LIKE most Shakespearian topics, this is a very old one; the first critic to imply that he was more learned than Shakespeare was probably his angry contemporary, Robert Greene. A little later, when it had to be conceded that the Stratford man could write, people at once began to exclaim upon his power to do so without art or study. Of all the stock requirements for a poet as set forth in Ben Jonson’s *Discoveries*, Shakespeare, it seems, had only the one nature provides: *ingenium*, wit or wits. Again and again it was remarked that his “strength and nature” made “amends for art”. “Those who accuse him to have wanted learning”, argued Dryden, “give him the greater commendation.”

It is partly a question of how you can praise him best: by saving his scholarly reputation or triumphantly denying that he had one. If you want him to have some kind of training in the humanities, you can work on the hints that he read Ovid in Latin, perhaps Boccaccio in Italian, more probably some books in French. Rowe, the first biographer, thought he could do some of these things. and that he remembered, from Stratford Grammar School, a tag or two of Horace. Others claimed that he was so clever that having studied the ancients he refused to imitate them. Others again treated him as divinely ignorant. Here is a subject on which a man can find some sort of authority for whatever he cares to believe, so long as he means to praise Shakespeare.

In the eighteenth century Upton made him learned and Farmer a mere genius. “Solicitous only for the honour of

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1 A lecture delivered in the John Rylands Library on Wednesday, the 9th of December 1964.
Shakespeare”, Farmer is amazed that “any real friends of our immortal POET should be still willing to force him into a situation which is not tenable: treat him as a learned man”. And he claims, with some justice, to have “removed a deal of learned Rubbish” from Shakespearian commentary. Farmer rightly attached importance to the testimony of the poet’s contemporaries, which is strongly on the side of Nature against Art. And we should not forget that to these men poetry was (as indeed it remains) a learned art; it has always been worth notice that a man of only ordinary education should master it. So Farmer deserved Jonson’s commendations for his labour in finding sources for Shakespeare more probable than the original texts of Greek and Latin (it was he, for example, who first showed that Shakespeare read Plutarch in North’s translation). It was no longer possible, if you thought that learning was a matter of imitating ancient authors, to think Shakespeare very learned. And nobody will ever again try to make Shakespeare into the eighteenth-century idea of a classical scholar. Whether or no D’Avenant is speaking the truth in his scurrilous account of how Shakespeare amused himself when passing through Oxford, it seems unlikely that he went into Bodley to read. For that matter, you do not hear in his Henry VI of the Library of Duke Humphrey, or of certain colleges established during those troubles; or in Sir Thomas More that the hero was the modern Socrates and a great scholar. Shakespeare’s scholars are not a great company—they are pedants mostly, or magicians, men of power like Prospero, or men trained, like Horatio, for spiritual emergencies: “thou art a scholar, Horatio, speak to it.” The only sustained academic effort represented in the plays is that of the courtiers in Love’s Labour’s Lost; and it is thwarted by life and love. Shakespeare’s own most obviously learned work—Venus and Adonis, Lucrece—belongs to the periods when he was young and désœuvré and trying a different role from the one he settled in; or when he was indulging the inscrutable whims of his last phase in The Tempest. He was first a scholar to please patrons, and

last a scholar to please himself; in between he was a scholar to please no one.

Let us then happily abandon hope of one kind of learned Shakespeare. Not that we can afford to neglect what modern enquirers tell us of his education. Once allow—as we must—the probability of his having attended Stratford Grammar School, and it will follow that the description "schoolmaster among the playwrights"—acceptable to Professors Smart and Baldwin—is an apt enough description. Then we shall go on to admit that "he read Ovid as well as Golding's Ovid, some Seneca and Virgil as well as English Seneca and Virgil".¹ Nor will it be possible to contend that he avoided books; we can catch him looking through books on Popish impostures, on the law of honour, on travel, on history, on law. He must have read deeper in Holinshed than his plots required, and gone into Plutarch beyond the Lives he was using. He knew something of the commentators on Terence; he knew Palingenius, emblem books, and of course the Bible. We must allow that his school reading helped to form his mind.² but also that he underwent some process of self-education, as we all do; and this justifies Professor Whitaker's feeling that as time went on he experienced an intellectual and ethical development in part caused by his mature reading.

What it comes to is this: there was nothing freakish or extreme about Shakespeare's learning habits. Though no scholar, he was a reading man, and since he was also a writing man, it shows. But there are two qualifications to be made here. The first is obvious: Shakespeare was a fantastically good reader because he was a person of enormously superior intelligence. The second is that he belongs not only to the class "Elizabethan" but to the class "poet", and he read not merely as one but as the other.

