in courses in moral philosophy at the University of Virginia, but not until 1857 did a separate course on Shakespeare appear in the school of history and general literature. Cornell University had a course in Shakespeare by 1868; Princeton, 1869; Johns Hopkins, 1877; and Columbia, 1882. The first PhD degree for a dissertation on Shakespeare went to Robert Grant of Harvard University in 1876 for his work on the Sonnets; the second PhD for work on Shakespeare went to S. B. Weeks, who graduated in 1888 from the University of North Carolina. Interestingly, a number of American and English students received PhD degrees from German universities for their studies of Shakespeare during this same period.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the teaching of Shakespeare became widespread in the United States, with most schools offering at least one play as part of the curriculum. One teacher in particular helped move the teaching of Shakespeare away from its early, somewhat narrow concerns: George Lyman Kittredge, a popular teacher at Harvard for nearly fifty years (1888–1936). Although no one excelled Kittredge in knowledge about Shakespeare's language, his approach in the classroom was not strictly philological; he emphasized an understanding and appreciation of Shakespeare's dramatic artistry. Not surprisingly, the growth of research about Shakespeare has gone hand in hand with the expansion of the teaching of Shakespeare. The productive critics and scholars of the past few decades have been, for the most part, teachers of Shakespeare. This contrasts with the general situation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when many of the critics were poets, men of letters, or simply amateur lovers of literature.

SOME CRITICAL APPROACHES

In defining some of the critical approaches to Shakespeare, one must be aware that most critics fit into more than one school of criticism. One senses a growing awareness of the need for eclectic criticism; that is, criticism that uses several different methods in interpreting Shakespeare. A sobering account and analysis of recent criticism can be found in Richard Levin's *New Readings vs. Old Plays: Recent Trends in the Reinterpretation of English Renaissance Drama* (U of Chicago P, 1979), much of which focuses on Shakespeare. Even if one does not entirely agree with Levin's sometimes bleak assessment, one has to admit that he makes some telling points about excesses in criticism. Brian Vickers in *Appropriating Shakespeare: Contemporary Critical Quarrels* (Yale UP, 1993) also assesses contemporary criticism and finds much of it wanting. Often the problem boils down to the mistaken and regrettable view that some *one* method exists that will yield the best results or even reveal the truth.

The diversity of Shakespearean scholarship and criticism becomes apparent in chapter 2, but it might be helpful to outline and group some of the types of modern criticism.

HISTORICAL CRITICISM

We can call one large category of criticism *historical,* with its several subcategories. The emphasis on history comes partly as a reaction to the excesses of a highly romanticized, somewhat sentimental Shakespeare who emerged from some nineteenth-century criticism, which often took no note of the context in which Shakespeare wrote. Historical criticism ideally steers a course between a Shakespeare exclusively Elizabethan, whom we can apprehend only if we become Elizabethans, and Shakespeare our contemporary. This approach has validity only insofar as it leads us into the plays and poems. Context cannot substitute for text.

Biography constitutes one major area of historical research. What facts do we have of Shakespeare's life? Who constituted his family and friends? What was life like in Stratford, in London? Documents discovered in this century have filled in some of the gaps, and a large number of biographies have been written. The pursuit of the life of the world's best-known writer seems valid in and of itself, though some biographies have contributed little to our store of knowledge. With hard facts about Shakespeare frustratingly few, many critics have searched the works themselves to try to gather information about the man. But such an approach abandons historical criticism in favor of a more speculative and conjectural procedure.

Much effort has gone into getting an accurate picture of the social, economic, political, intellectual, and cultural life of the

