THE IDEA OF SIN IN SHAKESPEAREAN TRAGEDY

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PREFACE

Of the myriad critical evaluations of Shakespearean drama, all aiming ultimately toward enlightening the reader and enhancing his appreciation, very little effort has been directed toward elucidating one of the most fundamental and indispensable elements in the Shakespearean conception of tragedy: the unique bearing of sin upon the over-all outworking of the tragic ideal--i.e., sin in its special meaning which approaches the extreme theological definition of moral lawlessness rather than a careless, indefinite idea of evil, a distinction amply clarified further on in the thesis. The comparative silence of criticism relative to this problem is more detrimental to the comprehensive appreciation of Shakespeare than a surface perusal of the subject reveals; for sin and lawlessness, to the Elizabethan mind, possessed latent influences and suggested subtle connotations that are so very vital in realizing the fullest significance of the dramatist's desired impression. To discern the full import of those connotations and their significance, one must of necessity be aware of the spiritual, emotional, and intellectual background of the dramatist, as well as his intended audience, in the limited sense, inasmuch as he and his audience are one in spirit as a rule. As an example aside, consider the consequences of such background in relation to the successful total effect of Dryden's brilliant piece of political satire, Absalom and Achitophel, to say nothing of Spencer's Faerie Queene or Milton's Paradise Lost. To be sure, it would be difficult to exaggerate the importance of background in these instances, particularly in the first. Its central message is involved in ambiguity,

meaninglessness to say the least, until the light of its connection with a greater antecedent is focused on the text and upon the subtle overtones of meaning concealed behind the superficial structure of the story. Somewhat in like manner the idea of sin in Shakespeare has subtle overtones of meaning implicit between the lines that are, under the light of proper investigation, illuminated and brought to bear upon the total strength of the tragic impression.

While explaining the relation of this thesis to that problem, a negative word of assurance as to what it does not intend to do may be relevant. Our title, "The Idea of Sin in Shakespearean Tragedy," and what we have considered thus far by way of introduction, is not meant to imply that Shakespeare had a theologically inspired conviction concerning sin which he made a conscious part of his conception of tragedy, and then proceeded to set it forth in his tragedies. Nor shall we attempt to infer the personal mind of the man Shakespeare on the question of sin by the fallacious practice of ferreting out quotations which propose to indicate the man by what he said in his plays. We shall be content to point out certain influences that were significant to the development of the Elizabethan mind and spiritual temperament, which influences must certainly have been instrumental in the formation of Shakespeare's dramatic ideal; and then, most important, to illustrate the reality of this rare treatment of sin in the plays themselves. The first half of the thesis deals, by way of background, with those influences just mentioned, while the burden of the last half is the clear definition of what is meant by tragic sin, along with its actual demonstration in six of the greater Shakespearean plots, the selection of that particular six being explained in the thesis proper.

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CHAPTER I. THE INFLUENCE OF HEBRAISM--AND HELLENISM

The distinguished criticism of Matthew Arnold, probably our most brillant authority on the relationship of literature and dogma, affords possibly the best commentary that we have on the two most fundamental roots of our literary stock--Hebraism and Hellenism. Arnold's discernment of these great parent cultures is of such keenness and fullness that he treats them with an Aristotelian objectivity in defining their qualities, and the influences they still exert upon us. To him Hebraism and Hellenism, great necessities arising out of the wants of human nature, were tendencies toward interpreting Life and Truth, with all that those terms imply, both moving by infinitely different and unequal means toward the perfection and salvation of man. Here he summarily defines the essence of these great diverse ways of life:

> As Hellenism speaks of thinking clearly, seeing things in their essence and beauty, as a grand and precious feat for man to achieve, so Hebraism speaks of becoming conscious of sin, of awakening to a sense of sin, as a feat of this kind.[1]

In more complete treatment he says:

> To get rid of one's ignorance, to see things as they are, and by seeing them as they are to see them in their beauty, is the simple and attractive ideal which Hellenism holds out before human nature; and from the simplicity and charm of this ideal, Hellenism, and human life in the hands of Hellenism, is invested with a kind of aerial ease, clearness, and radiancy; they are full of what we call sweetness and light.... [But] The discipline of the Old Testament [i.e. Hebraism] may be summed up as a discipline teaching us to abhor and flee from sin; the discipline of the New Testament, as a discipline teaching us to die to it.[2]

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[1] Matthew Arnold, Culture and Anarchy (New York, 1906), p. 135. The italics are mine.

[2] Ibid., pp. 133-135.

A man passing and repassing from Hellenism to Hebraism, from Plato to Paul, is visualized as rubbing his eyes and asking himself whether man is a gentle, simple being with a noble and divine nature; or an unfortunate captive, laboring to free himself from the body of this death.[3]

Of the two, Hebraism is the stronger. Through the long struggle for pre-eminence in Anglo-Saxon culture, when it has reigned without debate in popular thought, or when its influence has been reduced to a "check" or veto on the Hellenistic trend--during the Renaissance e.g.--it was always the sturdier, the more vigorous, and the more assuredly enduring, for it drew to its support that part of a society which is its vital strength and most active force. Hellenism, on the other hand, has ever been impractical, indeed unsound, because the world could not live by it, as our experience of almost two thousand years has so well taught. "Obviously, with us, it is usually Hellenism which is thus reduced to minister to the triumph of Hebraism."[4] Hellenism, so cherished in our memory for her devotion to beauty, is nevertheless effeminate and feeble standing before Hebraism; she is found guilty of being at ease in Zion while her zealous adversary takes her crown.

In truth, literary criticism is not the only source to inform us of the victory of the Hebraistic system, through Christianity, over the Hellenistic in English history. A long tradition of the sternest kind of morality in English thought through the dark ages and its revival in two centuries of Puritanism is sure and incontestable witness of how often Hellenism must bow before her mightier opposite and surrender with Julian the Apostate, the ill-fated emperor who with his immortal "Vicisti

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[3] Ibid., p. 135.

[4] Ibid., p. 129.

Galilae," symbolizes Rome's failure to restore paganism to the Greek world,[5] to the ultimate conquest of Christianity.

To realize an immediate connection between these definitions and the great tragedy of the Elizabethan era, we have but to observe the effects of Greek and Hebrew culture upon English conscience and thought through our unsteady progress toward artistic culture, and the total effects upon Elizabeth's England, effects that were manifested outwardly in epochal movements and crises of Anglo-Saxon history. The spirit of the Renaissance, for instance, is in reality a revived Hellenism. Without first the glory of Greece it is hard to conceive of a "revival of learning" which was Hellenic at heart; and without the Renaissance the England of Elizabeth could probably have never been called "merrie England" with her regard for classic form, her love of beauty and pomp. Puritanism, on the other hand, is a renovated and regenerated Hebraism. The drastic and far-reaching effects of Puritanism on Renaissance and Elizabethan thought is the burden of a future chapter and needs only a mention here. To regress in history as far as chronology is concerned, it is significant that even the very dawn of the higher ideal of morality and the finer distinctions of sin in Anglo-Saxon Britain shows evidence of coming through the influence of Hebraism, because earliest history and literature link the first awakening of our pagan ancestors to the idea of righteousness with the bringing of the gospel from ancient Gaul. From that hour of beginnings the Angles' civilization through ages of darkness and light has never been free from the claims of Christianity nor from its consciousness of sin and sin's retribution.

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[5] Stith Thompson and John Gassner, Our Heritage of World Literature (New York, 1949), p. 409.

At this point it is necessary to mention that the relation of Hellenism to this study is incidental to that of Hebraism, since the former has been far less influencial than the latter in moulding the Anglican religious temperament, with its peculiar idea about and emphasis on sin; therefore our interest will be directed principally toward demonstrating the influences of Hebrew culture upon our way of life and literature. Moreover, the idea of Hebraism must here be qualified and expanded to include Christianity, her more glorious counterpart; for, though different somewhat, they are in one sense a unity. Christianity is in truth the enlightened, animated spirit of ideal Hebraism. Christianity is Hebraism with ritualism and externalism cut away. It is of the heart, spiritual, and tending to life; while the latter is external, of the flesh, and tending to death. Both, however, are dedicated to disciplining man in relation to sin; one, to delivering him from it, and the other to condemning him in it; Christianity, to making man more than conqueror over it; Hebraism, to making sin exceedingly sinful. The essense, then, of Hebraism is restraint while Christianity fosters progress and amelioration. Unfortunately, however, the English religious temperament down through time has not given Christianity with its center in a sin-bearing Saviour and its positive attitude toward sin a chance to work according to divine intention; but each generation has reverted in their subjective affections to the primitive attitude of Hebraism and to its preoccupation with sin. Therefore the Hebrew's law of sin and death has left its weighty impression upon the conscience of a civilization it possibly never hoped to have affected.

In short, Hebraism has contributed liberally to our development as a people and as a literary influence in the world, and it is as such a

contributor that Hebraism and its contribution becomes of real importance to us. Dr. Frederick Temple, in his renowned essay of 1861, "The Education of the World," printed in the controversial volume, Essays and Reviews, believes that the greatest and most salutary contribution by the Hebrews to our progress is a moral discipline and moral character, which in any civilization is its essential strength.[6] Matthew Arnold, again, boasts of Hebraism and Hellenism as "august contributions" to our literary development, but he sees us—Anglo-Saxon posterity—as the "children" of that immense and beneficial movement that broke up the pagan world, that movement which stood in a relation to Hebraism that magnified it and reinforced it in our tradition.[7] But it is left to one of our leading anthologies of world literature, in its introduction to Hebraism, to touch most aptly and directly upon Hebraism's relation to us and our literary heritage.