On the general topic of Shakespeare's intelligence I will spare you platitudes, but it is only proper to be reminded now and again that it was a superior one. Mr. John Wain, somewhat like Carlyle before him, has observed that "one of Shakespeare's achievements was to demonstrate just how strong, how wide-ranging, how subtly adjusted the intelligence of a great poet has to be". But perhaps the second point, that Shakespeare's mind, and his learning, were those of a poet, is less obvious. Mr. Wain's formula was devised to meet the need of describing Shakespeare's power to synthesize—his rapidity of mind, his control of linguistic as of dramatic situations; one is repeatedly surprised—and more and more frequently in the later work—by the sheer extent of the possibilities envisaged in some grammatical ellipse or some conceit. But I wish to speak of another aspect of the poet's intelligence, and it is at this point that it becomes inseparable from the question of his learning. There are poets who read as philosophers or as theologians—Coleridge and Milton, for example—and with these poets one can—dangerous and difficult though the practice undoubtedly is—hypothesize some structure of learning in their poetry analogous to their non-poetic thought. In the other poets one cannot do this: Yeats is an instance, Shakespeare is another. Of course people do it, but they nearly always go wrong. There is no "philosophy" of Shakespeare, though there are prevailing intellectual moods and plural philosophies in plenty. What we should remember is their status. If I say that Shakespeare read, learnt, listened in much the same frame of mind as Yeats attended to his "instructors"—"they give me metaphors for poetry"—I shall certainly be misunderstood. Such labours as those of Miss Doran and Mr. Baldwin and Miss Tuve should by now have prevented such mistakes. Yet I cannot avoid the feeling that there is something in it. There is a brooding Shakespeare, a Shakespeare sometimes excited, sometimes possessed by, sometimes merely playing with, learning, or with schemes of a learned sort.

Consider, for example, his treatment of the motif or topos of the banquet of sense. I have studied this at length elsewhere; 1  

1 Essays on Literature and Ideas (1963), p. 70.  
Shakespeare uses it in Sonnet 141, in *Timon* (i. ii. 123), and in *Venus and Adonis*, 427-46; it is a theme iconographically associated with that of Hercules at the Crossroads, and Shakespeare remembered this when he wrote *Antony and Cleopatra*. Now this topic is not uncommon, even on the stage; Massinger develops it in *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* (iii. i), and Ben Jonson treats it several times, once, in *The New Inn*, at considerable length and very seriously. Is Shakespeare then merely following a fashion? The longest of the passages, in *Venus*, is the most straightforward because here the poet's learning is on show. In the Sonnet the theme is presented in simple inversion, for the text says "In faith I do not love thee with mine eyes", etc. In *Timon* the context is the masque of ladies; the choice of theme is ironical and tells us something about the nature of Timon's feast. In *Antony* all is glancing allusion. Only in the earliest example (1593) does Shakespeare use the idea "straight", as Jonson was still doing in 1634.

Here, then, is a simple instance of the obliquity of the poet's intelligence. The Banquet of Sense, like the "quinque lineae amoris", "to see, to hear, to touch, to kiss, to die", also used in *Venus*,¹ was a piece of stock learned equipment for poets, and Shakespeare acquired and used it when he launched his fashionable Ovidian poem. In the *Venus* and the *Lucrece* you can watch him at work with many such devices, and he uses them with more skill and originality than he often gets the credit for. But when they occur in plays more than a decade later they are subtilized, sunk into the mind, mere hints and invitations. The degree to which Shakespeare's whole manner of dramatic proceeding was shaped by normal expectations, and by the body of ethical and emblematic lore held in common with his audience, should certainly not be underestimated.² But if we sacrifice to this perception all sense of the more curious or subtle or even perverse aspect of Shakespeare's mind, we shall be left with a wonderfully articulate *bien pensant*; and this, if only from the sonnets, we know Shakespeare was not. Our experience is of a

¹ See Baldwin, *Literary Genetics of Shakespeare's Poems*, p. 16.
² See Russell A. Fraser, *Shakespeare's Poetics in Relation to King Lear*, 1962.
mind pursuing ideas beyond the point where they yield to poetry.

Of this one might offer many instances. There is, for instance, the learning of *Macbeth*. When we think of a performance of that play we hardly recall what scholarship has established, as to its intellectual basis. Yet one of the permanent modern Shakespearian achievements was W. C. Curry’s cautious and qualified book on the Augustinian and Thomist patterns in *Macbeth*; and H. N. Paul’s exhaustive speculations on the play should at least convince us that Shakespeare embodied in his text metaphysical questions fit for a learned king. Nor is this exclusively a matter for tragedy. The comedies—from *Love’s Labour’s Lost, A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *The Merchant of Venice* through the “problem comedies” and up to the philosophical romances of the final period—are full of thought; and the thought is poetic but sets out from existing “patterns”.

