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The Ur-Hamlet Problem.

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is no difficulty, further, in the use of the instrumental as compared with the genitive despite line 79, *sē- þe his wordes geweald wīde hæfde*. In this passage the context renders use of the genitive natural, as implying power over, as well as by, his words in choosing a name for the hall.

Not only does Bright's reading need no defence from the stylistic standpoint, but on the contrary the passage as amended falls under one of the most frequent types of rhetorical structure in the poem,  $a + x, / x^1, + a$  ( $x, x^1$ , indicating parallel clauses,  $a + a$ , a syntactic whole). The structure presented by the ms. reading, on the contrary, is one for which no precise parallel offers itself in the poem, which indeed makes use of but a few of its general type (*e. g.*, ll. 131, 180 ff., 484 ff.). The point has some force for the structure in question,  $y + x, / x^1 + y$ , is one that would have presented not the slightest difficulty, in managing the alliteration or otherwise, to the poet, had its use seemed to him effective or desirable. He does not use it, however, while that of the proposed reading occurs everywhere.

The ms. reading may be explained as due to accidental omission of *ge-* (as probably in 652a and 1783a), an omission which might readily occur owing to the frequent separation of the prefix from the word to which it belonged, and subsequent change of *wēald* to *wēold* (if the original indeed had not *eo* for *ea*). The question may here be answered why, if an emendation of the character proposed is under consideration, it should not possibly take the form *þenden worda geweald . . . lange āhte* instead of *wordum geweald* in order to accord with l. 79, *his wordes geweald wīde hæfde*. Apart from the difference of meaning already adverted to, a scribal error involving a change of *worda ge weald* (*weold*) to *wordum weold* is highly improbable, even supposing an unusually ill-written or illegible original.

(To be continued).

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## THE UR-HAMLET PROBLEM.

Professor Cunliffe's reply to the article by Professor Jack on *Thomas Kyd and the Ur-Hamlet*—both of which appeared in recent issues of *The Publications of the Modern Language Association*<sup>1</sup>—makes superfluous the detailed refutation which the present writer had projected. There is one point in Professor Cunliffe's counter claims, however, which deserves greater emphasis and another upon which I venture to suggest that direct evidence is wanting.

Professor Cunliffe, in summing up his own conclusions, directly reverses the views set forth by Mr. Jack, and declares:—

I. "That Nash had a dramatist or dramatists in mind in this paragraph.

II. It is perfectly clear that Nash knew of a Hamlet drama and this paragraph does throw some light upon its authorship."

My own view as to the two issues may be summarized thus:

I. Nash had in mind not merely one dramatist, but a group, "a sort"—Kyd being among the number.

II. The paragraph may serve as corroborative testimony, if all other evidence indicates Kyd's authorship of an *Ur-Hamlet*. Taken alone, however, it proves nothing definite on this point and does not make it entirely clear either that Nash knew of a Hamlet drama then, or that such a play was then in existence—the last two points being for our purposes identical.

I. The claim that Nash had in mind not merely one but a group, or type, of dramatists seems to the writer borne out by every consideration. There is always, in the first place, some argument *prima facie* in favor of accepting the more obvious interpretation of a passage, so that it would be natural to assume that if Nash used the plural forms here, it was because he had more than one person in mind. It is easy, of course, to multiply instances to which, for various reasons, such an assumption would not apply and the supporters of

<sup>1</sup> Professor Jack's article appeared in the issue for December, 1905, and Professor Cunliffe's reply in the following number, March, 1906.

Kyd's claim have quite generally construed this as such an instance. It seems strange, however, that the interpretation of the plural form as a mere device should ever have suggested itself to critics when the whole meaning and force of the passage—taken in or out of its context intimately involve the idea of plurality. Besides the acceptance of the plural significance disposes of all difficulties of interpretation—allowing for all possible references to Kyd and accounting for those which are less obviously or correctly applicable to him.

A. The whole context bears out such an interpretation—if one more argument as to context may be ventured, since Nash, in spite of a highly digressive style as to details, is apt to keep to some of the larger relations of unity. The *Epistle* begins almost at once with talk of dramatists and drama and pursues the subject to the beginning of the fourth paragraph leaving it then with these words :—