> The moral fervor of the Hebrews, along with their sense of social justice and of divine retribution for evil may be traced through the greater part of our literature. One cannot read Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, Wordsworth, Dickens, and Carlyle, not to mention numerous minor writers, without realizing this.[8]

The expressions "moral fervor," "sense of social justice," and "divine retribution for evil" deserve special mention since they embody so perfectly those ideas by which the Hebrews have affected our thought and literature so immeasurably. The innate demand for morality and the unwavering assurance of divine retribution for evil that we learned from them have so conditioned the responses of every age before and through Elizabeth's era that few poets, with the exception of the modern set,

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[6](London, 1861).

[7]Arnold, p. 137.

[8]Thompson, p. 3. The italics are my own.

have ever seen fit to ignore the advantage that a quality of national character so powerful would give to art. Indeed it is difficult to think of any serious story from Beowulf through Shakespeare deserving our critical attention which does not manifest in thought and expression, even in plot, some real quality of moral conviction, or at least a singular consciousness of sin and divine retribution for it; and Hebraism can most usually be immediately indentified as directly or indirectly responsible.

At this point it may be good to anticipate some objection to our claims that Hebraism is responsible for this moral emphasis in our national character up through the Elizabethan age; or even some objection to any moral necessities in art. So this explanation is warranted: The truth of Hebraism as the unqualified law of human development is not really the main burden of proof in this chapter; nor is it necessarily my objective to champion the cause of morality in art; but rather to demonstrate that the legacy of moral consciousness which Hebraism left to us is manifestly an inseparable part of our literary tradition, whether it pleases or exasperates us; and that good art, great art, indeed Elizabethan art, has not been among the least affected. Most certainly, then, Hebraism has through the ages established its claims in us, particularly in the dark centuries before the Renaissance and both directly and indirectly through Puritanism in the age embracing Spencer and Shakespeare, as an array of comparisons, quotations, and authorities might confirm. But however convincing they might prove, we may more profitably take another approach to the understanding of Hebraism at this point.

Hebraism's literature itself is the most compensating field of

study possible when one wants to sense the vitality of that great sin-conscious spirit that could transmit its strength of conviction to so many succeeding generations. In any age the inspired annals of the Jewish nation are certainly a rich anthology of the poignant struggle of man against the forces of evil that beset him all about; his constant deception by sin and going astray; the heavy forfeit he must pay for his error; and the manifold benefits that come when he does righteously. A complete treatment is prohibited on the grounds of time and space but even a quick perusal of the high points is rich and rewarding. And so that this thesis does not commit the embarrassing error of lecturing abstractly upon an object of art while at the same time keeping the object of beauty itself veiled from sight, here follows a brief outline of Israel's historic achievements in the realm of art.

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Hebrew literature opens with man's most ancient example of the fatal consequences of sin, a story every child in Christendom knows. Eve tastes the forbidden fruit, Adam joins her in the disobedience; they are expelled from Eden, their Paradise, and the death sentence passed upon them. When their first son, Cain, kills his brother, Abel, through jealousy, he is driven out from his native home to become a fugitive and a vagabond, laboring under the fear of being slain by everyone he meets, which fate he bewails most pitifully. Then in the passing of time the earth was filled with violence; sin became unbearably offensive in the nostrils of God; the restraining influences of divine mercy were withdrawn and a world flood ensued, destroying a wicked race and leaving only some righteous roots from which a new world race would spring. Sin had reaped her heavy penalty, each solemn-faced Hebrew might pronounce,

as he passed the story on to his posterity.

The life of the Hebrew Patriarch, Joseph, is a classic in the study of good triumphing over evil. Joseph, the best-loved son of his aging father, Jacob, was hated by his ten brothers less favored than he and was by them kidnapped and sold as a slave to the Egyptians. To increase their guilt, the villains forged a lie to convince their grieving father that the unfortunate lad was the victim of wild beasts. But in process of time, nobility of character, personal charm, and divine favor promoted Joseph to a place of eminence in Egypt; and he ruled in Pharaoh the King's place in time of famine because of wisdom given him from above. Then it happened that from hunger and want his guilty brothers were forced, ironically enough, to descend into Egypt that they might invoke the favor of Pharaoh; for, because of their long-forgotten brother, Pharaoh's stores were bursting with corn. In Egypt then they drank of the cup of judgment in that they were subjected to the mercy of him whom they had hated and sinned against so greatly. And so on the endless lesson is repeated.

The epic struggle of Esther in the behalf of her oppressed people against the wicked courtier Haman is probably the most beautiful story among the Hebrew writings. Esther came on to the stage of Jewish history at a time when her loved Israel was in servitude to the flourishing Persian King Xerxes, who reigned over an hundred and twenty-seven provinces ranging from India to Ethiopia. At one royal occasion, Queen Vashti displeased the king by ignoring a summons into his regal presence and was therefore deposed from her throne. When the kingdom was scoured in search for the fairest maiden to replace the fallen queen, Esther of the Jews--though her national identity was kept secret for the moment--was

the King's choice. As if by coincidence, Esther's own step-father, Mordecai, was an inconspicuous man of the court who had had the good fortune to save the King's life from the intrigue of two assassins; and the deed was written in the chronicles of the King. About this time Haman, a vain fellow, was promoted by King Xerxes to second place in the kingdom and commanded to be reverenced even as was the King. But Mordecai did him no reverence, nor did he bow before him. Then Haman devised a heinous plot to destroy all the Jews in the kingdom and built a gallows on which to hang the unfortunate Mordecai. It was about this time that the King, spending a restless night, acted on his whim and called for the reading of the chronicles; and with haste commanded Haman to honor royally his savior, Mordecai. In quick succession, at the risk of her own life, Esther presented herself before the King unsummoned and asked for the honor of the King's and Haman's presence at a banquet she had prepared. On the second day of the banquet the King, delighted with Esther, offered her the fulfilment of any petition, even to half of the kingdom; whereupon she requested her own life and the lives of her people, exposing the wicked Haman before the King's face. Within that hour was the murderous Haman hanged on the same gallows he had prepared for his guiltless enemy, Mordecai; and so the Jews triumphed over all their foes.

Space does not permit more than a mere sketch of the poignant story of Israel's seventy years of suffering in captivity, estranged from her loved Canaan home because she had sinned abominably against Jehovah by serving idols. Her cities were laid waste by the world conqueror, Nebuchadnezzar, and Jerusalem was razed to the ground. Her kings, her princes were humiliated under the Babylonian yoke till every idolatrous

affection was strangled. Then, with the old generation under the sod, her sins purged away, she was exalted from her shame and allowed to re-establish her national pride but never to forget the heavy penalties of sin.

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Such sturdy tradition, beautiful yet plain, supporting ardent belief in a holy, immutable, omnipotent God who despises sin and rewards those who practice it with eternal death are ideal ingredients for strong national character. The almighty Jehovah assuming responsibility for the discipline of disobedience to His law was to the Hebrew economy the cornerstone of its foundation, the very principle of life that perpetuated its interpretation of Truth and spread its influence throughout the world, giving it a universal significance. I suppose it is safe to say that the entire civilized world has felt at sometime, either directly or indirectly, the impact of the Jew's faith. And one of the most important legacies it bequeaths to every land it invades is its irresistible lesson of the hideous aspect of sin and its dire consequences, contrasted with the felicity of righteous thought and conduct. English literature from its earliest beginnings, particularly through the dark ages and in the Renaissance, betrays how well we received that legacy, how deeply it affected the course of our history. We shall now go on to see that same indestructible principle working anew in Elizabethan civilization.

CHAPTER II. THE EMERGENCE OF HUMANISM

Hellenism and Hebraism flourished and decayed with the civilizations that contained them. But their roots were too firm in the soul of humanity to be eradicated utterly; so at an advanced hour in the development of Anglo-Saxon civilization they broke forth into full realization of their strength. The new growths were the essential character of the old, but new ages gave them new names: "Renaissance," the outgrowth of Hellenism; "Puritanism" and "Reformation," offshoots of Hebraism.

Matthew Arnold, once more, is our most illuminating source for discovering this birth of Hellenic living again in the Renaissance, and of Hebraism in Puritanism and its counterpart, the Reformation. His observations of the effects that these movements had upon Elizabethan art and life are probably the most fitting in all criticism to initiate the idea which this chapter proposes to treat.

First in order, let us hear what he says of the moral weakness of the Renaissance:

> The Renascence, that great re-awakening of Hellenism, that irresistible return of humanity to nature and to seeing things as they are, which in art, in literature, and in physics, produced such splendid fruits, had, like the anterior Hellenism of the Pagan world, a side of moral weakness and of relaxation or insensibility of the moral fiber, which in Italy showed itself with the most startling plainness, but which in France, England, and other countries was very apparent, too.[1]

Of the other two movements he says:

> The Reformation has been often called a Hebraizing revival, a return to the order and sincereness of primitive Christianity.[2]

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[1] Matthew Arnold, Culture and Anarchy (New York, 1906), p. 148.

[2] Ibid., p. 139.

This turn of the Hebrews [i.e., a strong share of assuredness, tenacity, and intensity in matters of practical life and moral conduct] manifested itself in Puritanism, and has had a great part in shaping our history for the last two hundred years. Undoubtedly it checked and changed amongst us that movement of the Renascence which we see producing in the reign of Elizabeth such wonderful fruits.[3]

It was the moral weak spot in the Renaissance, then, that gave the irresistible restraining force of Puritanism a decided competitive advantage over it to curb its classic tendencies and to alter its course. Now if this interpretation of literary history has good basis—and it must have, on grounds that we shall go on to establish—then Puritanism, with its stern, negative tone, indeed its avowed contempt of art, may have deeply marked and colored Elizabethan poetry even in the hour of its greatest fruitfulness. In my opinion, the peculiar inclination of Elizabethan drama to invest evil or sin with the very nature of a complex science, and its abnormal fondness for probing and experimenting with it to the full, is actually a by-product of Puritanism's sin-consciousness, though that idea may seem paradoxical on the basis that the Puritan deplored most of all that very practice in art. That objection will be answered later in the chapter. At any rate, whatever is alleged by good authority to have effected serious reverses and modifications in the Renaissance movement in its crowning epoch—certainly the period in which Shakespeare developed and wrote—is significant to this study and deserves critical attention.