When, therefore, we are considering Shakespeare’s learning, we ought not entirely to neglect this habit of curious brooding upon ideas; not that one wants to make him a philosopher—only a poet capable of intense intellectual application, dealing in the excitement of speculative thought. It is an excitement that can seem perverse, wanton even; it has a privacy denied to public propositions. An instance which explains part of what I mean is the treatment of time in *Macbeth*.

When Lucrece apostrophizes Time she nobly utters commonplaces; what she says derives in an orthodox way from two famous places in Ovid (*Met.* xv. 234, “tempus edax rerum...” and *Tristia*, iv, vi) and from Horace’s “exegi monumentum”, also laid under contribution in the sonnets. Shakespeare may have remembered also a frequently quoted scrap from the *Timaeus*; certainly he had looked up Time in the emblem books. In short, he wrote, in the manner of his time, a variation on a set theme. Traces of the same theme may be found elsewhere, not only in the Sonnets but as late as the comic set-piece on Time in *As You Like It*. The first hint of a personal, perhaps obsessive,

1 W. C. Curry, *Shakespeare’s Philosophical Patterns*, 1937.
3 See, for example, S. C. Chew, *The Virtues Reconciled*, 1947.
treatment of the theme may be in *Henry IV*. There the Prince is "redeeming the time"; this meant, in the devotional language of the period, to make "the activity of the passing moment a contribution to a man's most vital duty, that of saving his soul." The Prince seeks ways "to frustrate prophecies", and is accordingly attentive to the flow of time which brings their realization nearer; and his attention induces attention, notably in Hotspur, but also in others: "We are Time's subjects." In Act 3 of the Second Part the king introduces a passage which is as much a poetic dialogue on Time as a comment on innovation in the state; it opens with his own weary poetry, his wish to see time's end, and leads to Warwick's remarkable speech on the historical search into the seeds of time—"the hatch and brood of time" (III. i. 80 ff.).

These variations on Time—as leveller, as pattern, as the medium of prophecy, as brooding over event and character like some malign dove—may not be scholar's learning, but they sound like poet's learning; they have the effect of providing for the whole play and series of plays a dimension additional to that of mere chronicle. We should not characterise this dimension as philosophical; it is rather a matter, shall we say, of a fruitful unease of intellect (which is one of the conditions of a certain kind of poetry). The historical pattern, the action of prophecy (which the Prince cannot entirely prevent) are structural elements which have given rise to this controlled irrelevance, this disturbance in the texture, if you like those terms. The royal house is under a curse; the truth that slow time will bring, before it ends, is the return of a legitimate monarch. In the history plays, a century of time erodes justice and then injustice, and brings on the Day, the accession of the Tudors; Richmond is an imperial figure, reminding us of the strange relation in the mind of Europe between Empire and Apocalypse. And, working with such themes the poet agitates other figures of time, immersing the characters deeper in its element.

So too in *Troilus* the Trojan apocalypse lies ahead, its seeds sown in time; and we encounter time as the medium of human

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achievement and its destroyer, that which gives back the light of virtue but is also the porter of oblivion and the provider of Occasion. In Lear time is under the shadow of the promised end. And in Macbeth this vortex in Shakespeare's mind is deepest and strongest; the word itself tolls through the play as "world" does in Antony and Cleopatra.

Time is the medium in which human desires are translated into actions; the interval between them is the phantasma of Brutus, the hideous dream. The first part of Macbeth is about that terrible time; and what seems characteristic of Shakespeare is his insistence on the excitement, the complexity of it. The prophecies tempt a man to jump over that interim and "feel now/The future in the instant", or be "transported/Beyond the ignorant present". But one need not take the leap, which is the same thing as to "jump the life to come". Lady Macbeth taunts her husband with his inability to proceed directly from desire to act; and through the scenes ticks the dramatic clock which is the word "time" itself: time beguiled, time mocked, time running. The second act begins with Banquo simply asking Fleance the time; the bell tolls, the owl signals midnight, the knocking at dawn which ends a blessed and begins a woeful time. "By the clock 'tis day." Thenceforward the word is introduced—you might almost say, intruded—like a ticking clock: "fill up the time"; "let every man be master of his time"; "the perfect spy o'th' time"; "the pleasure of the time" (spoilt, says Lady Macbeth, by her husband's terror at Banquo's apparition!) the glimmering west and the timely inn.

