

THE SHAKESPEARE CANON

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The Shakespeare canon by J. M. Robertson

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J. M. ROBERTSON

**THE SHAKESPEARE
CANON**

THE SHAKESPEARE CANON

BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

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THE AUTHORSHIP OF "TITUS ANDRONICUS." An Introduction to the Study of the Canon of Shakespeare.

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THE SHAKESPEARE CANON

- I: THE ORIGATION OF "HENRY V"
II: THE ORIGATION OF "JULIUS CÆSAR"
III: THE AUTHORSHIP OF "RICHARD III"

*John
Mason* BY
J. M. ROBERTSON

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PREFACE

THESE studies in the Shakespeare Canon are submitted to students, not as a body of uniformly assured results, but as the outcome of much protracted effort to reach testable and tested opinions. After twenty revisions, one has some notion of the possibilities of variations of view. But after a certain point one is fain to seek either criticism or confirmation: for the time being, this is as far as one can get. The main theses, long held, are, however, put with confirmed conviction.

Old doubts as to the possibility of getting attention for such inquiries have been partly removed by the welcome emergence, in this field, of Messrs. Pollard and Dover Wilson, who in 1919 asked the readers of the *Times Literary Supplement* whether Shakespeare was likely to write in 1599 in the manner of certain passages cited by them from HENRY V. The same challenge may as fitly be put with regard to much of JULIUS CÆSAR. After many more revisions, accordingly, I have since decided to table certain discussions as putting some of the more prominent problems that have arisen for me in Shakespeare study, the origination of HENRY V being one of them. Others have been set forth in previous essays:¹ these, which before were but outlined, are now handled at some—I hope not undue—length, after a renewed pilgrimage.

It may still be necessary to explain that the method of "clues," herein at times resorted to, is not regarded as in itself a process of proof. It has happened to me to write, on another theme, a bulky volume of which a main object was the urging, with much iteration (indicated in the index), of the difficulty of certain

¹ *Did Shakespeare write "Titus Andronicus"?* (1905); *Shakespeare and Chapman*, 1917; *The Problem of "Hamlet,"* 1919; *The Problem of "The Merry Wives of Windsor,"* 1917.

problems, and then to be invited by one reviewer to admit the existence of the very difficulty in question; while a second reviewer took offence at two iterations of a vital position which seemed to me to need them. Let me say, then, that I regard these questions of disputed authorship in old plays as soluble only by a combination of many kinds of test, in which clues of phrase and vocabulary are but tentative steps. Conviction is licit only when *every* order of evidence has been faithfully considered. The clues in question may often help; and they may mislead, for lack of width of examination.

For instance, Mr. Dugdale Sykes, who has done really valuable work by their means in several important inquiries,¹ seems to me at times to rely fallaciously on the clue of "tics" of phrase. He claims to trace the work of Peele, for example, largely by tics such as "I mean" and "O how!" and "this damnèd deed" and "brazen gates." But "I mean" occurs at least half-a-dozen times in Marlowe, and about as often in Greene; and Kyd has "brazen gates," and "damnèd deed"; and Marlowe has "brazen doors"; and Greene "brazen doors" and "gates of brass"; and there are far more "O how" lines in Marlowe, Greene and Kyd than in Peele: though Mr. Sykes says he cannot find them. These, however, are oversights which may befall any of us; and by means of better clues Mr. Sykes does some really sound identification. I think he is substantially right, for instance, in seeing much of Peele in *THE TROUBLESOME RAIGNE OF KING JOHN*. On the other hand, a disinclination to recognise variety of authorship—a thing so common in Elizabethan plays—makes him insist on seeing "a single author" throughout that piece, because of "the *recurrence* of certain expressions and tricks of style." There is here a refusal to apply the style test as apart from the notation of scattered phrases; and one result of that method is that Mr. Sykes credits to Peele the first scene in *ALPHONSUS EMPEROR OF GERMANY*, *because* Peele copies a passage from it in *DAVID AND BETHSABE*. Now, by style test, one

¹ See his *Sidelights on Shakespeare*, Stratford-on-Avon, 1919.