

imitative adaptation from one to another. The framework of *Love's Labor's Lost* he took from two plays of John Lyly's, *Endimion*, and *Gallathea*; that of *The Comedy of Errors* by the same process from *Menaechmi* and *Amphitryo*; that of *Two Gentlemen* by the same process from two of his own plays, *The Comedy of Errors*, and *Love's Labor's Lost*, and so on.<sup>18</sup>

Here grammar school has furnished a basic principle in Shakspeare's growth by having taught him from other things to imitate something new for himself. And yet the new thing and not the imitation is the thing of importance. Shakspeare has proceeded from one to another of his early plays by the same process of imitation. Each time, however, he imitates not only the new, but also the winnowing of his past work, which in turn was the result of imitation. His method is the pragmatic one of trial and error. Self-criticism is at the basis of his growth. We see that he recognized usually, though not infallibly, what we have usually considered to be right. What was his standard of judgment? There lies one half the secret—perhaps the greater half, if one may put it so. The other half was the lavish ability to do. That lavish ability many of Shakspeare's contemporaries also had. But they had not the power of selection and improved imitation which Shakspeare had, by which he consolidated his gains of the past each time, and added to them from others something more. The secret of his growth lies here. But where lies the secret of his ability to grow? It is the old problem of evolution. One might assume infinite variations, on which the trial and error of the survival of the fittest produces growth by selecting those things which have the power of growth. But the difficulty is that such a theory and its analogues assume what they set out to prove. We have assumed a motive force which it was our problem to discover. At most, we only describe a process; we give no clue to the motive forces which make the process not only possible but necessary. Shakspeare had marvelous skill. But whence? He had an equally marvelous power of self-criticism. But whence? He used his self-criticism to direct his skill. But how did he know to do it? The process, the interacting stages of *what* he did, those things we can see and describe. But *why* did he so? That I do not profess to know; that I see no way of finding out; that I see no sign that anyone knows or is finding out about anything. Yet that is what the human race needs to find out consciously about itself

<sup>18</sup> This process for the early plays I have described in some detail in a work on *Shakspeare's Five-Act Structure*.