Shakespearean era. Today we have a better-informed view than did those in earlier centuries. As a man who came under royal patronage in 1603, Shakespeare had to be keenly aware of the political world; but whether he set out in his histories to offer political propaganda or teachings remains open to debate. The strong nationalism of the Elizabethan reign, which can be easily documented, must have had some impact on Shakespeare. Whether he understood economic theory, he surely understood practical finance, for we can now document his economic success and his property holdings. The social and economic rise of actors and dramatists adds another variable to the historical equation, providing new status to a group that had been deemed vagabonds. Knowledge of the sports and customs of the people helps in understanding parts of particular plays and the whole impulse toward dramatic entertainment. Shakespeare's philosophical assumptions and predilections also make a difference in his drama, but how do we know them? By reading his literary and philosophical contemporaries, a number of scholars have drawn a composite, a paradigm, of what the "worldview" might have been. But to claim that Shakespeare himself adhered to any system seems problematical, and the "evidence" from the plays kicks up about as much dust as it settles. Certainly Elizabethan ideas about the scientific, moral, political, and psychological world differ from twentieth-century assumptions. Historical knowledge of such areas at least provides a hedge against egregious error, though it does not provide any sure-fire interpretation. Again, we must somehow understand the dramatist's context without believing that it provides the only means by which he can be understood and enjoyed.

Influenced by anthropology, Marxism, or political ideology, a number of critics have been moved to consider what defines history. Is it a construct of facts, of paradigms, or is it much more problematical? These critics, sometimes labeled neohistoricists, insist that no opposition exists between literature and history; indeed, literature helps create society. This idea differs radically from older historical assumptions that Shakespeare's work reflected society, such as that found in E. M. W. Tillyard's perspective. Critics engaged in the new historicism hope to escape the trap of reductionism that afflicts some earlier historical studies. Instead of searching for a paradigm, the newer critics focus on the complex and sometimes indeterminate nature of Renaissance culture. They explore the interaction between state and culture, often finding the theater to be a prime location for the representation and legitimation of power. The new historicism witnesses a convergence of concern for politics, cultural anthropology, historical fact, and literary theory, and an expanding awareness of the function of literature in society.

THEATRICAL CRITICISM

Knowing the historical details of the era also involves learning about the *theater.* The major research on the theaters, acting companies, and actors has occurred in the twentieth century; previous criticism had largely ignored the Elizabethan theater. Yet Shakespeare, as a complete man of the theater, had to face practical, day-to-day problems that in many ways shaped his art. The presence of actor Richard Burbage in Shakespeare's group helped make possible such great tragic roles as Hamlet, Lear, Othello, and Macbeth. One obviously does not create dramatic roles that no one in the company can play.

What were the theater buildings like? What advantages, what limitations, did they offer? Clearly the jutting platform stage made the soliloquy and the aside plausible dramatic devices because it placed the actor in close proximity to members of the audience, allowing him to communicate confidentially with them. What, if anything, happened to Shakespeare's drama when the King's Men also began to perform regularly at the private, indoor Blackfriars Theater in addition to the Globe Theater? Critics occasionally observe that Shakespeare wrote for the box office, and he certainly appealed to the audiences. But who made up the audiences—what social and economic groups with what tastes and expectations? Further, what about Shakespeare's fellow dramatists? How well did he know them and their work? What influence did they have on him? With whom did he collaborate? Learning more about the drama of the time means understanding that many of Shakespeare's dramatic conventions and techniques derived from widely accepted practices.

Another approach of theatrical criticism explores the stage history of plays since the seventeenth century and documents changing stage traditions and interpretations. How the great actors of the past have come to terms with Shakespearean characters reveals dimensions and subtleties that may not have been appreciated before. The staging of plays can involve historical study as one tries to reconstruct the likely performance in the Elizabethan theater, or it can be immediately practical, as in the mounting of a contemporary production. Much of performance criticism has focused on the practical problems of mounting a performance. Either way, one has to grapple with and resolve certain issues that a reader may simply pass over. For example, how does one stage the supposed plunging of Gloucester from the cliff at Dover in *King Lear*? And what about the Ghost in *Hamlet*—should he be a character on stage or an offstage voice? Theater criticism in particular attempts to answer an almost endless list of such questions.

A subcategory includes film and television. The twentieth century has created these new ways of producing Shakespeare, and the critical interpretations of certain films and film directors have multiplied. The BBC Shakespeare series for television has made the plays available to millions of people worldwide. Critics try to assess the contribution and limitations of this new form, including how film and television versions compare with stage productions.

