb in concluding that Hamlet's "very eccentricities (hysteria at the bottom of all)," according to Lipscomb, "saved him from insanity."⁶

Though Hayne accepts Shakespeare's "gigantic genius," he frequently is puzzled by the fact that a "Warwickshire Peasant, with few chances of academic learning"—with "small Latin and less Greek," as Ben Jonson expresses it—could have absorbed so much "universal knowledge" and had so few "limitations."

In 1873, for example, Hayne read a play in *Blackwood's* for April entitled "Shakespeare's Funeral" in which Michael Drayton, the poet, and Walter Raleigh, the son of Sir Walter, visit Stratford upon the day in 1616 when Shakespeare's final rites are performed. They are surprised to discover, as Hayne expresses it in a review of the contribution, that "by his household no less than by the sagacious town folks, Shakespeare was respected rather as a prosperous burgher and 'man of substance' than as a *writer!*" "In the *latter* capacity," Hayne continues in his essay,

they seem anxious to ignore or be-little him. His daughter [Mrs. Hall], in especial, cannot conceal her contempt of his 'play-writing' abilities, only this contempt merges, as it were, into a dreadful fear lest her father's worldliness and 'profane' gifts should have imperiled his precious soul!⁷

"We never could have dreamed," Hayne acknowledges,

now that *Walter Savage Landor* is dead, that the writer lived in Great Britain, or for that matter, in broad Europe, capable of producing an 'Imaginary Conversation' as full of *vraisemblance* of dry humour, allied to touches of deepest pathos, of a local coloring so perfect, and a knowledge of Elizabethan manners, people and customs, which transports one as by magic power to the place, and among the individuals depicted, with such rare, such consummate skill. But a *single* dialogue of the kind exists in English literature which equals this; we mean, of course, Landor's 'Citation and Examination of Shakespeare' on the charge of deer-stealing!

To illustrate his points, Hayne quotes a "few extracts" and concludes:

If the mental appetite of our reader has not been stimulated by these extracts, why, then he almost deserves to be handed down to posterity under the same ridiculous light which the ingenuity of the author of "Shakespeare's Funeral" has evoked to surround the muddle-headed and pragmatistical citizens of Stratford—the Nymms, Bottoms, Slys, and Bardolphs who bravely spent the poet's 'dole' while as blind as moles to his surpassing fame and genius!

And yet Hayne himself is fascinated by the relationship between Shakespeare's genius and his more mundane qualities and interests. He freely acknowledges Shakespeare as his "master," but at the same time, he admits to Lipscomb on 6 April 1884:

How thoroughly right you are about Shakspeare [*sic*]. Our age *does* merit applause for its appreciation of *him*. Did he *wholly appreciate himself*? I *doubt* it!! Of course, he knew how *lofty* his position was above his contemporaries. He could *smile* at Ben Jonson's *lordly* contempt concerning his possession of '*little [sic] Latin & less Greek*'; he could look down with immeasurable scorn upon such a hound as Green [*sic*], etc, but did he know the *real* measure of earthly immortality within him?...

I figure Shakspeare to myself a perfectly unpretentious man, a prosperous *burgher* of *Stratford*, liking to sit in the sunshine & converse pleasantly with all passers by. His grand capacious soul took in all Humanity. Not the veriest beggar or scoundrel was beneath his notice, nay, his sympathy.

How he *revels* in the absurdities of some of his characters; & how, now and then, the profoundest pathos is

eliminated (if I may thus express it) from the humor of even fools & blackguards.

Recall, I pray you, scene III, Act II of King Henry V. Pistol, Dame Quickly, Nym, Bardolph, & Boy are present. When Pistol announces the death of *Falstaff*, in his usual bombastic vein, but with evident deep feeling *au fond*, what does poor Bardolph say?

With passionate earnestness he exclaims—"Would I were with him, wheresome'er he is, either in *Heaven or in Hell!*" Now could devotion go further *than this?*—Then, observe how the half-grotesque, yet genuine pathos of the scene is modified, or contrasted, (so to speak) by what follows a little after.