Meanwhile time changes, contracts; "The time has been", says Macbeth, "that when the brains were out the man would die." In this new time, guilt has reduced the interim between desire and act; the firstlings of the heart become the firstlings of the hand. And time anticipates Macbeth's dread exploits. Since he would not use it for protection against evil, it offers him no defence against the equivocal fiend and the prophecy literally fulfilled. Now each minute teems a new grief. For his enemies, "the time" approaches; but for Macbeth it has become meaningless; no moment a moment of grace, to the last syllable of recorded time. The last speech of the play uses the word three
times; but the most remarkable and Shakespearian use is to have Macduff enter with the tyrant’s head and announce that “The time is free”.

Shakespeare has used the family of meanings which characterise this word, including those the New Testament distinguishes as *chronos* and *kairos*. The passion with which this game is played properly, I think, reminds one of the greatest of all Christian meditations on time, in the eleventh chapter of the *Confessions* of Augustine. “If it were done when ‘tis done” is based on a proverb; but Shakespeare finds in it a wish that a moment in time should have no succession, that is, be eternity. “But the present, should it always be present, and never pass into time past, verily it should not be time but eternity”, says St. Augustine. Macbeth cannot have the future in the instant; he deceives himself, saying “If the present were eternity we need not bother about eternity”. As Augustine puts it, “we generally think before our future actions, and... forethinking is present, but the action wherof we forethink is not yet, because it is to come.” It is precisely the difficulty over which Macbeth broods. “My soul is on fire to know this most intricate enigma”, says the saint. The enigma also, it appears, engaged Shakespeare.

Now the difference is that Shakespeare is not seeking to know an enigma. He is rather, with deep excitement, assembling a family of contexts. The deep penetration of the text by the “time” of ordinary language, as we might say, makes it impossible to offer the barest paraphrase, let alone some solution of a problem. What we may be sure of is that the nobly correct and learned exercises we remember from *Lucrece* have given way to deeper tones, to a poetry at once dramatic and, in a Coleridgean sense, philosophical. At any rate, the simply learned treatment of a topic lies far in the past.

To speak in this way is not to deny the important truth that some at least of Shakespeare’s plays have a fundamental thematic interest which is reducible to a learned *topos*. The whole structure depends on some central ethical issue, as in *Love’s Labour’s Lost* or *Two Gentlemen*. There is the conflict of Truth and Opinion in *Troilus*, of Equity and Justice in *Measure for Measure*;
Fortune in *As You Like It*, or Nobility in *Cymbeline*. There are many other such instances. His freedom and variety in handling such themes speaks for Shakespeare's power to make commonplaces impinge on us like elements in immediate but unnaturally beautiful life.

But I am trying to describe something subtler, even perhaps more *wanton*. I'm speaking of a Shakespeare *not* conventional, not an inspired illustrator of homily or commonplace—from the eccentric, even *louche* Shakespeare of certain late sonnets, from the Shakespeare who so abused his sources. Brooke's interpretation of the moral of *Romeo and Juliet* is used, in Shakespeare's version, as the partial opinion of the Friar. So, in *Othello*, the only characters who share Cinthio's view of the moral of the story are Iago and Brabantio. And in *Antony and Cleopatra* Shakespeare builds up the structure of conventional moralization the story had long before attracted, only to bless the immoral opposition with the unanswerable argument of poetry.

It is this *perversity* I want to trace in certain aspects of Shakespeare's intelligence as it operates on learned subjects. *Antony and Cleopatra* provides notable instances in the cases I have mentioned, and in its treatment of such subjects as Empire. *Cymbeline* is a monument to such brilliant perversions. A more familiar and concrete instance might be the entirely idiosyncratic development of the Christian-Aristotelian difference over the doctrine of creation "*ex nihilo*" in *King Lear* which raises, quite deliberately I think, if you consider the apocalyptic patterns of the play, the old philosophical dispute on the eternity of the world. But perhaps I can state my views on this, and on the related issues I have introduced, by asking you to think of a specific theme, centrally stated in one short poem.

The most direct challenge to people who suppose Shakespeare to have been a "natural" arises from the poems, above all from "*The Phoenix and the Turtle*". The imagery of this poem, however interpreted, is certainly in some way learned; and to deny Shakespeare this kind of learning you must say he was not the author of the poem. This has indeed often been done; but the external evidence in favour of his authorship happens to be unusually strong. It can also be said, I think, that the learned
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interests it reflects—and its mode of reflecting them—are Shakespearian.