To begin with, the measure of Puritanism's strength in sixteenth century society is perhaps the most relative issue to be decided before its effects on drama can be estimated; and certainly there is sufficient documentary data on this subject that the most superficial student should

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[3] Ibid., pp. 141-142. The italics are mine.

be able to come to a very definite conclusion. The historian, John Richard Green, consolidates in a most beautiful chapter the sum total of the many scattered commentaries on the subject. He says, in one of his topic sentences:

> No greater moral change ever passed over a nation than passed over England during the years which parted the middle of the reign of Elizabeth from the meeting of the Long Parliament. England became the people of a book and that book was the Bible.[4]

Trevelyan throws his weighty support to this opinion:

> The Bible and the world of classical antiquity were no longer left to the learned few....The old Hebrew and the Graeco-Roman ways of life, raised from the grave of the remote past by the magic of scholarship, were opened to the general understanding of Englishmen, who treated them not as dead archaeological matter, but as new spheres of imagination and spiritual power to be freely converted to modern use.[5]

At the outset of the great awakening the Bible was most popularly introduced by public readers who had "audible voices;" and was then superseded by a more general recitation of the Scriptures in the services of the Church, while the small Geneva Bible took the precious Word to every fireside.[6] In short there was an all-engulfing epidemic of interest in the Bible. The motive for this ardent relish for the Bible was not entirely, though predominately, religious but was to an appreciable degree literary, inasmuch as the nation at large had pitifully limited access to history, romance, and hardly any poetry but Chaucer. In the Divine Record they found everything: epic struggle, the exalted utterance of prophets and sages, chronicles of stately deeds done by kings, shepherds, and holy valiant warriors, the lyrics and Psalms of the sweet singer of Isreal, the meek but irresistible wisdom of the Divine One Himself in form of

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[4]John Richard Green, A Short History of the English People (New York, 1900), II, 139.

[5]George M. Trevelyan, English Social History (New York, 1942), p. 140.

[6]Green, pp. 139-140.

parable and precept, apocalyptic visions and stories of perilous voyages—all these and more were their rewards for the possession of one book. The phraseology, allusions, and illustrations from the Bible that colored the conversations of Elizabethan men of letters from the great to the small is convincing evidence of its abundant use in literary circles.

However, in my opinion the direct effect upon literature of this revival of Bible interest through Puritanism was incidental to its indirect influence, by which, like Hebraism, it affected the inner moral structure of the people which must eventually result in its expression outwardly in the forms and qualities of art. In this way Puritanism's Bible became an influence of inestimable strength. Green substantiates this opinion in part when he says: "But far greater than its effect on literature or social phrase was the effect of the Bible on the character of the people at large."[7]

That this effect on the character of the people was far reaching and did essentially revolutionize the structure of Elizabethan society can be established by good historical documentation:

> The whole moral effect which is produced nowadays by the religious newspaper, the tract, the essay, the lecture, the missionary report, the sermon, was then produced by the Bible alone; and its effect in this way, however dispassionately we examine it, was simply amazing. One dominant influence told on human action: and all the activities that had been called into life by the age that was passing away were seized, concentrated, and steadied to a definite aim by the spirit of religion. The whole temper of the nation felt the change.[8]

The case for Puritanism with its wonderful Bible as an effectual moral force in sixteenth century England could be carried on until there

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[7] Ibid., p. 141.

[8] Ibid.

would hardly be an excuse for unbelief; but the evidence already presented, which is really the gist of the treatment of the subject, is probably enough. However, it would be a serious omission if we failed to note that Puritanism is much older than the last twenty years of Elizabeth's reign. Trevelyan pronounces Puritanism to be much "older than the Reformation;" in fact he implies that the ancient Piers the Plowman was spiritual father to all Puritans in that he and "Bunyan the tinker, are more alike in imagination and feeling than any other two writers divided by three centuries."[9] A great deal could be said about that primitive spirit of Puritanism and its being even then a sturdy, growing power in English society; of its guerrilla activities through the first three-quarters of the sixteenth century; and of its strengthening ally in that century, the Reformation; but much of it would be a near recapitulation of what has gone before and might prove to be an anticlimax. Yet the mentioning of it is relevant since it should reaffirm in our thinking the truth that the leaven of Puritanism was active in the world in which Shakespeare and his contemporaries moved and thought even before their birth.

That Puritanism wrought a drastic transformation somewhat equivalent to a social revolution in the golden hour of Elizabeth's reign is an historical fact. However, it should be apparent already that there is much more to Puritanism than simply a revival of Bible interest; and at the same time the nature and extent of the moral effect it had upon the national character needs some explanation. As to the nature of Puritanism, true enough the Bible did afford the bulk of its inspiration;

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[9]Trevelyan, p. 2.

but the movement of zealots went far beyond the texts they found in the Book in forming their many-sided conviction—indeed, that was ninety-five per cent of Puritanism: conviction. Its cardinal premises were the secret of its unique strength; they were, namely: the preeminence of the One true God; the absoluteness of His law; and the acknowledgement of sin's dreadful presence in the world and its painful victory over the unwary and the unwise—these are the most potent ingredients any creed can possess. The last of the three—sin recognition—always enjoys the greatest emphasis in a revival of austere religion on account of human propensity to err; and Puritanism was certainly no exception. In every facet of its conduct the mounting movement manifested the intensity of conviction that comes from recognizing God as personal and from the deep self-consciousness that the sense of sin brings: It was "poor in dress, plain in ceremony, austere in temper, and calvinistic in theology,"[10] in contrast with Merry England, given to gaiety of heart, fine clothing, loose manners, and ostentation in formality. It was for powerful preaching and for a return to primitive Christianity. It exalted the ideal of self conquest and of fleeing from evil; and most significant of all, it made sin notorious and its consequences hideous.

Now to note a techincal point of importance. Early in its hour of ascending popularity, before its ardent sincerity hardened into dogma, Puritanism left the retribution of sin to the wisdom of God, except possibly in such cases where human or divine statute would enjoin severe prosecution of a particular sin; but ere long, when the Puritan despot became aware of the signet of authority in his hand, though that authority was popular rather than legal, he affirmed the right of human agency

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[10] Edwin Goadly, The England of Shakespeare (New York, 1861), p. 110.

in punishing sin--and it was his prerogative to define "sin" and design the punishment.

Such pious zeal in popular hands could not help but work its profound effect upon the character of the society.

> The whole temper of the nation felt the change. A new conception of life and of man superseded the old. A new moral and religious impulse spread through every class. Literature reflected the tendency of the time...."Theology rules there," said Grotius of England only two years after Elizabeth's death....[11]

As if further to define the precise nature of the effect, the same historian writes: "A sterner Protestantism was invigorating and ennobling life by its morality, its seriousness, its intense conviction of God [and, as he later says,] its consciousness of evil.[12]

It is probably safe to say that no rank or level of Elizabethan culture completely escaped the impact of the change or was able to ignore it altogether. This is not to say at all that Puritanism made disciples of English society as a whole nor did it utterly reform merry England with its loose manners and sensuous appetites. Literature at least indicates too clearly that there was no such radical conversion in its ranks, but it does betray, along with a neutral recognition of the movement, a profound indirect influence upon literary forms and styles.

This influence was not of the nature to turn it toward didacticism. Neither Kyd, Webster, nor Shakespeare, needless to say, ever developed the tones of a saint or a moralist; Elizabethan drama at its sublime height did not dedicate itself to making men better. But their drama does reflect the spirit of a society highly sensitive to sin and given

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[11] Green, pp. 141-142.

[12] Ibid.

to gloomy introspection, a society victimized by a knowledge of good that it could not live by.

In determining the conclusive effect of the Elizabethan conscience upon its own literature, hardly anything could be more rewarding than a contrast of English and Italian literature and social conscience in Shakespeare's day. The two cultures were so very far removed in the matter of conscience that someone has said of Italy in Elizabeth's time that it was a place where to a contemporary englishman's notion anything could happen. This kind of thinking is remarkably present in the plays of Webster and to a great degree in Shakespeare. The greatest rewards of the contrast come in judging how differently the two regarded sin and the problem of morality, particularly the more sinister tones of the English conception. This distinction is wonderfully illuminated by John Addington Symonds in a lengthy but most compensating quotation:

> The Italians were depraved, but spiritually feeble. The English playwright when he brought them on the stage, armed with intellectual power and gleaming with the lurid splendor of a Northern fancy, made them ten-fold darker and more terrible. To the subtlety and vices of the South he added the melancholy meditation, and sinister insanity of his own climate. He deepened the complexion of crime and intensified lawlessness by robbing the Italian character of levity. Sin, in his conception of character, was complicated with the sense of sin, as it had never been in a Florentine or a Neapolitan. He had not grasped the meaning of the Machiavellian conscience, in its cold serenity and disengagement from the dread of moral consequences. Not only are his villains steadily, frigid, quick to evil, merciless, and void of honor; but they brood upon their crimes and analyse their motives. In the midst of their audacity they are dogged by the dread of coming retributions.... To the Italian text has been added the Teutonic commentary, and both are fused by a dramatic genius into one living whole.[13]