The imp-like, mischievous little rascal of a *Boy asks*, "Do you remember 'a [Falstaff] saw a flea stick upon *Bardolph's nose*, & 'a said it was a *black soul burning in hell-fire?*" And Bardolph's irresistible answer, "Well! the fuel is gone that maintained *that fire!* That's all the riches I got in his service!"⁸

Hayne, of course, was appalled by the theories that someone other than Shakespeare was responsible for his work. In the last months of his life, Hayne read an article in the *Augusta Chronicle* on the "monstrous heresy...that Bacon was the author of *all Shakspeare's [sic] Plays.*" On 8 February 1886, the same day he read the article, Hayne wrote Lipscomb: "Of course, the evidence of such men (as *Ben Jonson*, e.g.) who knew *Shakspeare personally*, & have left on record their *conclusive* testimony as to his *genius*—is very conveniently *ignored*. By the way," Hayne continued, "I do wish you *would knock this theory* on the head, (you can do it in *five minutes* time) when you speak in *Augusta!*"⁹ On February 15, he observed: "Somehow, I cannot bear to have glorious *Will* insulted, as it were, nay deprived almost of his very identity at this late day."

Lipscomb, on his part, was loath to notice the "Bacon Illusions" in his March lectures before the Hayne Circle for two reasons. "Is there any critic, authority, evidence of any sort, beyond guessing," he asked on February 22, "in its favor? I confess I have seen none," he observed in answer to his own question. In the second place, he admitted, "I am pushed for time, or shall be, in keeping the Lectures within an hour each...If my Lectures make any impression, I hope it will be that S. is about the most read and veritable person who lived on this planet within the last three hundred years." Hayne could hardly disagree with this sentiment, and Lipscomb thereupon lectured on March 23-26 upon *Macbeth*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *Hamlet*; was enthusiastically received; and though he did not take up the so-called Baconian theory in

his lectures, he granted an interview to the *Augusta Chronicle* in which he "effectually dispelled the illusion...that Lord Bacon had inspired or created any of the Shakespearean dramas."¹⁰

On the other hand, Hayne realized that Shakespeare had some faults. On 1 October 1885, for example, he acknowledged to Dr. Lipscomb that Shakespeare "not only 'nods' sometimes...but goes 'fast asleep'" and concluded with Ben Jonson that Shakespeare should have "blotted more lines." On the following February 15, he enclosed in another letter to Lipscomb a copy of some recent sonnets, the images and comparisons of which he admits might be "overstrained" because he could not help "following my Master Shakspeare in what has been pronounced a serious fault of his & the whole Elizabethan Age of Poets—I mean a proneness to comparisons metaphorically dressed up."¹¹

After all was said and done, though, Shakespeare was the great poet to Hayne. He understood human nature better than any other writer, and he expressed himself more memorably than any other poet. He may have been a "Warwickshire peasant," but he "absorbed universal knowledge by the pores of his skin" and surpassed all English writers, including Milton with his "majestic genius" who, after all, was but "a child compared with Shakspeare,"¹² whose "grand capacious soul" did indeed take "in all Humanity." To Hayne, as to Ben Jonson, Shakespeare was truly "not of an age, but for all time."

NOTES

¹See Jay B. Hubbell, *The South in American Literature, 1607-1900* (Durham, 1954), pp. 743-757; and the following articles and book by Rayburn S. Moore: "Paul Hamilton Hayne," *Georgia Review*, 22 (1968), 106-124; "Hayne the Poet: A New Look," *South Carolina Review*, 2 (1969), 4-13; and *Paul Hamilton Hayne* (New York, 1972), pp. 15-32.

²In this essay, I am concentrating on Hayne's use of and reference to Shakespeare in his letters, and though I shall on occasion comment on Shakespeare's importance to Hayne's published prose and verse, I shall, on the whole, focus on his correspondence.

³This letter, a *jeu d'esprit* of 20 September 1848, is addressed to Susan B. Hayne (1829-1895), Hayne's favorite cousin and an intermittent correspondent throughout his life. The letter itself and all others quoted hereinafter (unless otherwise indicated) are in the Hayne Papers, Perkins Library, Duke University, and are used with the kind permission of Dr. Mattie Russell, Curator *Emeritus*, Manuscript Department. Further reference to this collection is to

HP, DUL. Some of Hayne's letters to Susan B. Hayne have been published in "Seven Unpublished Letters of Paul Hamilton Hayne," ed. William S. Hoole, *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 22 (1938), 273-285.