Let us retreat a few years from 1601, the undoubted date of the poem, to Richard II. It would not be difficult to show, with the help of Ernst Kantorowicz, the degree to which Shakespeare was affected by certain ideas on perpetuity having their origin in medieval philosophy and law. I have already commented upon his preoccupation with time; if one wished to place that in the context of the history of ideas one would doubtless label it “Augustinian”. Time began with the creation and will have a stop. Its course is marked by acts of will, by sin, senescence, and mutability. Against it may be placed for instance, such glory as derives from poetry, if not from honour, as existing not in time but in some perpetual duration. But what of the great continuities of earthly life? The most obvious of them is kingship: the king never dies; or rather, he dies in his body natural, not in his body politic. Kantorowicz has shown¹ that the theory was associated with the scholastic concept of aeum.

This was originally an angelological concept, a third order between time and eternity. I believe that both Spenser and Shakespeare had a deep and exploratory interest in this concept. In so far as it relates to the kingship, Shakespeare put it into Richard II. This aspect of the doctrine is summed up in Kantorowicz’s title: the king has a mortal body and also a dignity which does not die, and which is represented by ceremonies. The painful separation of the two bodies is part of Lear’s experience also; he gives away the dignitas and is left with his natural body, subject, as the lawyers said, to all infirmity. He sees the lost dignitas as adhering to the natural body only by means of ceremony and ceremonial clothing. When he curses the robed justice he curses the ironical antithesis between the Dignity and the erring man within the robe—a contrast as great as that between the decaying body in the coffin and the robed effigy of the king that was placed upon it in royal funerals. Lear in the storm is realising the loss of the dignitas, tearing off the last fragments of the clothing that have come to symbolise it, as

¹ The King’s Two Bodies (1957).
his daughters have stripped away lands, knights, servants; only in madness is he a mockery king, every inch a king, with his fading regalia of wild flowers. But when Gloster kisses the hand of his body natural "it smells of mortality". And throughout Lear we are made to share (with Kent and Gloster and Lear) the sense that such dissolution means the end of time, "the promised end". But—and this is the strange power of the conclusion—the truth is different. The Dignity falls on Edgar, in all the misery of regal mortality and the death of good men and women, life continues; we see that continuity must be accounted for even in tragedy. Aquinas says that without revelation (and revelation is excluded from Lear) we could not know that the world ever had a beginning; without it we should be sure enough of misery, but not of an end. What we have in Lear is not an end but a bleak perpetuity of the dignity.

Now kingship, a topic which so preoccupied Shakespeare, is not the only instance of his application of the concept of *aevum* to continuity in human affairs. We have seen that he applied it also to the justice: he dies but his office does not. Above all, perhaps, it applied to the Empire. The Virgilian *imperium sine fine* began with Augustus, sometimes called the first vicar of Christ, and the Empire thenceforward was coeval with the Church. Since the power of *imperium* was held to be conferred by the Roman people, the people also never died; its *maiestas* was continuous, transmitted to the peoples of every kingdom which claimed the rights of the Roman *imperium*. Thus, in England, which had not the Roman law but which under Elizabeth carefully imported the main elements of European imperial mythology, it was held that the Queen wore the *dignitas* of Augustus and of Constantine. In two plays Shakespeare interests himself deeply, but with some obliquity, in the nature of Empire. In *Antony and Cleopatra* we may take the hint from Caesar's prophecy of the "time of universal peace" (iv. vi. 4) his reign will bring; indeed it brought the birth of Christ and the extinction of pagan time, represented by Antony and Cleopatra in their masks as Isis and Osiris (for Shakespeare knew more Plutarch

1 Kantorowicz, chapter vi.
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than the Lives). Cymbeline, set at the time of the birth of Christ, describes the reception into Britain of Roman civility and establishes as from that earliest possible moment the British share of the Roman maiestas now devolving upon the imperial James.

I do not mean to imply that Shakespeare unambiguously celebrates these regal and imperial continuities. In fact, the situation of the incumbent of the dignitas strikes him rather as humanly appalling, and no one could say that he tried to make the founder of the imperial dignity humanly attractive; the majesty that dies is what we remember from Antony and Cleopatra. The point is that these are poetic meditations on a learned theme, a philosophico-legal complex.