No competent student of Elizabethan and Italian drama would ignore the vast gulf separating the basic concepts of the two cultures so capably pointed out by Symonds. That they both associated lawlessness with

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[13]John Addington Symonds, Italian Byways (New York, 1883), p. 175.

dramatic action is an admitted fact; but it is obviously in their individual attitudes toward that lawlessness that they were profoundly dissimilar. The Teutonic conception of character, complicated not merely with sin, but with the "sense of sin," gave Elizabethan drama its distinct uniqueness; indeed, the Elizabethan's idea of sin was a prime factor in the pre-eminent success of his drama in a universal sense. England's supreme aloofness in the sixteenth century literary world is inevitably retraceable to her spiritual temper; more specifically, to the deep contrasts and contradictions of her intense, vivacious spirit. The Elizabethan soul was a lively blend of powerful inconsistencies: with one part she was merry, high-minded, sensuous, reveling in the most voluptuous expressions of sin; while with the remaining part she was introspective, gloomy, highly sensitive in the sphere of religion and conscience, subjectively persuaded of the fearful consequences of sin. This is undoubtedly the situation to which Matthew Arnold points when he speaks of the influence of the Hebrews--with its strong share of assuredness, tenacity, and intensity concerning practical life and moral conduct, coming through the Reformation and Puritanism--checking and changing the fruitful movement of the Renaissance in Elizabeth's England.[14] In short, and to reiterate an earlier statement, sixteenth century England is a picture of a society victimized by a knowledge of good that it could not live by, victimized by an instinctive condemnation of the thrilling orgies of lust and passion it so fully delighted in. Therefore it follows naturally that it would, as Symonds declares, complicate sin with the sense of sin, deepen the complexion of crime, make its villains not only quick to evil, but as prone to brood over their crimes, while

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[14] See p. 12 of the Thesis.

dogged by the dread of coming retributions.

Puritanism's tremendous part in producing the particular turn of the English spiritual temperament, eventually expressing itself in art, has already been demonstrated. Hardly any scholar would hazard more than an estimate of the conclusive, total effect of the movement; but that that effect was revolutionary in almost every way is universally admitted. One of the many Shakespearean scholars who have acknowledged this truth offers a rather trite, yet significant, comment: "English historians have long recognized in this Puritan one-sidedness one of the most important stages in the national development of their country."[15] Certainly tragedy did not escape the strong, indirect influence of its one-sideness; and we may be sure that Shakespeare fell heir to his rightful portion of that influence: we behold that fact in all his later tragedies.

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[15]Wilhelm Creizenach, The English Drama in the Age of Shakespeare (Philadelphia, 1916), p. 106.

CHAPTER III. THE INFLUENCE OF SENECA

"No author exercised a wider or deeper influence upon the Elizabethan mind or upon the Elizabethan form of tragedy than did Seneca."[1] So said the eminent T. S. Eliot in his "Introduction" to Thomas Newton's reprint of Seneca His Tenne Tragedies, translated into English in 1581.

"The influence of Seneca...upon the Elizabethan drama is so plainly marked that no competent historian of our literature could fail to notice it."[2] This statement, published in 1893, was set forth by J. W. Cunliffe, acclaimed by many scholars as the most thorough student of Seneca.

"Indeed Seneca's influence on the serious drama of most of western Europe is almost immeasureable."[3] This important conclusion comes from the mature literary judgment of the late English critic and professor, H. B. Charlton. In this same clear direction an endless stream of authority runs in support of Seneca's great share in shaping English tragedy.

Probably no fact is more established in literary history than is Seneca's supremacy in the Renaissance revival of tragedy. For instance, Charlton in his essay simply takes for granted the fact of Seneca's influence on Elizabethan drama and refers his readers to an extensive footnote bibliography that is sufficiently complete to assure the most

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[1]Thomas Newton, Seneca His Tenne Tragedies (New York, 1581), I, V.

[2]John W. Cunliffe, The Influence of Seneca on Elizabethan Tragedy (New York, 1907), p. 1.

[3]H. B. Charlton, The Senecan Tradition in Renaissance Tragedy

doubtful how exhaustively the matter has been treated and the fact established by the most qualified authorities.[4] Nevertheless in arriving at a clear personal conception of the impact of a revived Seneca upon Elizabethan literary circles and the impressions that the Senecan revival might have made upon Shakespeare himself--only in a general way, however-- it is abundantly worthwhile, I have found, to review quickly the record of the revival in criticism and history contemporary with Queen Elizabeth.

To begin with, Roger Ascham, one of the most popular of the early Elizabethan critics, recommends in The Schoolmaster a play by the Scotch scholar, Buchanan, entitled Jephthaes, which was modeled after Seneca and given to the public about 1540-3. In the same volume Ascham gives a criticism of Seneca's shortcomings as they stand revealed in the transcendent light of Greek tragedy; but most significant of all, he calls the Roman poet "our Seneca."[5] William Webbe, a Cambridge graduate and literary critic, called Seneca "a most excellent wryter of Tragedies" and in his list of English translators he commends "the laudable authors of Seneca in English."[6] Thomas Nash, who possessed recognizable merit as a critic, while expressing contempt for Seneca, informs us of the poet's popularity among Elizabeth's subjects:

> English Seneca read by candle light yieldes maine good sentences, as Bloud is a begger, and so foorth: and if you intreate him faire in a frostie morning he will affoord you whole Hamlets, I should say hand-

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(Manchester, 1946), p. xvii.

[4]Ibid., p. cxl.

[5]Gunliffe, p. 8-10.

[6]Ibid., p. 11.

fulls of tragical speaches.[7]

Klein, viewing Elizabethan tragedy with an eye to its progress said: "With every subsequent tragedy of the sixteenth century, with every step we fall deeper and deeper into the savagery...of the tragedy of Seneca."[8]

Concurrent with this response among the critics was the revival of Seneca on the stage and in popular attention. In 1551-52 Seneca's Troades was performed in Latin at Trinity College, Cambridge. From 1559 to 1561 four of his plays were performed in Latin. An Oxford scholar, Jasper Heywood, published in 1559 the first English version of one of Seneca's plays, the Troas. It was reprinted twice within three years, and was followed in 1560 by the same translator's version of Thyestes, and a year later by a translation of Hercules Furens. In 1561-62 the first original English tragedy built closely on the Senecan model, Gorboduc, was acted in the Queen's presence at Whitehall. In three years, Seneca had established himself in English and in Latin, in the theater and in the press.[9]

In 1563 Queen's College, Cambridge, performed Medea in Latin; Cambridge performed Dido in 1564, and Oxford the Progne in 1566. The last play initiated the academic practice of writing plays in modern Latin built closely on the Senecan pattern. Gascoigne's Jocasta (1566) and Gismond of Salerne (1567),--or as it is called by another title, Tancred and Gismund,--tragedies of the Senecan mould, were played by law students for the Court, which was then the mediator between academic and popular

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[7]Ibid., p. 2.

[8]Ibid., p. 7.

[9]Charlton, pp. cxl-cxli.

drama. By all means Seneca had become somewhat of a literary fad to the extent that probably every one of his plays, with the exception of Thebais, appeared in English in some form before 1570.[10]

That decade of popularity which Seneca enjoyed was followed by a temporary lull extending through the next decade (1570-1580). But the next opens with a revival of Seneca. It was felt first in the universities, attested by the performance of Legge's Richardus Tertius in Latin in 1579-80 at St. John's, Cambridge.[11] The year 1581 marks probably the most significant point in the Seneca tradition: the year in which Thomas Newton published his famous compilation of earlier translations into one volume, Seneca His Tenne Tragedies Translated into Englysh. Seneca then became the people's poet and his popularity and influence upon tragedy became inevitable. "The translation must...have had considerable effect in spreading a general knowledge of Seneca's form, style, and manner, the character of his subjects, and the leading ideas of his philosophical teaching as contained in the tragedies."[12]

Seneca's influence is strong throughout the decade. In the universities he had established his supremacy.[13] His most important influence, however, Mr. Charlton proposes, was in the popular drama: the plays of Peele and Kyd combined Seneca and popular tradition into a basis on which English romantic tragedy should be raised.[14] In accord with this T. S.

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[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid., pp. cxlii-cxliii.

[12] Cunliffe, p. 6.

[13] Charlton, p. cxliii.

[14] Ibid., pp. cxliii-cxliv.

Eliot says: "The most significant popular play under Senecan influence is of course The Spanish Tragedy".[15] To be sure, it is hardly possible to overestimate the influence of Seneca through this one play, to say nothing of Titus Andronicus and Peele's Locrine. Indeed even the transcendent Shakespeare himself in this instance seems to fall heir to some definite results of the revival, for probably any Shakespearean scholar who has read The Spanish Tragedy, without the encouragement of higher authority, would recognize the debt that the greater poet in Hamlet owes to Kyd, particularly in the idea of feigned insanity, the attitude toward the crime, the determination for retribution, and the tragic manner of its working out.

This postulating of Shakespeare's indebtedness to Seneca has been taken much further than The Spanish Tragedy, however. Charlton, for example, states without any modification that Seneca had definite influence upon Shakespeare.[16] T. S. Eliot believes that Shakespeare's "verse instrument" could not have been formed as it was without the legacy left him by the genius of Marlowe and the influence of Seneca.[17] Cunliffe does not presume to prove positively either a direct or indirect influence of Seneca upon Shakespeare, but nevertheless goes on to establish quite convincingly from many approaches that such an influence does exist. In the last analysis he seems well assured of the fact for he asserts: "To Sidney, to Meres, and to Shakspere himself, Seneca was the model of classical tragedy...." And by way of footnote he offers some substantiation for that statement: "Shakspere is compared by Meres to

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[15] Newton, p. XXIV.