⁴A cursory check of Hayne's letters reveals that the following plays are neither mentioned nor quoted from: *Richard II*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Coriolanus* lead a list composed of *Timon of Athens*, *Pericles*, *Henry VI*, *Henry VIII*, *Cymbeline*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *King John*, and *Two Noble Kinsmen*. After *Hamlet*, Hayne refers most frequently to *Macbeth*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Henry V*, *The Tempest*, *Othello*, *Richard III*, and *King Lear*.

⁵All quotations are, respectively, in letters to Richard Henry Stoddard, William Gilmore Simms, and John G. James in *A Collection of Hayne Letters*, ed. Daniel Morley McKeithan (Austin, 1944), pp. 15, 210, 428, 458. Hereinafter cited as *CHL*.

⁶Lipscomb's essay, "A Psychological Study of Hamlet," appeared in the *M.Q.R.*, 65 (1884), 665-678. This title, Lipscomb explained to Hayne on 23 October 1884, was a misprint and should have been "A Physiological Study of Hamlet." Yet, in the essay Lipscomb characterizes Hamlet as a "profound study in mental physiology" who serves the "mental physiologist" as a basis "for a study in intellectual philosophy, and in that branch of it involving psychology" (p. 670). "At the start," Lipscomb elucidates,

Hamlet's infirmity of will is well-defined. The growth of this morbid state, running through a succession of stages, is accurately presented. Nothing is omitted that can cast light on the progress of his intellectual besetment. Step by step the history discloses itself beneath the dramatized movements; the soul in its sorrow and strife is laid bare; and the unusual number, fullness, and impassioned fervor of the soliloquies make the self-revelation complete. (p. 670)

Hamlet, moreover, possesses a "literary temperament" which is not "introversive" but "out-going":

It loves an audience. It covets sympathy. Next to oratory, it has a yearning for recognition and hearty appreciation. The divine instinct of a fine thinker is, that it is 'more blessed to give than to receive;' and in obedience thereto, a truly unselfish intellect delights to communicate for the sake of others. But in Hamlet this sort of temperament is not dominating....And hence his intellect, though so fertile in creation and luxuriant in expression, never concerns itself as to any fruit it might bear in

others....This unvarying occupation with self is not of the lower self. What he shall eat and drink, in what way kill time, how dispose of his large opportunities to find relief from oppressive care and solicitude, never engage his attention. Inward, still deeper inward,...this searching for a remoter inwardness, year by year the steady expansion of a world contained in the soul and encircled by a horizon ever thinning away and hastening into ampler spaces: Hamlet is this fascinated explorer of life's occultness, seeking himself where the real Hamlet cannot be found....Account for these phenomena under any ordinary law of literary temperament, *plus* an abstract philosophic power of almost limitless activity? By no means; the temperament is an important question, perhaps more so than any other next to his genius; but the main thing...is to observe how this natural temperament was developed, by what steps it mastered the will and usurped the entire control of mind, the direction it took in its abnormal energy, and the fatality it entailed first upon Hamlet and afterward on his career. (pp. 668-669)

It is in this light that Lipscomb considers Hamlet as a "profound study in mental physiology." This approach was surely among those considerations that led Lipscomb to indicate to Hayne on 18 November 1884, that he could "truthfully claim" the essay "to be original" since he "had not even a suggestion of the line of argument from any outward source whatever."

⁷Hayne's review of the play is also entitled "Shakespeare's Funeral" and is contained in a clipping in HP, DUL. The source of the clipping is not identified.

⁸As early as 1872 Hayne had quoted this passage from *Henry V* and characterized it as "among the most pathetic in Shakespeare's dramas," and he continues to allude to it from time to time until his death in 1886.

⁹That the Baconian theory was much on Hayne's mind is supported by a letter written to Charles Colcock Jones, Jr., less than a week later—on February 14—in which he inveighs against the same article in the *Chronicle*. On February 15 Hayne reminded Lipscomb not to "forget to knock that 'Bacon' theory on the head!"

¹⁰See the *Chronicle* for 24 March 1886, p. 8, col. 4 and for 25 March, p. 4, col. 3. For accounts of the lectures themselves, see the *Chronicle* for 24 March 1886, p. 8, col. 4; 25 March, p. 4, col. 3; 26 March, p. 8, col. 4; and 27 March, p. 1, col. 6.

Rayburn S. Moore

127

¹¹See "Winter Sonnets," *Independent*, 38 (11 February 1886), 161.

¹²See Hayne to Lipscomb, 27 [March] 1884, HP, DUL.