Now the twin-natured incumbent of the dignitas was held to be unique, in that he was both species and individual. The nearest analogues were in the Trinity, in angelology, and in the bestiary, from which was drawn, as emblem of the doctrine, the Phoenix. This bird was both mortal and immortal, its own father and son. It stood for perpetuity in mortality, and had a long connection with the idea of perpetual dignity. Coins of Valentinian II (375–392) show a phoenix and the legend Perpetuetas. The same emblem served the French and English dynasties in Shakespeare’s time; it had a special propriety in the case of Elizabeth, since it also stood for virginity. The Phoenix was sexless or hermaphrodite, according to Lactantius, the great source of its lore: "femina seu mas sit seu neutrum seu sit utrumque"; he also insists on its virginity: "felix quae Veneris foedera nulla colit".

1 In Plutarch’s account of the myth, Isis is the material female principle, receptive of all form, and Osiris is form. They are like Venus and Adonis in Spenser’s Garden of Adonis, (F. Q., III. vi). She is Egypt, and he the fertilizing Nile-water. Typhon, the destroyer, is dryness. But as crocodile he is both Sun-emperor and destroyer (like Octavius). Crocodiles are also predictors of the future. Osiris Plutarch assimilates with Dionysus (and in the Lives he compares Antony with that god). In the play Antony and Cleopatra think of Octavius as dry and destructive, and as the minister of Chance (Here there is also an allusion to the theme of fortuna imperatoris). We are expected to see him as the agent of providence, the herald of a new era and, incidentally, the first incumbent of the Dignitas currently enjoyed by James I.

2 Kantorowicz, pp. 388–401. Claudian calls the Phoenix "felix heresque tui" (Phoenix, line 101).


4 De Ave Phoenice, lines 163, 164.
The use of the Phoenix in the propaganda of the later Elizabeth—"semper eadem"—has been illustrated by Miss Frances Yates.\textsuperscript{1} And half a century later the medal struck by English royalists to commemorate the death of Charles I showed the dead king on the obverse, and on the reverse a phoenix rising from its ashes and representing the immortal dignity.\textsuperscript{2} Later the bird became the emblem of the British and American insurance house, signifying an \textit{aevum} (sustained by your premiums) in which property, mortal in individual cases, achieves perpetuity as a species. This by no means exhausts the figurative significances of the phoenix; it stood also for "felix renovatio temporum", as Elizabeth remembered; and it was also the bird of the \textit{saeculum}, the century—Milton’s "secular bird".\textsuperscript{3} It was the king or emperor of all the other birds, and is sometimes, as by Claudian represented as receiving the praise and devotion of the others:

\begin{quote}
convenient aquilae cunctaeque ex orbe volucres
ut Solis mirentur avem.\textsuperscript{4}
\end{quote}

The Phoenix, then, concentrates clusters of learned themes. What did Shakespeare make of it? He was evidently preoccupied by problems of continuity and \textit{dignitas}, and he alludes rather frequently to the Phoenix, sometimes with glancing familiarity, as when Iachimo calls Imogen "the Arabian bird", meaning that she is unique, the most chaste of women. Cranmer’s speech at the baptism of Elizabeth in \textit{Henry VIII} makes James I the heir who will arise from the queen’s virgin ashes; a prophecy by hindsight not only of her virginity but of the unusual transmission of the dignity to a new dynasty. But there is nothing greatly out of the way in that passage, whether or no Shakespeare wrote it; whereas everybody agrees that "The Phoenix and the Turtle" is out of the way.

\textsuperscript{2} Kantorowicz, p. 413. For the Phoenix as \textit{βασιλεύς} see Jean Hubay and Maxime Leroy, \textit{Le Mythe du Phénix} (Bibliothèque de la Faculté de Philosophie et Lettres de l’Université de Liège, lxxxii, 1939), p. 130; and Claudian, \textit{Phoenix}, lines 83-88.
\textsuperscript{3} Hubay-Leroy, p. 218.
\textsuperscript{4} \textit{Ad Stilichonem}, ii. 418-19; Hubay-Leroy, p. 129.
I take it we should agree that there is not much to be learned about Shakespeare’s poem from the other poems in *Loves Martyr*. Chester, of course, was responsible for introducing the Turtle into what might seem the self-sufficient life of the Phoenix. Nobody has ever succeeded in saying what Chester’s poem is about. If he is really talking about the marriage of Sir John Salisbury, it follows, as Chambers observed, that Shakespeare did not read the poem closely, since the marriage was not childless.¹ In Chester the two birds discuss true love, and then, Turtle first, throw themselves on a pyre in the expectation of some even better Phoenix from the ashes. Before this, Nature, before bringing the birds together, offers the Phoenix a survey of English history, and especially of King Arthur’s life (King Arthur was a notable Phoenix; he rose again as a Tudor king). At the end of the poem the Pelican confusedly argues that the Phoenix, though unique, is improved by union with a bird symbolising constancy, which will give the new Phoenix what it surely should not have lacked, “lore and chastitie”.² Chester’s poem is obviously one which remains confused about its occasion, and for this reason (and, I suspect, his having cleared out his desk and fitted all the extraneous matter into the long poem) it is likely to remain a kind of Bottom’s Dream. But some better poets added verses on the theme. The first, Ignoto, ignores the Turtle and stresses only the uniqueness and self-perpetuation of the Phoenix (“Her rare-dead ashes fill a rare-liue urn”).³ The second is Shakespeare. Marston, following him, briefly mentions the turtle, but then embarks on a crabbed celebration of the new Phoenix, “God, Man, nor Woman”,⁴ (recalling the passage of Lactantius already quoted). Chapman, though celebrating “the male Turtle,” dwells only on the perfection of his beloved “Whome no prowde flockes of other Foules could moue, But in her selfe all companie concluded”.⁵ Jonson lengthily celebrates voluntary chastity, and the constancy of “a person like our *Dowe*”⁶ to his phoenix. None of them