[16] Charlton, p. cxliv.

[17] Newton, p. XXX.

Seneca, and Polonius says of the players in Hamlet, 'Seneca cannot be too heavy, nor Plautus too light for them.'"[18] Professor T. S. Baynes came to the conclusion that Shakespeare read the Senecan tragedies at Stratford Grammar School.[19] And so on could we accumulate support for a theory proposing a direct influence of Seneca upon Shakespeare without acquiring that quality of certainty which genuine scholarship requires; but it is worthy of consideration that Shakespeare did know something at least of Seneca and that every scholar quoted produces reasonable evidence of likeness in certain qualities between them. Therefore one editor may be giving more than a mere opinion when he says: "Hamlet is a refined example of a type of tragedy which developed in Elizabethan times largely under the influence of the Latin philosopher-dramatist, Seneca the younger...."[20]

Granting that Seneca did enjoy a remarkable revival of influence, the really significant question that naturally follows is concerned with the exact nature of the effect that a Senecan emphasis had upon the literary world; in other words, what did a resurrected Seneca mean to Elizabethan drama? The precise result of the renewed Senecan interest can hardly be better explained than to point to the poet's original treatment of tragic material and, possibly more important, his choice of subjects; for in his case, to understand the man is to understand his influence.

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[18]Cunliffe, p. 6.

[19]Ibid., p. 12.

[20]K. J. Holzknecht and McClure, Selected Plays of Shakespeare (New York, 1936), I, 411.

In condensing the essential Seneca into the most representative definition possible, we could hardly do better than to quote a Shakespearean editor's comment: "Crime and its retribution is the burden of each of Seneca's stories, and the themes he selected were the most sensational ones of incest, adultery and unnatural murder in the whole of mythology."[21] "Crime and its retribution" as a motive, with the most grotesque plots in which it could realize fullest and most violent expression--that is the heart of Senecan tragedy, or at least the Senecan tradition of tragedy. Blood and horror naturally attend the action; if not naturally, Seneca makes it so. One principal point is that the retribution of crime is given over to the jurisdiction of personal revenge, the one sinned against acting as the merciless vindicator of sin. The tragic theme is fatalism: the inevitability and finality of Fate's decrees; the sentiment of the play is morbid introspection, self-pity. There are such tragic inventions as ghosts, foreboding dreams, mixed with supernatural forces. The principal tragic incident is murder, generally the most cruel and blood-thirsty sort. There are superhuman villains dominated by abnormal, consuming passions. The appeal of Seneca's plays, at least in Elizabethan England, was that all these horrors were arranged so that horrors were incessantly piling upon horror, the crimes being engendered often by some thrilling sexual passion, all weaved into an enchanting whole by his dramatic technique.[22]

If the Latin Seneca was bad, the English Seneca was worse. T. S. Eliot protests that the pure Seneca is not so hideous as his Elizabethan

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[21] Ibid. The italics are mine.

[22] Charlton, pp. clxix, clxx.

reputation and is of the opinion that Seneca happened to be the ideal suggestion to lead England in the direction that its latent ambition was already inclined.[23] In other words, Seneca supplied the English dramatist with the pretext or justification for horror for which he already had the taste; and what he took to be qualified as his own unrestrained desire impelled him. Charlton adds very appropriately at this point that "the Senecan tradition was greater than Seneca or the Senecans;"[24] in other words, he became the pliable property of many ages because he touched the cord that moved them all. Seneca simply encouraged in the English the taste for "the foreign, remote, or exotic;" and of this particular relationship between Seneca and Elizabethan taste, Thorndike has remarked that the Senecan plays called attention to drama "not as an exposition of events or as an allegory of life, but as a field for the study of human emotion."[25] It is hardly a contestable point that Seneca played an influential role in inspiring the psychological probing and analyzing of personality and emotion so characteristic of Elizabethan drama, aside from the fact that he might or might not be guilty of such a dark reputation as his modern tradition implies. Therefore even if T. S. Eliot's arguments be sound; and granting Seneca might have shuddered to behold the results of his own influence, he is nevertheless responsible for aggravating that savage propensity in the Elizabethan which needed only the proper urge to set it into action. These considerations

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[23]The general basis for this conclusion is taken from pp. xviii, xxvi, and xxviii of T. S. Eliot's Introduction to Harbon's Seneca His Tenne Tragedies.

[24]Charlton, p. xvii.

[25]William Tyrell and Addison Hibbard, A Handbook to Literature (New York, 1936), p. 395.

are greatly clarified, and verified, by Professors Thrall and Hibbard. They first reiterate the common observation that Seneca's plays were principally meant for recitation, not stage production; and then point out that Kyd's Spanish Tragedy "departed from the Senecan method in that it placed the murders and horrors upon the stage, in response to popular Elizabethan taste and in defiance of Horace's dictum that good taste demanded leaving such matters for off-stage action."[26] The Elizabethan's relish for the visible exhibition of horror and passion forced Seneca into a more modern setting that rendered him more terrible.

Besides his popularity in England proper, Seneca was still destined to exert a roundabout, yet very definite, influence upon Elizabethan drama through Italian literature. Two waves of Seneca reached Shakespeare's England: one arrived directly, the other by way of the great Renaissance center of culture, Italy. It is profitless to debate which influence was the stronger; but it is a tenable conclusion that the Italianized Seneca, in coming into the Elizabethan situation, took on a much darker aspect than his English counterpart. The plays of Webster, particularly, and to some extent Shakespeare, indicate this darkening of the complexion of crime as it passed through the Italian setting into the English. This study could be developed at great length; however, the fact of the influence of Italian Seneca upon Elizabethan tragedy has been dealt with sufficiently in criticism[27] to relieve us of any necessity of going further into the matter except to refer to Symonds' words

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[26] Ibid.

[27] Charlton, Eliot, and Cunliffe (in both of his books entered in the Bibliography) all devote considerable space to this point.

quoted above[28] which are so very relevant in this connection, more enlightening probably than any commentary that has been written on this aspect of Seneca.

To summarize, Seneca joined with other important forces in developing the Elizabethan supersensitiveness to sin and fondness for exploiting crime and evil. The effort of this chapter has not been to insist fanatically upon a direct indebtedness of Shakespeare to Seneca, but to establish the truth of Seneca's popularity and his "universal" influence upon Elizabethan drama, an influence which Shakespeare could not conceivably escape. To be sure, Shakespeare and Seneca are so much alike in spirit and taste that the conclusions of the average investigator follow very naturally that the great Elizabethan must have drawn from the available resources of which his Latin predecessor was the source.

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[28]See p. 18 of the Thesis.

CHAPTER IV. THE INFLUENCE OF ENGLISH TRAGIC TRADITION

The story of Elizabethan drama's ancestry is one of the most colorful in England's tradition of art. It seems that as long as England has had literature, she has had drama in some form, roughhewn as its character might have appeared in the more uncouth and darker ages. Later criticism has given those earlier ages of dramatic effort names that are expressive of their character: Old Sacred Drama, Morality and Miracle Drama. The remarkable strength of these old forms, a study in itself, has received the attention of excellent scholarship;[1] and the secret of that strength was, very logically, that drama became a sure expedient for the practical spirit of those intense epochs. Its homely, unornamented style was one evidence of how it accommodated itself to the very stern necessities of the time it served; and its subject matter confirmed that fact beyond doubt, as we shall see.

In short, earlier tragic drama was servile to the zeal of the strongest spirit in English primitive society: the religious spirit. Christianity had extended its conquest to every quarter of the civilized world, and Anglo-Saxon culture was not among the least affected. History clearly records the gospel's early triumph in old Briton, while the ancient Beowulf demonstrates the fact in the world of literature. Now the ardent spiritual zeal which the Gospel brought in with it had the jealous character of directing all attention to religion, allowing no quarter for

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[1] Felix E. Schelling, William Farnham, and S. L. Bethell, all entered in the Bibliography.

baser interests; so that when it perceived the effectual power in dramatic representation, it impressed art into its exclusive service and forced drama to dedicate itself wholly to furthering the Kingdom of God. In the era of reviving faith in Europe, 1050 to 1250, drama became a part of ritual, utilized by the priesthood to make vivid the supreme moments of Christ's life.[2] Even after Chaucer the purpose of drama, predominantly, "was the teaching of Christian dogma."[3] As late as the fifteenth, indeed the sixteenth, century, in the golden era of the morality play, even though the dramatic material might not be a scriptural or traditional story, the dramatist nevertheless, with plots of his own, gave implicit comment upon life. And avowedly didactic as he was, he was generous even in explicit comment. He was in a true sense a preacher, and the stage was his pulpit.[4] One critic sums it up by saying that the drama of the Middle Ages was not concerned with the individual, "but with Everyman and his relation to God."[5]

While Christianity discovered a compelling expedient in drama, at the same time drama from the beginning found some advantage in Christianity. The sacrificial death of Jesus Christ and the holy martyrs of the Faith always held some potentialities for tragic plot. Vital Christianity in the hands of the playwrights became a new active force in literature, almost assured of a hearing with any level of culture. The pathos of Jewish history, as well as Christian sacred history, supporting the

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[2]Felix E. Schelling, Elizabethan Drama 1558-1642 (Boston, 1908) I, 6.

[3]Ibid., p. xxvii.

[4]Williard Farnham, The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy (Berkely, 1936), p. 177.

