

**TIME IN THE PLAY OF
HAMLET, NO. 5.
THE ONCE USED
WORDS IN SHAKESPEARE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649326235

Time in the play of Hamlet, No. 5. The Once used words in Shakespeare by Edward P. Vining & James David Butler

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EDWARD P. VINING & JAMES DAVID BUTLER

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To promote the knowledge and study of the Works
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and Elizabethan Drama.

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JUNE 15, 1885.

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Anal. - p. 25.

Papers of E. P. Shakespeare Society, No. 5.

Time in the Play of Hamlet,

BY

EDWARD P. VINING.

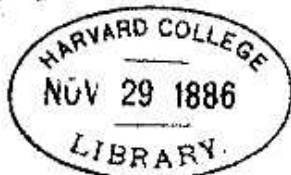
Read before the Society December 3d, 1885.

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1886.

~~Eng Lit. 2306~~

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Lowell Friend.

Time in the Play of Hamlet.

If it were not for the fact that we find conflicting opinions as to the force and meaning of some one or more words or phrases in almost every scene of Shakespeare's dramas, and that—as to "Hamlet" in particular—nearly every critic differs in many vital points from all others of his army of co-laborers, it might be a matter of some surprise to see the great divergence of opinion as to the length of time covered by the action of this tragedy.

On the one side it has been seriously contended that its entire action transpired within a period of not more than ten days; while on the other it has been thought to extend over at least ten years. Nay, more, there have been those who, in eloquent phrase, have urged the view that Shakespeare's method of dealing with the dramatic element of time is to artfully convey two opposite ideas of its flight—swiftness and slowness—so that by one

series of allusions we receive the impression that the action of the drama is driving on in hot haste, and that all the events are compressed within a period of but a few days; while by another series we are insensibly beguiled into the belief that they extend over months or years. "So," say they, "whenever time comes in as an element, we are subject to Shakespeare's glamour and gramarye—to his legerdemain. We are held in a confusion and delusion about the time."

This theory is so pretty and striking—it harmonizes so nicely with our natural love of mysticism and transcendental lore, and with the vague views of those who fancy that they are diving into the depths of Shakespeare when they do but skim the surface—that it is a pity that the facts are all against it.

Now, the truth is that our immortal poet has laid out the action of the different scenes with minute consideration both of the time occupied by each and of the interval elapsing between them, when any occurs, and he has so carefully indicated the lapse of time that he