GENRE CRITICISM

As the evidence in chapter 2 suggests, a vast amount of critical energy has been expended in the study of the *genres:* comedy, history, tragedy, and sonnet. Critics often create subcategories within the genres, such as problem comedies, satirical tragedies, Roman plays, Romances, pastoral comedies, tragicomedies. We have yet to reach the full extent of Polonius's famous list of such forms in *Hamlet.* What definitions and practical understanding of these forms prevailed in the Elizabethan period? Did Aristotle's critical theory of tragedy or that of the Italian critics of the sixteenth century influence practitioners of the art? How does Shakespearean tragedy differ from Aristotle's description or our knowledge of Greek tragedy? We may observe that *Romeo and Juliet* differs from the later tragedy *Hamlet.* Does this reveal some sort of development in Shakespeare's practice of writing tragedies? Similar questions can be raised about the other genres. Comedy may be defined by its themes, structure, and form; or one might emphasize the comic characters as the most distinguishing feature of these plays. How do Shakespeare's comedies differ from, say, Jonson's in spirit and in form? What defines a history play, and what about its precursors? Who else wrote plays about English history? Conceivably, Shakespeare had little systematic theory of form, being more concerned with getting another play finished than with whether it fit some conception of genre. Some critics have suggested that we should not refer to Shakespearean tragedy or comedy but, instead, to Shakespearean tragedies or comedies—that each has an independent existence not tied to those that went before or came after. Whatever conclusions we reach about Shakespeare's critical knowledge of literary theory, we can safely assume that he did not first immerse himself in critical treatises and then proceed to write.

An increasing number of studies challenge the notion that genre differentiation depends on fixed, stable boundaries. We have been aware for quite a while that violations of genre boundary occur often in Shakespeare—comic elements in tragedy, tragic elements in comedy, for example—but only in the last few years have critics turned their attention to mixed forms to understand the double problem of boundary definition and genre differentiation. This problem can be tackled from a variety of critical approaches and methods. Historical criticism helps us understand genre theory in the Renaissance. Other critics have focused on the archaic or archeological strata embedded in the works themselves, thus helping us understand the ways in which Shakespeare both represents and departs from inherited patterns. Many interesting questions have been posed: to what extent does one form or genre develop in opposition to another? How do comedy and tragedy overlap in terms of structure? Where does romance fit with the other genres? The influence of poststructuralist and deconstructionist critics has been felt, particularly in the notion that the text simultaneously erects and erases boundaries in a process often re-

ferred to as "closure." The full implications of genre boundary and differentiation studies remain to be determined.

ANALYSES OF LANGUAGE AND IMAGERY

Partly in reaction to excesses of pedantic biographical and historical criticism, a wave designated "new criticism" hit the critical shores in the early decades of the twentieth century. It places priority on the intensive exploration of poetic *language* (and, of course, encompasses much more than just Shakespearean criticism). Proponents of new criticism believe that the reader ought not be so concerned with biography or the historical milieu in which the writer wrote; instead, the sensitive reader should respond to the drama (or whatever) as poetry. To oversimplify, the reader ideally sits down with no other paraphernalia than the text itself (probably shorn of footnotes) and comes to terms with the work of art. The potential rewards and risks seem quite great. Such an approach reminds us that Shakespeare excelled as a master poet, but it risks forgetting that he functioned also as a master dramatist. At its most extreme, this critical method makes each play an expanded metaphysical poem. Probably no other school of criticism, however, has had so profound an impact on the practical matter of teaching Shakespeare. It has led to specialized studies of Shakespeare's verse—meter and rhythm—and how these elements contribute to our apprehending the poetic meaning. A number of books and essays have explored the intricacies of Shakespeare's language—his use of word play, ambiguity, paradox, verbal irony. The design of the Elizabethan theater itself encouraged an emphasis on language, as it provided a platform stage that allowed the audience to focus fully on what the actors said. The drama could thus in the best sense be deemed "wordy." With limited printing and limited literacy, this era emphasized oral communication, with the theater functioning as an obvious manifestation. Sensitivity to the word governed those who sat or stood in the Globe.