[5]F. E. Halliday, Shakespeare and His Critics (London, 1949), p. 169.

idea of the fulfillment of God's plan for man's redemption through Christ, supplied the moving themes of medieval drama.[6] All this was bolstered by the "cult of the Passion" which flourished in the Middle Ages, a zealous movement giving rise to very highly specialized forms of meditation on the wounds, the agony, and the death of Christ. Gothic art contributed with representations of an emaciated, most pitiable Christ, thorn-crowned, serenely tolerating his excruciating agony upon the cross. Each influence had its repercussions in the other and each reinforced the other until an abnormal taste for the terrible was a prevailing reality; and with it came an increased sensibility among the people to suffering and death in general. There was a growing fascination with the ruder aspects of death, illustrated by the popularity of the eerie Dance of Death.[7] To be sure, an emotional tendency in the character of the nation was taking form, a tendency that would eventually bear its influence upon Elizabethan drama.

The next noteworthy developement in drama came in with the Renaissance. In Europe a definite interest in a worldly-minded drama grew up around the illustrious figure of Boccaccio and later in England around Chaucer and Lydgate. But it is not until the closing hours of the fourteenth century that English drama moved into the first stage of that steady advance which was to climax in the Elizabethan glory: that stage was the morality play. Moreover it was the first real opportunity for the development of a dynamic and genuine tragedy in England; at least the morality play provided the matrix in which tragedy's embryo could begin

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[6] Farnham, p. 173.

[7] Ibid., p. 174.

its maturation. Though the old sacred drama of the medieval epoch was one in spirit with the morality play, the subjects of their plots were quite different. Old Sacred Drama took its subjects and plots from the Bible almost entirely; the morality play represented the same didactic interests but as a rule used dramatic material outside the scope of the scriptural narrative. It was through this change that true and ideal tragedy gained its foothold. The life and death of Christ which had dominated the old drama, though it made for interesting and intense drama, fell short of the ideal for tragic plot.[8] Jesus could never be conceived as imperfect in any sense but rather God in human frame, not sharing completely with man those mundane weaknesses that are necessary to make a tragic hero. The purest ideal of tragedy cannot accept the fall of a perfect man as being a really tragic incident; only men who in their frailty help to precipitate their own fall can be successful subjects of tragic plot. Moreover, the epic of Christ's crusade against "the works of the devil" ended ultimately in triumph, a climax contrary to the spirit of tragedy. So when the morality play of the fifteenth century began to moralize upon the transient glory of kings and of man in his pride coming to naught, it laid a setting in which an enduring and sure tragedy could thrive.

The morality play bequeathed to English tragedy some qualities and characteristics that it never completely lost. The plays of this period, of which The Pride of Life is the first good example, are concerned deeply with the inevitability of death; and Death, the grim reaper, is often himself a member of the dramatis personae. He was God's chief agent for

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[8] Ibid.

the retribution of sin, visiting judgment upon man in that man failed in Adam and since Adam.[9] Pride, wrath, envy, folly were some of the principal shortcoming of temporal flesh; man was in truth a captive being, laboring under the irremovable weight of sin. Therefore whether it was the "otherworldliness" of fifteenth century tragedy or the earthly mindedness of the sixteenth century, the motif of the moral drama of both ages bore out the severity of the wages of sin and that God in mercy wills that all men escape destruction. Summarily, moral drama's collective legacy to later tragedy was an exaggerated sensitiveness to life's suffering in relation to man's spiritual and moral failure, with special emphasis upon such theological considerations as sin, salvation and retribution.

By far the next most sigificant development in the interest of tragedy before Shakespeare, concurrent incidentally with the revival of Seneca, was an intense movement toward a purer tragedy that centered in the celebrated Mirror for Magistrates, first published in 1559, one of the most notable literary antecedents of late Elizabethan drama. The morality play was greatly responsible for the tremendous interest in tragedy that grew up around this unique production, for that same morality drama during two centuries had been moving more and more into the domain of tragedy by shifting its concern from God's saving mercy to God's avenging justice.[10] The Mirror drew its surprising strength from the latest emphasis of the morality play: divine avenging justice; and in its spontaneous and animated tragical narratives "the problem of tragic retri-

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[9] Ibid., p. 201.

[10] Ibid., p. 271.

bution proved to have a fresh urgency." In sixteenth century England the concept that this present world of the flesh has its own perceptible laws of tragic cause and effect was generally gaining momentum. Elizabethan nondramatic tragical story had already succeeded quite well in affirming that concept; and the Mirror, sensing the strength of the idea, took up the theme, meanwhile making the inspired discovery that British history and legend were an almost inexhaustible source of tragical material waiting to be drawn upon. Together the historical chroniclers and the tragical moralizers of the Mirror and its progeny made vitally important preparation for the establishment of tragedy upon the Elizabethan stage,[11] a tragedy combining the concepts of divine and mundane retribution for sin, working itself out in momentous historical incidents.

> First the original Mirror and later its extensions and imitations taught the Elizabethan public that tragical moralizing had newly moving appeal when brought close home by being appended to the storied misfortunes of a Richard II or an Owen Glendower;[12]

And so the utilizing of British history, as well as universal, in the cause of tragical plot-making based on retribution, got under way, given an added impetus by mounting public demand. The stage was now set, when the Mirror had made its impression, for the career of gifted dramatists--like Shakespeare--with a historical-tragical interest, anxious to depict tragic representations of man's historic moral failures and downfalls.

Speaking of the impression made by the Mirror on early Elizabethan culture, that impression probably rivals, if not excells, the Senecan tradition in claiming influence upon the spirit and inner structure of later drama. Certainly it is a study worthy of the most sincere critical

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[11] Ibid.

[12] Ibid.

attention in relation to Elizabethan literary history, since it had such important bearing upon the course of that same history. One literary historian lauds it as having "a career perhaps more complex and influential than that of any other Elizabethan book."[13] To be sure, its influence is demonstrated quite beyond the fear of gainsay by its enthusiastic acceptance with the general populace, an acceptance so extraordinary that it is referred to by that same conservative historian as "hot demand." The very fact that the Mirror had perpetual extensions and imitations—indeed, the "progeny" of the Mirror was in some ways as important as the original—not only illustrates its enduring popularity, but portends the eventual effect it would have upon succeeding literary ages. In analyzing the comprehensive scope of that effect, the original work itself is the best interpreter of its effects, since, as was the case with Seneca, its own characteristics speak clearly for themselves.

There is hardly a possibility of missing the dominant idea of the Mirror: of the nineteen stories in the original compilation, by far the majority are "tragedies of retribution for sin or fault."[14] The lengthy title appearing on the 1559 edition is highly descriptive of its purpose:

A Myrroure for Magistrates. Wherein may be seen by example of other, with howe greuous plages vices are punished: and howe frayle and vnstable worldly prosperitie is founde, even of those, whom Fortune seemeth most highly to fauour.[15]

The Latin motto appended to the title, "Faelix quem faciunt aliena pericula cautum," enforces the lesson of retribution.[16] An editor's preface

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[13] Baugh, Brooke and others, A Literary History of England (New York, 1948), p. 398.

[14] Farnham, p. 283.

[15] Ibid., p. 281.

[16] Ibid.

to one of the later extensions is just as enlightening:

> The tragedies, gathered by Ihon Bochas, of all such princes as fell from theyr estates throvghe the mutability of Fortune since the creacion of Adam, vntil his time: wherin may be seen what uices bring menne to destruccion, wyth notable warninges howe the like may be auoyded.[17]

Farnham declares that the Mirror possessed "a severe morality that often went beyond the morality of the Fall of Princes in insistence upon tragic retribution."

The book purposes to "mirror" the instability of fortune, the loathsomeness of vice and its punishment; meanwhile the reader is "constantly reminded that 'the only thing which is purposed herein is by example of others' miseries to dissuade all men from all sins and vices.'"[18] Now the vices by which the men fall in the nineteen stories are analyzed plainly, not subtly or with restraint. For instance, Mowbray, who was banished by Richard II, was guilty of treachery, pride, and envy. Richard, who was next to fall, "was a king who ruled all by lust and made little of justice, right, or law." The authors manifestly concurred in the idea that men's miseries spring from "lack of due regard for measure, from rashness, overweening ambition, and intemperance." They wrote under a strong conviction that there is a "salarye of synne" that must be paid here on earth and that there is a chartable course whereby man's faults bring him to ruin.[19]

In more specific definition of the particular kind of retribution set forth in the Mirror, its stories stress immediate justice in the

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[17] Ibid., p. 279.

[18] Baugh, p. 398.

[19] Farnham, pp. 284-290.

mortal world.[20] His judgment cannot rest till a divinely appointed date beyond temporal time; he has sinned intolerably against the mortal world and by it he must be punished. Yet there is something outside the mundane sphere that becomes an "external impulse" to enforce retribution. "Call it Fortune, the stars, or, more properly, God." The idea of Fortune as somewhat of a representative substitute for God, was prominent in the Mirror, coming to it from medieval tragical story.[21] The Mirror's extensions and imitations, its progeny, took up the central proposition concerning retribution set forth in the original, and, according to Farnham, they "bear witness that the tragedy of mundane retribution, not the tragedy of mundane irrationality, had the stronger power of perpetuation and growth in Elizabethan England."[22] It is not difficult to discern what Elizabethan tragedy owes to this one development alone in the Elizabethan's progress toward the finished concept of tragedy, to say nothing of the Mirror's overall contribution, as well as the contributions of its dramatic predecessors, to the art of tragical moralizing in relation to sin. There is little necessity to point out specific instances in Shakespeare's later tragedies of this multiple indebtedness of the poet to his own English literary tradition. The obvious influence of that tradition upon his sublime conception of tragedy in an overall way needs no vindication; the tragedy of Macbeth alone illustrates that truth.

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The foregoing chapters have pointed out some of the major influences

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[20] Ibid., p. 297.

[21] Ibid., p. 291.

