

# Shakespeare's Shade

(1796/1800)

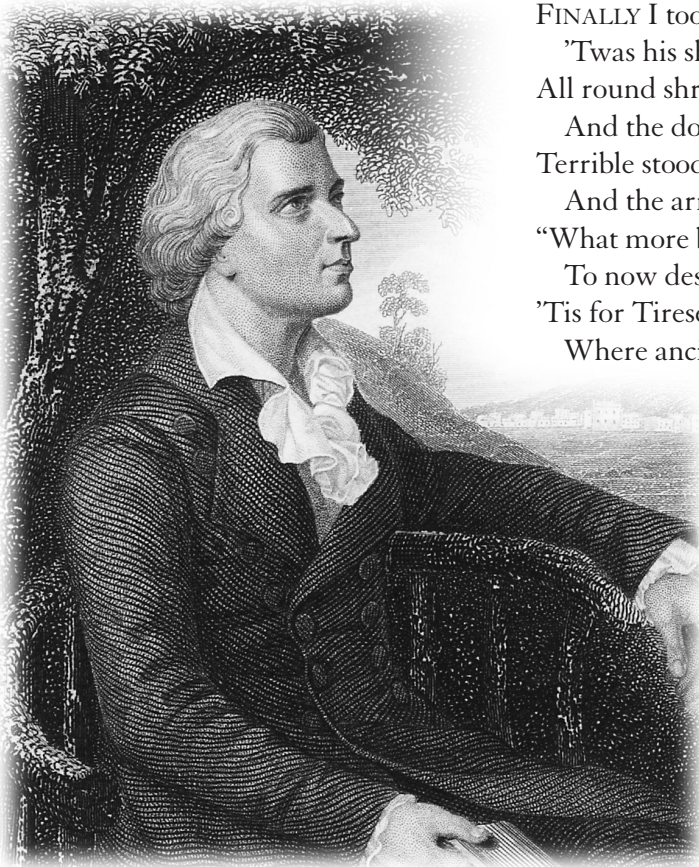
Friedrich Schiller

FRIEDRICH SCHILLER LOVED AND LEARNED *from William Shakespeare, whom he honors in this poetic dialogue on the degeneration of Classical drama. Schiller himself translated Shakespeare's MACBETH into German.*

*"Shakespeare's Shade" is written in the "monodistich" form, which is preserved in this translation. Schiller invented the form, and employed it in hundreds of epigrams, many of just two or four lines, as well as in some longer poems.*

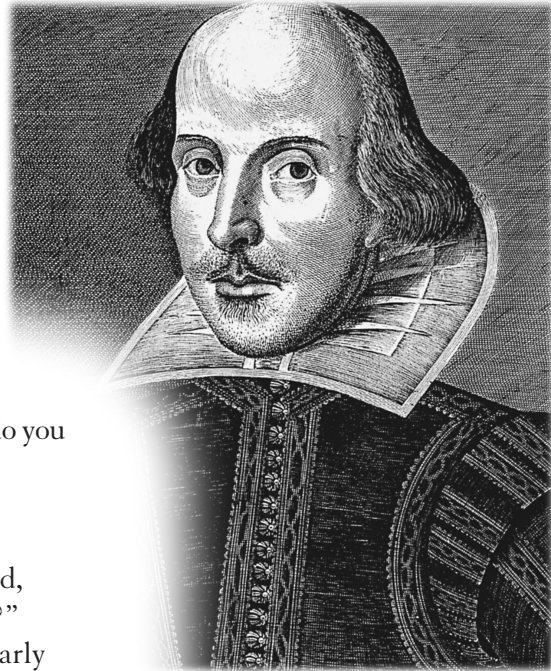
*Schiller wrote an epigram titled "The Distich" to explain the meter, which, as he makes clear, has a natural rising and falling quality in the coupled lines, which is most suitable to short, humorous treatment of subjects, as well as to dialogue:*

*In hexameter climbs the fountain's affluent column.  
In pentameter then falls it melodically down.*



FINALLY I too saw the lofty Hercules' power,  
'Twas his shade there. But he, sadly, could no more be seen.  
All round shriek, like shrieks of a bird, tragedians are shrieking  
And the dog-barking sound of dramaturgists round him.  
Terrible stood the monstrous one there, his bow was extended  
And the arrow on string steadfastly aimed for the heart.  
"What more bold-spirited deed, unlucky one, dare you at present  
To now descend by yourself to the deceased in the grave!"  
'Tis for Tiresius I must go hence, to question the prophet,  
Where ancient buskin I'd find, which is no more to be seen.

*Friedrich Schiller*



*William Shakespeare*

“If they believe not in Nature and Greece o’ the ancients, then do you  
Only vainly attempt thence dramaturgy to bring.”  
O it is Nature, shows up here again on our stages,  
Starkly naked, that one might thereby count every rib.  
“What? Then truly by you the old buskin is still to be sighted,  
Which to fetch I myself climbed down to Tartarus’ night?”  
There’s no more from this tragical ghost. But barely once yearly  
Passes your fiery soul over the boards of the stage.  
“That’s good! Philosophy gave your emotions refinement  
And ’fore the humor so gay flies black emotional state.”  
Yes, there is nothing better than jest that’s unvarnished and robust,  
But even sorrow does please, if it is only but moist.  
“Does one see then with you the nimble dance of Thalia,  
Next to the solemn step with which Melpomene treads?”  
Nothing of either! We only are stirred by the Christian and moral  
And what is downright plain, homely and popular, too.  
“What! No Caesar’s permitted appearance to make on your stages?  
No Achilles, Orestes no more, no Andromeda there?”  
No! One sees with us only parsons, commercial advisers,  
Officers, magistrates, those who lead calvary troops.  
“But, I do beg you my friend, to know wherein then can this mis’ry  
Greatness encounter, how then can what is great happen through them?”  
What? They fashion cabals and they lend on secur’ties, they pilfer  
Ladels of silver plate, venture the pill’ry and more.  
“But then whence do you capture the great, the destiny giant,  
Which does uplift all mankind as it does grind him to dust?”  
These are mere whim! Ourselves and our worthy companions,  
Do our sorrow and need, seek and discover right here.  
“But that you have with more comfort and better at home in your houses!  
Why do you flee from yourselves, if it’s yourselves that you seek?”  
Don’t mistake it, my hero, for that is a different question:  
Destiny, it is blind, and is the poet e’er just.  
“Therefore *your* wretched nature it is that one meets on your stages,  
Only the great never there, only the infinite not?”  
Yet the poet’s the host and the last act’s always the reck’ning:  
Whene’er depravity’s sick, virtue sits down for the meal.

—translated by Marianna Wertz