The work on language includes the study and analysis of *imagery.* This critical approach got its greatest impetus in the 1930s, when several seminal studies appeared. Today, commenting on the plays' images has become a widespread practice, and many books pursue this particular critical method. Some studies have examined or isolated individual images or groups of images, documenting, for example, the extensive sun imagery in *Richard II,* disease imagery in *Hamlet,* and garden imagery in the history plays. Patterns of repeated imagery, often referred to as iterative images, reveal a meaningful order. Or particular images may be grouped together several times in a play. Some critics seize on a single image as shaping the whole structure. For example, the image of evil in *Richard III* may be so pervasive as to imply an ordering of the play around it.

The dramatist obviously uses images to comment on theme and character. One cannot recall the image of Richard II as "glistering Phaeton" without understanding something about his dramatic character, or the constant images of storm that accompany Lear without perceiving that they reflect the tempest in his mind. In other words, seldom does Shakespeare use images merely as decoration; they have some dramatic function. Recent studies have underscored the significance of visual images produced in the staging of the plays—gestures, poses, costume. As Richard and Bolingbroke together momentarily hold the crown in Act IV of *Richard II,* they offer a striking emblem of the struggle for kingship and testify to the compelling power invested in the symbol of the crown. The larger view of Shakespeare's imagery has attempted to trace his development as a dramatist through his use of imagery: from early, fitful moments when the images seem mainly decorative to the full integration of images with dramatic action, character, and theme.

Reacting to these traditional views of language, one critical movement, referred to as poststructuralism or deconstruction, focuses on differences, oppositions, and antitheses as it asks ever more challenging questions about the ways in which the text differs from itself. Questioning, probing, and reading against the grain of the text's language, poststructuralists examine the means by which the text achieves stability. Deconstruction focuses on such oppositions as writing/speech, signifier/signified, literature/criticism, reader/writer and challenges the desire for unity, a center, and metaphysical truths. Although unable to escape this desire for unity and center, we must recognize that the centering equilibrium exists only for a moment. Poststructuralism challenges many traditional assump-

tions about language, imagery, text, and literature itself. A number of studies using poststructuralist strategies with regard to Shakespeare have appeared.

THE STUDY OF CHARACTER

In addition to matters of generic form and language, many critics concentrate on the study of *character.* Indeed, this may be one of the oldest critical approaches. Analysis of character inextricably links with the nature of drama itself. Although Aristotle insists that plot constitutes the soul of drama, the experiences of readers and theatergoers suggest that a striking character may be the most memorable element of a drama. The characters seem so real that some critics choose to discuss them as if they are real rather than fictional persons, or as if they have an existence beyond the play. An extreme case occurred in a mid-nineteenth-century study of the childhoods of Shakespeare's female characters. Obviously, one potential problem with this critical approach emerges as a variation of "woods-for-treeism," that is, gaining a dominant character but losing the whole play. What motivates Iago? What causes the sudden onslaught of irrational jealousy in Leontes? The questions could continue, since we obviously have a keen interest in character motivation. How much ink has been spilled trying to explain what Hamlet does (or doesn't) and why he does it (or doesn't)? Judging by what has been written, Hamlet remains perhaps the most fascinating character in all of Western literature—an extraordinary testimony to the creation of character.

PSYCHOLOGICAL CRITICISM

Concern for character leads to *psychological* criticism. The complex psychology of character in Renaissance drama, and in Shakespeare in particular, remains one of the striking features that sets it apart from medieval drama. Thanks to Freud, we can rather casually hold the opinion, whether valid or not, that Hamlet suffers from the Oedipus complex (Freud drew generously from Shakespeare in his writings). Psychoanalytical criticism has thrown off sparks of illumination, but whether they catch fire or merely fizzle often depends on how well the critic remembers that these are fictional characters. Complications occur because of the characters' inability to respond to psychoanalytical questioning except in the voices and words that the dramatist has given them. Some studies have sought to define Renaissance psychology and then view the plays in that light. In order to understand many of the references in the plays, one needs a rudimentary knowledge of Elizabethan psychology—the theory of the humors, for example. But reading all the Renaissance treatises on melancholy cannot finally explain our reaction to Hamlet or the construction of his character.