[22] Ibid., p. 304.

that contributed to the development of Elizabethan culture, with a view always to drama's special position in the overall picture. Every one of those influences was profoundly and basically important, either directly or indirectly, to dramatic art, affecting its spirit, its form and structure, indeed the very course of its splendid success in the world of literature. In Chapter One we saw how the Hebrew's moral fervor and intense spiritual feeling, along with his sense of sin and emphasis on divine retribution for evil, had a vital part in the shaping of Anglo-Saxon civilization for its earliest beginnings. Both Hebraism and Hellenism were invaluable contributions to us as a race; but it was the stronger of the two, Hebraism, that made the deepest impression upon us in the realm of sin consciousness, the area of supreme importance to this thesis. Extending its influence through Christianity, Hebraism weaved its principles of sin discipline and retribution into the spiritual fabric of English society throughout the dark ages and to an appreciable degree all during the Renaissance.

In Chapter Two we saw Hebraism living again in Puritanism and in the Reformation, and Hellenism in the Renaissance. The renewed Hellenism, like that of the anterior Greek world, was again reduced to minister to a regenerated Hebraism, in that Puritanism, armed with its mighty Bible, became a virtually irresistible force in Elizabeth's England, particularly in the last half of her reign. The Puritan's movement, revolutionizing the character of the whole nation with its ardent conviction, its extreme sensitiveness to sin and severity regarding sin's retribution, while not working a universal religious conversion, did drastically affect the inner spiritual character of the people; and even while holding art in contempt, the Puritan's fervor reacted upon the literary world to

the extent of bequeathing to it an abnormal awareness of sin and a subjective persuasion regarding the retribution of moral lawlessness.

In Chapter Three the sixteenth century revival of interest in Latin Seneca was established as an historical fact. On the basis of excellent authority, it was affirmed that Seneca exerted tremendous influence upon Elizabethan tragedy. Kyd's Spanish Tragedy is a cardinal example of that influence, while even Shakespeare's later tragedies reveal some indebtedness to him. The Senecan tradition was notorious for its particular emphasis upon themes of abnormal vice and thrilling sexual passion, resulting in severe retribution. Seneca prompted in the Elizabethan the taste for the unnatural, for the unrestrained display of violent lawlessness and bloody retribution upon the English stage; and while Seneca's direct legacy to English tragedy was heavy on this emphasis, Seneca's influence in Italy, coming to England indirectly, yielded even a deeper impression of moral lawlessness.

Chapter Four dealt with Elizabethan drama's ancestry, i.e. old sacred drama, the morality play, the Mirror and its progeny, all teaching their powerful lessons in tragic moralizing. They were in truth ministers to the strongest element in English society—the religious spirit. The messages that these crude but dynamic experiments in tragedy left to the Elizabethan concerning the horror of sin and retribution in the mundane sense were too forceful to be forgotten. The later Elizabethan dramatist rejected the didactic tone of his dramatic predecessors but capitalized upon the invaluable experience that had been accumulated through ages of moral plot-making.

Now to consider the conclusive results of the background forces upon dramatic art. Tragedy felt the impact of this sin-retribution em-

phasis in two ways. First, as has been stated before and shall be demonstrated generally in Part II, the spirit, the inner form and structure of drama betray a direct effect of these great influences, a natural consequence in that the Elizabethan playwright's concept of life and art was inevitably retraceable to his spiritual and cultural environment. Second, and quite apart from this more direct influence, tragedy was yet to feel the strength of the sin idea through another real and influencial medium: the audience. Here, to be sure, is a rewarding phase of our study thus far. In spite of a great deal of unscholarly criticism written on this theme, Mr. Brander Matthews has made some very worthy observations in which he very cogently outlines the indispensible role of the audience in the success of the stage. He said significantly, "There is ever a tacit agreement, a quasi-contract between the playwright and the playgoers."[23] This agreement is no more or less than logical since drama, he believes, is more than mere self-expression on the part of the poet; dramatic art, to be genuinely great, "must be the art of the people as a whole, with all their divergencies of cultivation." It cannot be serenely and objectively aloof, for its success is proportionate to the degree that it mirrors Nature, Nature as it is conceived by the cultural world from which, and for whose delight, it is produced. It is in a true sense "a function of the crowd." It is of incidental importance to us that Matthews is relatively successful in establishing generally the fact of a certain "pressure" created by the audience upon the content of the drama, thinking in terms of the drama of a definite period or place; and he quotes for authority from Dryden and Johnson respectively:

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[23]Brander Matthews, A Study of the Drama (New York, 1910), p. 69.

> They who have best succeeded on the stage
> Have still conformed their genius to the age.
>
> The drama's laws the drama's patrons give,
> And we who live to please, must please to live.[24]

But it is certainly not incidental to our study that the response of the audience, the measure of its delight in, and its emotional participation in, drama is dependent ever upon the spectator's tastes and his unreflective sympathies and attitudes toward life, which things are in turn dependent upon his background. The importance of Hebraism, Puritanism, Seneca, and pre-Elizabethan drama in the overall development of the Elizabethan's cultural attitude and emotional appetite is beyond estimation. Those influences saturated the cultural atmosphere in which he thrived with a supersensitiveness to sin, which sin was to be accompanied by an inexorable law of retribution. The Elizabethan was conditioned as few peoples in history were to appreciate that particular interpretation of life that regards man's fortunes and misfortunes in the light of his moral-spiritual conduct. Therefore, the portrayal of sin fascinated him to a unique degree and the working out of its retribution intrigued him no end, because these things meant more to him than ages less conditioned by such stern regard for evil can realize. Indeed, the enactment of sin held for the Elizabethan audience thrilling emotional connotations that an audience lacking such background would never be capable of appreciating. He was, as it were, especially prepared to enjoy to the full the power inherent in the idea of evil when it challenges the moral foundations of society. In a word, to realize fully the strength of the sin question in Shakespearean drama, the modern reader does well to approach

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[24] Ibid., pp. 68-79.

the great tragedies with an awareness of those forces which so vitally influenced the moral and spiritual life of the Elizabethan playgoer. When he, the modern, is equipped with such knowledge, the good-vs-evil struggle in Shakespeare will possess for him the power it was originally intended to exert.

CHAPTER V. TRAGIC SIN APPLIED TO THE PLAYS IN GENERAL

The importance of the sin element in Shakespearean tragedy is evident by the prominence it enjoys in the vast field of tragic action created by the great poet, assuming momentarily for the sake of clarity that sin compares loosely with evil or villainy. Of all the tragedies coming from that period we might well call Shakespeare's crowning maturity, not one is without a dark thread of sin as a basic, irreplaceable motif of plot. Indeed, the damage that would accure to any of the superbly-motivated plots, Macbeth, for instance, if the sin element were subtracted is almost beyond estimation.

Snider, in his scholarly critcism of Shakespeare, sanctions this premise when he says that the "Shakespearean Solution," obviously Snider's designation for the tragic denouement, in whatever shape it might occur, "has one fundamental principle—the return of the deed upon the doer."[1] It is toward this final dealing with the problem of sin, the doer suffering for his deed, together with the judgment of the tragic flaw within the hero, that the total action is initiated and ultimately directed. It is the heart, the essential strength and power of Shakespearean action.

For a clearer appreciation of this truth the action of tragic plot may be condensed into a rudimentary formula for telescopic analysis: two words—Conflict and Solution. This is the very foundation of tragic plot. Tragic sin takes its place as a vital component in the making up of that formula as can be seen in Snider's explanation of the structure of Shake-

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[1]Denton J. Snider, The Shakespearian Drama (St. Louis, 1889), p. XXVI.

spearean drama.[2] "Guilt and Retribution" are, moreover, according to him the two principal Movements of the action;[3] and they are inevitably linked up with Conflict and Solution. Guilt, the counterpart of sin, supplies the motive for Conflict while Conflict deals with sin by establishing final Guilt; Retribution effects the final Solution by eliminating the source of conflict—sin. Yet completely apart from the support of higher authority it is a thesis capable of demonstration that the Shakespearean conception of tragedy, and the idea of tragic sin are virtually inseparable; at least they are never separated in the consummate tragedies before us for consideration: Hamlet, Macbeth, King Lear, Othello, Romeo and Juliet, and Richard II.[4]

In this, the second half of the thesis, we shall see this principle of sin working itself out in these six great plays. Since all or several of the plays share alike certain general characteristics in relation to the problem of sin, Chapter V will deal with those particular aspects of sin that are common property of Shakespearean tragedy in general; while Chapter VI will treat of tragic sin as each of the plays employs it in its own individual way.

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[2] Ibid., pp. LI - LII.

[3] Ibid., pp. XLIX - LIII.

[4] These six have been selected for two reasons. First, and principally, because of their fitness for demonstrating the thesis; second, because they represent Shakespeare's superior attainments in separate fields of tragedy. Professor Charlton, in his Shakespearian Tragedy, says that Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, and King Lear are generally agreed upon as the most consummate expressions of Shakespeare's tragic art; and he calls Romeo and Juliet "one of Shakespeare's most preferred plays." Coleridge places Richard II as "the first and most admirable of all Shakespeare's purely historical plays."