³ Grosart, p. 181.
⁴ Ibid. p. 185.
⁵ Ibid. p. 188.
⁶ Ibid. p. 193.
needed more than the title and a hazy idea of the contents of Chester's poem. Some of Marston's hyperbole suggests that he must be thinking of the queen, though one cannot be certain of that in the age of Donne's *Anniversaries*; and if one wanted to develop the point one would have to use the Pelican's speech, since the Pelican was another of Elizabeth's birds. I doubt, indeed, whether all the contempt poured on Grosart's theory, that the poem has to do with the queen and Essex, is justified; Chester could just have been talking about the death of Essex and the almost mortal grief of the queen, and the other poets could have had it in mind.

But we had better not depend on the other contributors. It seems likely enough, of course, that writing at the end of a reign (and the end of a century) the poets, invited to reflect for whatever occasion, on the Phoenix, would remember the old queen, her body natural in decay, her dignity seeming all too mortal in the uncertainty of the succession (she would hardly, like Shakespeare's Cranmer, think of James of Scotland in that way). Yet the only one of these learned men who really did meditate the Phoenix emblem, consider all its deep meanings, was Shakespeare.

Here the Antheme doth commence:

Loue and Constancie is dead;
Phoenix and the Turtle fled
In a mutuall flame from hence.

So they loued, as loue in twaine,
Had the essence but in one;
Two distincts, Division none;
Number there in loue was slaine.

Hearts remote, yet not asunder;
Distance, and no space was seen,
'Twixt the Turtle and his Queene:
But in them it were a wonder.

So betwixt them Loue did shine,
That the Turtle saw his right,
Flaming in the Phoenix sight;
Either was the other's mine.

Propertie was thus appalled,
That the selfe was not the same:
Single Natures double name
Neither two nor one was called.
How did he go about it? He must have known Lactantius, as T. W. Baldwin argues, and he would also remember the parrot in Ovid (Amores, II. 6). Baldwin says that the poem is about married chastity, and a charming variation, in the Lactantian vein, on Ovid’s parrot and the sparrow of Catullus. And certainly the old phoenix is there, with its “wondrous voice,” inimitable even by the nightingale or the dying swan; its lack of sex, its chorus of birds. Above all, Lactantius is present, in the poem, when it says that “the selfe was not the same”; “ipse quidem sed non eadem est, eademque nec ipsa est.” Translating this, Shakespeare rather characteristically plays on the two parts of the English word selfsame, achieving by a sort of pun what Lactantius does by profuse repetition. On these words of Lactantius, quoted by Shakespeare, depends most of the traditional emblematic quality of the phoenix as continuity in the aevum.

So we are here very close to a large and difficult body of learning, one in which, as we have seen, Shakespeare elsewhere showed some interest. And his language in the poem is obviously learned. No one has written about it so well as J. V. Cunningham; indeed, his is the best essay ever written on this poem. He shows that the terminology is borrowed from scholastic enquiries into the Trinity, where you have to go to find “distinct

1 See, for a lengthy analysis, T. W. Baldwin, Literary Genetics of Shakespeare’s Poems, pp. 363 ff.
2 De Ave Phoenice, line 169. As elsewhere in the poem, there are many variant readings, including “Est eadem sed non eadem, quae est ipsa nec ipsa est”, which is preferred by Hubay-Leroy.
persons” with only one essence. “Two distincts, Division none”—as Aquinas observes, “to avoid the Arian heresy... we must avoid the terms diversity and difference so as not to take away the unity of essence; we can, however, use the term distinction... we must [also] avoid the terms separation and division, which apply to parts of a whole...” (S.T., I. 31. 2). “Number” is “slain” because plurality is a consequence of division; as the mathematicians said, “One is no number”. “Distance and no space” is from the argument for the co-eternity of the Persons of the Trinity. “Property” (the proprioium) is the quality that distinguishes separate persons; it is “appalled” in Shakespeare because what ought to characterize only one person here characterizes two. But the English word can hardly be used purely in this sense, and the less technical reference to matters of meum and tuum is here also present, outraged because of this ideal commonwealth (“either was the other’s mine”). “Reason” is confounded because it has to work by division, and in these “distincts” there is no “division”. Love has achieved what Reason cannot.