Recent psychological studies have focused on such questions as identity, doubling, sexuality, and personality development. Inevitably, some critics have examined family structure and its psychological implications: problems of parent-child relationships, paternal narcissism, fratricidal rivalry, and especially father-daughter bonds. Some less well-founded studies have attempted to move from the plays to say something about the psychological development of Shakespeare himself. Obviously, psychological understanding of the characters has informed theatrical productions of the plays.

THEMATIC AND MYTHIC CRITICISM

In a pursuit of *thematic* criticism, a small but controversial group of critics has taken what can be termed the "Christian" approach to Shakespeare. For generations, Shakespeare has been examined for the instruction he has to offer about righteous living. Indeed, in the early days of teaching his plays, this became one of the purposes. For some time, preachers with varying degrees of actual knowledge have borrowed freely from Shakespeare, usually a quotation to drive home a point. Much of the early response includes the notion that to be a good writer one must first be a good man. Shakespeare grew up in the midst of a solidly Christian culture; but we know nothing about his personal religious practices or beliefs except that he was baptized, married, and buried in the Church of England. Studies have indicated Shakespeare's extensive knowledge of the Bible as reflected in his plays and poems; that provokes no controversy. When critics interpret a work in specific Christian

theological terms difficulty ensues. Do the endings of certain plays or the overall themes seem specifically Christian? Does the Duke in *Measure for Measure* represent God's providence? Does Othello find salvation? One could go on raising such debatable questions. The whole nature of "Christian tragedy" is critically vexing, and the idea seems contradictory to some. The Romances have been read as religious allegories; Christ symbols have been found here and there. The pitfalls of this particular critical approach should be obvious without denying that, in its more sensible moments, it has provided new perspectives on the plays. Other critics have examined dramatic themes not necessarily colored by religion, including jealousy, justice, love, education, patience, duty, moral obligation, suffering, revenge, transformation, reconciliation, politics, substitution, inheritance, and greed. Thematic criticism argues for the importance of ideas in the plays.

Mythic criticism asserts that Shakespeare participates in and reflects myths common to different civilizations. Drama itself seems a form of ritual, or at least it contains ritualistic qualities as it establishes a participatory relationship between actors and audience. Shakespeare's use of classical myths and ancient mythology appears obvious in the plays. On occasion, he seems to have had a specific myth in mind that ordered and structured the play, such as his dependence on the Pyramus and Thisbe and the Venus and Adonis stories. The legends of King Lear and Cymbeline come from a shadowy pseudohistory that Shakespeare fashions into drama. Critics have found, especially in the comedies or in a figure such as Falstaff, reflections and embodiments of a Saturnalian myth. The whole process of social and holiday indulgence may reflect customs and practices current in Shakespeare's own time. The necessary aesthetic distinctions between a holiday occasion and formal drama have led to fascinating criticism. The myth of the seasons has been seen to underlie the nature of comedy and tragedy, with the winter's tale of tragedy in opposition to the summer, life-renewing spirit of comedy. Such criticism explores issues of anthropology and collective psychology. This mode of analysis runs the risk, as do other methods, of forgetting the theater. But if these critical approaches even approximate the truth, they should give the lie, once and for all, to the idea that Shakespeare wrote as an untutored genius.

FEMINIST AND GENDER CRITICISM

The 1980s witnessed an explosion in book-length studies that analyze Shakespeare from a *feminist* perspective or that at least have a *gender-based* approach to his works. Feminist criticism confronts two primary questions: what does it mean to be a female character in Shakespeare's fictional world, and what does it mean to be a female reader of Shakespeare at the end of the twentieth century? The first question had been broached earlier, but not in a satisfactory or sophisticated manner. As a result of these fundamental questions, feminist criticism has relied heavily on historical and psychological approaches. Thus, a number of critics have tried to ascertain the position and plight of women in Shakespeare's time: what social conditions prevailed? What influence did women exercise in marriage, in commerce, in politics? What effect did the system of patriarchy have on women?