“To leave these to the mercie of their mother tongue that feed on nought but the crummes that fal from the translators trencher, &c.” Certainly the reference here is to dramatists and their inadequate handling of the classics, but why *one* dramatist rather than more when the description is capable of a wider application? Then follows a somewhat rambling discussion of Greene's merits, of the prevailing taste in fiction, and finally of the ignorance of Nash's opponents in the Marprelate controversy, with which Nash checks himself in the words, “But least I might seeme with these night crows *Nimis curiosus in aliena republica*, I'le turne backe to my first text of studies of delight, and talke a little in friendship with a few of our triuiall translators.” It was with the dramatists' irreverent treatment of the classics that he left off and it is to these dramatists that he now instinctively reverts, as to the worst among all the “triuiall translators,” and so the ones to whom it is most fitting that he shall “talke a little” in the candour of friendship. What more trivial translator indeed could have been anywhere found than the typical Elizabethan dramatist—hard pressed as he almost invariably was by financial need, and always greedy for dramatic material, rushing unprepared into the sacred task of interpreting the classics and, if he found himself une-

qual to the production of even garbled versions, contenting himself with building upon the labors of others, even filching directly from the English versions of Seneca when the fine sentences to be found there served his especial need. Moreover, it is just these most flagrant offenders whom Nash chooses as offering the strongest contrast to “those men of import” whom, in the paragraph immediately following, he cites—lest he should “condemne all and commend none”—as having “laboured with credit in this laudable kinde of Translation” and “merueilouslie inriched the Latine tongue with the expence of their toyle.” It is clear that, in this second paragraph, he has a group or type in mind; for he names one man as being “in the forefront,” and refers to “manie other reverent Germaines” several of them by name. Thus, the very accuracy and force of the antithesis lies in the contrasting of one group with another.

B. But aside from any inference derived from the context, and aside, too, from the employment of the more common plural forms, it should be noted that the more distinctive words in the passage point strongly to the literal plural. Thus, Nash explicitly says that he will talk with a *few* of the “triuiall translators” and then proceeds to characterize the group—a group not of necessity all Senecan, except so far as the Senecan influence was general at that time and naturally involved the intermeddling with the classics which he now meant to blame chiefly. These are his words :—

“It is a common practise nowadaies amongst a sort of shifting companions that runne through every arte and thrive by none, &c.” Nothing could be more explicit than Nash's reference to a type as such and no reference more in point—as generalizations go—than this is, if applied to the Elizabethan dramatists; whereas, as Professor Cunliffe points out, it is grossly inapplicable to the men whose labors were involved in the 1581 translations of Seneca. Both the facts in the case and the implications of the vivid phrasing suggest that Nash was hardly guilty of the anti-climax of limiting to one a reference clearly applicable to a considerable group.

C. The acceptance of a literal plural leaves undisturbed all possible references to Kyd, since

he may easily have been included in all and especially glanced at in some. As one of the most prominent dramatists of the day and the chief representative of the Senecan school, he would naturally have been in the forefront of reference and Professor Jack does not, at any point, prove the impossibility of his having been referred to.

1. Kyd is not yet proved to have been a scrivener; but his parent's occupation, his knowledge of legal terms, and especially his shifting career, suggest that he might have dipped enough into such an employment as to warrant his being included in Nash's reference.

2. No one can be quite sure whether Nash meant to play upon Kyd's name in the expression "Kidde in Aesop." Aside from the fact that, in citing Aesop and in drawing upon animal life, he was following his common vein of illustration, it is not clearly proved that he changed the name of the animal in order to play upon Kyd's name, any more than it is proved that he draws here directly from *The Shepherd's Calendar*. There is no obvious reason why a pun could not have been intended, whatever may be the probability.

3. Professor Jack does not sustain his argument that the students addressed would probably not have understood any detailed reference to Kyd's pamphlet from the Italian or to *The Spanish Tragedy*. It is possible, of course, that students at Oxford and Cambridge should not have known, three years after its publication, of a pamphlet on a subject of considerable interest and by one of the best known authors of the day. It is, of course, possible too, that they might not have seen or been familiar with one of the two or three most popular plays of that day. The question of probability, however, is at least an open one and in any case, one should hardly need reminding that conventional literary forms, such as *Epistles*, *Dedications*, &c., do not limit their range of interest to the persons addressed, but serve as mere mediums for the conveyance of literary opinion. Dryden, as well as the Elizabethans, abound in illustrations of this use. It may be inferred, then, that Kyd is not excluded from any of the references thus far suggested.

D. The plural interpretation of the passage—besides allowing for references to Kyd—explains

those less obviously or accurately applicable to him.

1. Mr. Boas<sup>2</sup> claims that Nash, in his thrusts at Kyd's unscholarly handling of the classics, was guilty of "scurrilous depreciation of his rival's classical attainments," whereas Mr. Jack takes the comparative inaccuracy of the charge to mean that Kyd was not referred to at all. If, however, we recognize the reference as being not merely to Kyd, but to a group in which he was included, Nash's only injustice to him is that which inevitably comes to some with any sweeping adverse generalization as to a class. Moreover, this injustice is still further minimized by the fact that—as Mr. Boas admits—Kyd shows himself, in his efforts with both Italian and classic material, a careless translator.<sup>3</sup>

2. The same general explanation might apply to Nash's blame of those who filch sentences from the English *Seneca*, since Kyd seems not to be among the flagrant offenders in this connection.