So St. Thomas is also behind the poem. Cunningham refers to the Summa Theologica, I. 31, “de his quae ad unitatem vel pluralitatem pertinent in divinis”. The Thomist paradoxes and distinctions become strained, even tragic, because of the difficulty of making such points in English. Aquinas can develop distinctions between alium and alienum, alius and aliud, the first relating to a difference secundum personas, the second to a difference secundum essentiam (I. 21. 2). For the momentary establishment of such distinctions Shakespeare torments English terminology; it is a learned and sombrely witty torture.

Yet even granting that, we may be reluctant to think of Shakespeare as working with the Summa open before him. How, then, did he know about this? The answer is that this scholastic terminology persisted and was in common enough use. To speak of the Father and Son as distinct Persons with but one essence was familiar theology—Hooker, as Cunningham reports, even says that “their distinction cannot admit separation”.1 And when Bacon wanted for a legal purpose to argue that “it is

1 Cunningham, p. 87.
one thing to make things distinct, another to make them separable," he clinches the point with a scholastic tag: "aliud est distinctio, aliud separatio." 1

Bacon's argument occurred in a plea of 1608. The question was whether natives of either Scotland or England, born after the accession of James I, should be naturalized in both kingdoms. The King's natural body, reasons Bacon, operates upon his body politic, so that although his bodies politic as King of England and King of Scotland "be several and distinct, yet nevertheless his natural person, which is one... createth a privity between them". 2 Because of this privity, a Scots subject of the king's natural person must also be a subject of his English body politic. His person and crown are "inseparable though distinct", like the persons of the Trinity. The language which a contemplation of the Phoenix educes from Shakespeare is, in short, a language based upon certain paradoxes still indispensable to theology and constitutional law. Spenser, as I have argued elsewhere, was interested in them; and now it seems clear that Shakespeare, invited to dwell upon the Phoenix, related it to precisely this complex of paradoxes concerning continuity, number, property, and so forth. They derive from scholastic thought, but are variously associated with the figure of the Phoenix, which makes them available in many contexts: dynastic, imperial, legal, constitutional. They can suggest the Tudor renovation, the virginity of the last Tudor, the end of a century and a dynasty. Who can say whether some particular aspect of all this was in Shakespeare's mind? It seems almost impossible that he shut out from his mind all the broader implications of the theme: the end of the century, for which the secular bird could stand; the decay of the Phoenix Elizabeth, with no certainty, in 1601, of the survival of her Dignity. Perhaps he uses the strange intrusive dove, as a figure for the hermaphroditic relation of the Queen's two bodies.

And yet for our present purposes it is enough to say that he gave in this poem a rather strict metaphysical expression to concepts—the aeivum, the dignity, the double name of natural beings—

1 "Case of the Postnati of Scotland ", in Works, ed. Spedding, Ellis, and Heath (1861), xv. 234.  
2 Ibid. p. 227.
which had long interested him. Perhaps he was, after all, as the editions say, thinking of a chastely married pair, and that from such a point of departure all the rest was made to follow. But this sequel is what concerns us. It is learned, but not so learned that only a scholar could possess the materials of which it is made; its language, though wrought from a technical vocabulary, is free-standing, the language of a poet and not of a scholar, the language of a man whose craft is learned but not scholarly.

I have gone a long way about to make this point, which is the centre of my argument. We do not need to think of a very learned Shakespeare, but we do need to think of a Shakespeare who was capable of an intense interest—intense, yet sometimes at the same time wanton or even perverse—in the formulae of learning: a strong-minded, wilful, private, reading man. This is at any rate a way out of the old dilemma; if you measure his learning or his mind by some entirely inappropriate calculus, he emerges as a natural, all wit and no art, or, on the other hand, as the slave of familiar text books and homiletic commonplaces, all art and no wits. What we shall have instead in a plausible representation of a great poet: a speculative, interested man, a man of great intellectual force, who employs that force in poetry.