If one can answer these questions—and they are not as simple or straightforward as they seem—then how does one square this understanding with the way Shakespeare portrays women in his works? Do the plays reflect the actual world, contradict it, criticize it, or what? Does Shakespeare show sympathy toward women in ways that his society and his contemporaries did not? Could he be a feminist? What does it mean if some of Shakespeare's female characters appear strong and powerful when the historical record indicates that society expected women to be meek and docile?

Feminist critics have also explored on a psychological basis what it meant or means to be a woman. Can some feminine principle be recognized and defined that operates in the plays? Do the males feel threatened, endangered psychologically, by the presence of this opposing force? What does it mean to the male characters that women have the power of birth, given to them by nature? Do women envy men, desiring their aggressiveness and prowess? What role do female characters play in sexual relationships? What defines the father-daughter bond?

Additionally, feminist critics have tried to assess the relationship

between gender and genre. Some have argued that the plays depict comic women and tragic men because one generic form seems particularly compatible with the feminine principle and the other suits the masculine perspective. But how do gender and genre connect in mixed forms, such as the history plays and the Romances? Does understanding gender help us interpret the structure of the plays? Do some particularly strong women cross generic boundaries?

The studies listed and discussed in chapter 2 reveal the diversity of the questions raised and approaches tried by feminist critics. Also, part of the contribution of such critics has been simply to counteract decades of male bias and insensitivity in the practice of criticism.

CULTURAL STUDY

Emerging in part from feminist and historicist studies and influenced by anthropology, *cultural study,* a relatively new critical approach, focuses on cultural practices, those social practices that impinge on the theater. These may include seasonal festivities, courtship rituals, hospitality, human sexuality, and everything in between. What formed the basic understanding of the body from the viewpoints of medicine and of physical desire? What did Shakespeare's society understand about sexuality? How did it regulate sexual practices, and how did the drama express these concerns? What cultural mythmaking appeared in the plays of the period? Why did King James I regularly order noblemen back to their country estates so that they might practice hospitality? How did hospitality and dramatic entertainment intersect? How did conflicts about property rights and social degree affect drama?

Some of these questions scholars and critics have raised with special force in the 1990s. In a way, cultural study amalgamates and appropriates various critical approaches but has a recurring focus on actual social practices. Displaying and reflecting such practices, the Shakespearean theater stands in the vortex of social challenge and change.

TEXTUAL CRITICISM

Another school of criticism deserves attention for its exceptional impact on Shakespearean studies—*textual* criticism. The

practitioners of this form of scholarship have made a major contribution in the twentieth century. Students and other readers are often unconcerned about the nature of the editions they use, and certainly the standard editions mentioned in chapter 2 will not seriously mislead anyone. But such has not always been the case, as in many earlier texts, impressionistically edited and emended according to the editor's whim, whether on poetic or moral grounds. Textual criticism remains an art, though it has developed some objective, scientific methods. Fundamentally, this approach seeks to determine what Shakespeare wrote—not questions of disputed authorship, but literally what he wrote—based on the valid belief that correct understanding and analysis depend on a sound, reliable text. In the history of Shakespearean criticism, a number of examples exist in which the critic relied on a poor and incorrect text, thus damaging interpretation.

Textual criticism, according to Fredson Bowers, confronts at least three major problems. (1) To determine the nature of the printer's copy; that is, whether the printing depended on the author's manuscript, a scribal copy, a promptbook from the theater, and so on. (2) To establish the relationship between all known copies of the text. For example, how do the three different versions of *Hamlet* relate to one another, and which provides the authoritative text on which to construct a sound edition? Or what about a single edition that survives in several copies with variant readings? (3) To understand the nature of the printing process itself in order to know what effect this might have had on the transmission of the text. What typical methods did compositors use to set a page of type? What common work habits can be discerned in a given print shop? Did that shop have one or two presses? Such questions involve descriptive or analytical bibliography, the "science" of the physical makeup of a book. Investigations into the printing process have led to the discovery and identification of the compositors who set the type; frequently their spelling habits and preferences appear in the text, not Shakespeare's. Study of the First Folio has isolated some six or seven different compositors and the portions of the Folio that they set.

All these matters have a profound effect on how the textual editor proceeds. Computers now assist in sorting evidence,