E. Even the references commonly cited as strikingly applicable to Kyd—barring the questionable one in the pun, which will be discussed later—may easily be interpreted as wide enough to include a group.

1. Professor Jack is, of course, right in calling attention to the prevalence of Senecan influence among the dramatists of that time, but his inference from this fact that Nash, in calling attention to it, could not have had Kyd in mind, is untenable. Kyd would naturally be thought of, perhaps conspicuously, in any such generalization, but the prevalence of the influence is being emphasized along with its intensity, and without the literal plural this force would be lost.

2. The same general argument applies to those who "intermeddle with Italian translations," to those who "haue not learned . . . the iust measure of the Horizon without an hexameter" and to those who "bodge up a blanke verse with ifs and ands." The prevalence of the fault is no argument against Kyd's being referred to, but furnishes another proof of the literal plural significance of the passage.

We may then assume that while Nash, in the

<sup>2</sup> *Thomas Kyd*, F. M. Boas, 1904, p. xlv-xlvi.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. xvii-xx.

disputed paragraph, might have had Kyd more or less in mind at every point, he was writing primarily of a group in which Kyd was naturally included. This conclusion by no means destroys the possibility of Kyd's being here indicated as the author of an *Ur-Hamlet*, but it suggests considerable need of caution as to the inference, and some re-examination of the evidence on that particular point. The writer's own view as to the question has already been stated, but is repeated here for clearness:—

II. That the paragraph may serve as corroborative of other testimony as to an *Ur-Hamlet*, but that taken alone, it proves little. The argument from probabilities may be considerable, but it must be distinguished from that of certainty.

1. For one thing, although the context and later references make it seem probable that Nash in speaking of "whole *Hamlets*" and "handfulls of tragicall speaches," has in mind a play, it is not impossible that he means merely *The Hystorie of Hamblet*, as illustrating the climax of the tragic or melodramatic. Certainly that tale, being newly translated into the English along with other tales from Belleforrest's *Histoires Tragiques*, and doubtless current among the dramatists of the day, abounds in "tragicall speaches" and so might reasonably be said to have "handfulls" of them, if length rather than number be taken as the measure. Moreover, Nash was, in any case, using the expression "whole *Hamlets*" in a figurative sense, since he must have known of the existence of the prose tale and its equipment of "tragicall speaches," and would not have inferred that a *Hamlet* play was taken directly from Seneca when he was blaming others for ignorance of the classics. Such loose phrasing must be carefully dealt with.

2. Then, too, as to the chief evidence from which Nash's declaration of Kyd's authorship is usually inferred, *i. e.*, the expression "the Kidde in *Aesop*." The present writer has already expressed some slight doubt that a pun was intended, though readily admitting such a possibility. Even granting the pun, however, it is a rash inference to conclude that it meant he was to indicate Kyd as the author of an *Ur-Hamlet*. The word *Hamlets* is used in one connection, whereas the possible pun on Kyd's name occurs several lines later in a different connection; so that we are hardly justified

in inferring between the two passages such interrelations of reference as would be necessary for a definite statement that Nash meant to indicate Kyd as author of a *Hamlet* play.

Fortunately, outside testimony, at least as to the existence of an early *Hamlet*, seems more definite, inasmuch as Henslowe has an entry in his *Diary*, "9 of June 1594, Rd. at hamlet . . . viii," and Lodge in his *Wits' Miserie* [1596], mentions "the Ghost which cried so miserably at the theater like an Oister wife *Hamlet revenge*." Certainly Henslowe's reference here seems clear and Lodge's, taken with that, practically conclusive; so that the two somewhat reinforce the possibility that Nash's reference was to a play, but it must be remembered, for accuracy, that Henslowe's record was five years later than Nash's *Epistle* (1589) and Lodge's *Wit's Miserie* still two years later; so that their mention of a play at these later dates does not prove that Nash knew of it in 1589.

If, however, we accept all favorable possibilities as certainties,—conceding that a *Hamlet*-play did exist in 1589 and that it could not, in that form, or at that time, have been written by Shakspere—it seems highly probable that Kyd was the author of the early play and if so, that Nash had him vaguely in mind as such in his reference to "whole *Hamlets*." Kyd's strong claim to the authorship of an *Ur-Hamlet* however—granting its existence—rests, not on the reference in the paragraph, however valuable that may have proved as a clue, but upon the evidence furnished by the resemblance between the acknowledged works of Kyd and the 1603 quarto of *Hamlet*. Whoever denies Kyd's authorship of the assumed play must be ready to account for these strong resemblances, if not to suggest a more probable author.

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#### CHARMS TO RECOVER STOLEN CATTLE.

The two charms that follow have not been published, so far as I know, and have been gleaned from Cambridge mss. in the swath of the industrious Cockayne. Though the first, as far as it