Tragic Sin Defined

Tragic sin in its most simple application could be defined with such plain terms as crime, injustice, vice, lawlessness, or in general a breach of the moral order sufficiently serious to warrant irrevocable justice. Tragic sin cannot be a trivial offense, a common foible or frailty of human flesh, else it would not supply motive enough to affect so profoundly the course of tragic action. It of course can manifest itself in the world of reality only through the medium of character i.e., personality; and the individual who commits sin in the tragic sense is destined to be possessed by it and eventually destroyed by it, at least because of it. Tragedy, when it runs truest to its real character, gives the role of the tragic sinner to a personality other than the hero under the familiar designation of villain; yet in Shakespeare the hero himself may conceiveably be the tragic sinner, as in the case of Richard II or Macbeth, antithetical as that fact is to the purest idea of tragedy. But whoever becomes guilty of the tragic offense becomes the personification of the forces of evil, marked for destruction by both divine and mundane justice. That individual and his sin are fused into a concrete reality in the action; e.g., Claudius' sin is as real to us as is Claudius himself. It is not some nebulous nonentity which we have difficulty identifying or holding in mind. Claudius' sin is Claudius, just as Macbeth's sin is Macbeth. It would be difficult to conceive of any of the Shakespearean sinners apart from their vices. In sounding out the various depths and intensities of sin in its application to tragedy no attempt has been made to delve deep into such metaphysical studies as "The Ethical World of Shakespeare"[5] or "The Moral System of Shakespeare;"[6] rath-

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[5]Snider, p. XXVII.

[6]Richard G. Moulton, The Moral System of Shakespeare (New York, 1903).

er, the attempt has been to understand basically what elements appeared to Shakespeare's age as hateful and odious, yet at the same time thrilling; and the extent to which those elements inflamed the imagination and stirred the emotions to positive response. This last consideration has brought us to the next point of inquiry—the point that in Shakespearean drama sin becomes much more than a vague opposite of Greek philosophical idealism, the Good and the Beautiful. Shakespeare invests it with the character of a diabolic negative force working havoc upon the moral systems of man.

Now to elucidate that truth. It was suggested above that tragic sin compares loosely with evil or villainy; and so it does when it is considered carelessly with only superficial interest. But because of the Anglo-Saxon religious conscience, gained from Hebraism and Christianity, descending through centuries of hardy tradition, tragic sin went beyond the philosophical abstraction called evil and beyond any ordinary literary interpretation of villainy. This fact is so aptly expressed in a previous quotation from Symonds[7] that it seems altogether fitting to borrow from it again. Symonds underlines the Anglo-Saxon propensity toward deepening the complexion of crime and intensifying lawlessness beyond the Machiavellian conception of the Italian. The English playwright's characters contrasted with the Italian were "ten-fold darker and more terrible...,sin, in his conception of character, was complicated with the sense of sin, as it had never been in a Florentine or a Neopolitan." Now it is this intense preoccupation with crime and lawlessness, as in Macbeth, and this amplification of evil and moral perversion, as in Othello, that is

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[7]See p. 18 of the Thesis.

the essence of tragic sin. We see it again so clearly in the inhuman depravity of Lear's daughters and in the very human, yet diabolical, schemes of Claudius.

A question naturally arises in connection with these definitions: Does this interpretation of Shakespearean plot do violence to the universal ideal of tragedy? an ideal as ancient as the Greeks themselves; namely that the tragic hero must be inherently noble, not evil; but yet to be truly tragic he must be the author of his own calamity through some tragic defect of character, rather than having some external force cause his fall. In other words, in this shift from the conventional treatment of tragic material--Shakespeare's heroes are somethimes infamously evil, like Macbeth, or if not, the effecting of the tragic termination may depend upon the villain, as in Iago's case, quite as much as upon the hero himself--has Shakespeare violated the true spirit of tragedy? The import of these questions is old in Shakespearean criticism. It suggests the spirit of a movement in criticism that flourished with the seventeenth century revival of classicism and withered fortunately in the light of Doctor Johnson's common-sense judgment, a movement that presumed to weigh Shakespeare in the balances of classical tragic rules and find him wanting.

The fallacy of such mislogic is exposed by the exceptionally commonplace fact that Shakespearean and Greek drama must be judged on relatively independent bases since Shakespeare served an age physically, mentally, and spiritually different from that of Euripides. Elizabethan civilization differed profoundly from the Grecian in the matter of conviction and of taste, if not also in the basic interpretation of life itself. The difference is of course fundamentally a difference in background and experience, a fact made clear earlier in the thesis. This alone makes

the classical scorn of Shakespeare absurd.

Furthermore the criticism of modern times is practically in agreement that Shakespeare is virtually beyond the negative restrictions of static laws. He is not lightly discounted as being himself a qualified dramatic lawgiver. Yet it is important that Shakespeare did not utterly repudiate the dramatic principles of Greek tragedy; he simply transcends them when they are inflexible or outdated. Take for instance Aristotle's much-treated "unities". According to Doctor Johnson's liberal interpretation of the unity of action,[8] Shakespeare properly observes that first unity in keeping with its importance, as all the tragic plots from Romeo and Juliet to Hamlet illustrate. On the other hand in none of the plays does he take too seriously the second and third unities, time and place, just as Aristotle's original intention indicates less insistence concerning their application.

In the matter of Aristotle's "tragic flaw" principle--the fact that the hero must bear within himself the making of his own lamentable fall through some weakness of character--Shakespeare has not so much taken away as he has added to; he actually enhances the idea by casting other forces into relationship with it. Notice how Hamlet and Oedipus are different in plot. Oedipus is sole cause of his woe, while Hamlet has Claudius to blame, as well as his own frailty, for the tragic fate he suffers. It is the same with Othello, Lear, Romeo and Juliet. The evil of others is highly instrumental in bringing about their calamity. In reality it is a basically different approach to the interpretation of character. Instead of leaving the tragic frailty to bring about the final ca-

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[8] William Thrall and Addison Hibbard, A Handbook to Literature (New York, 1936), p. 451.

tastrophe alone, Shakespeare has linked with it in the action an element of deep moral lawlessness to heighten the effect and to make the tragedy more perplexing and complete.

Then in keeping with the authority inherent in his greatness Shakespeare set aside the Aristotelian dictum that the tragic hero must transcend the proportions of the common man by high birth when he gives Othello and Romeo and Juliet heroic roles; and he further abrogates the classic principle by offsetting the tragic with contrasting comic scenes, even in some of his most serious tragedies. Romeo and Juliet, for example, opens with puns and jests, followed later by the Nurse's, as well as Mercutio's, lewd but laughable wit. Lear had its Fool, Hamlet its comic grave-digger scene, along with Hamlet's own witty sarcasms and word-play, Othello its Roderigo; and even the sober Richard II has its ridiculous episode where York accuses his son, Aumerle, before the newly crowned Bolingbroke.

To digress momentarily from the central thought, it may be significant to observe that the classical approach to tragedy had already suffered some change with a minimum of offense to Elizabethan critics. Such technical aspects of Greek plot as the chorus and the deus ex machina, not exactly compatible in their original forms with the modern idea of drama, were improvised in various ways or omitted entirely, a fact sufficient in itself to illustrate that tragedy is elastic enough to accommodate itself within reasonable limits to the necessities of any age.

Shakespeare asserted his sublime independence again, and by all means most forcibly, in the realm of character, most productive of all Shakespearean fields of criticism.[9] Of the myriad critical comments on

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[9]Halladay, p. 170.

this theme one is at the moment most significant: "The greatest contribution of modern times to the drama, however, is character, and it is character expressed in poetry that makes Shakespeare's plays as great as, perhaps even greater than, those of AEschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides."[10] Halladay, from whom the above quotation was taken, delineates as nicely as any of Shakespeare's critics what the poet has done for drama even beyond the sublime efforts of Euripides and Sophocles. Here it is in paraphrase: Action was supreme in the classical models; Aristotle summed up the entire idea of tragedy as an imitation of action. In Shakespeare, drama became more than merely an imitation of action; it became the "projection of character in action." It might even be said that in Shakespeare and the modern drama action is subsidiary to and dependent upon character.[11] The stock figures of Greek tragedy, embodiments of abstract principles acting as puppets to illustrate an all-significant truth, were rejected by the spirit of the Renaissance for more genuine representations of life in the form of actual flesh and blood personalities acting in real situations, pitted against each other in great conflict.

Shakespeare was unquestionably destined to give the most consummate expression to the new concept of character, for herein is his transcendent greatness as a poet: "The delineation of character is usually considered Shakespeare's greatest gift."[12] Moreover, his "supremacy" resides in the fact that his "characters are not simply an embodiment of some abstraction of virtue or vice; though they have, and must have, virtue and

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[10] Ibid.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Snider, p. XLVII.

vice; nor are they merely the outer active superficiality of a living being, without the inner essence of man, though they have, and must have, life and action."[13] Without contradiction Shakespeare's characters—the timeless lovers, Romeo and Juliet; the universal personality and man of world, Hamlet; the noble, naive Othello; and the soul-distraught Macbeth and Claudius—all live out the full expression of their complex individuality so completely that that fact alone would make them immortal.

To be sure, it is through the medium of character that Shakespeare experiences the deepest realization of his dramatic power; and moreover it is in the treatment of character that tragic sin enters to play its all-important role. Sin's entrance in the action transforms character from a simple, static representation of a type into a many-sided active force capable of challenging the very foundations of the moral order itself, and capable of altering even the values of life. Sin in the hands of Shakespeare becomes a means to reveal character, an instrument with which to probe into the most remote recesses of the soul and draw its hidden meaning into the world of visible reality. Notice the transformation in Macbeth's character as he contemplates and finally yields to the suggestion of evil. What might have been a relatively simple soul is now the arena of a thousand clashing, conflicting emotions; and every part of his personality is inflamed and dilated out of proportion. Shakespeare allows sin to probe into Macbeth's inner being and lay bare its misery for us to see. So it is with Claudius and Richard II. On the other hand, sin is virtually as effective in drawing out character in personalities other than the sinner himself. Iago's sin transforms the de-

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[13] Ibid., p. XLVIII.

cidedly uncomplicated nature of Othello into a monstrosity of emotion, goaded by jealousy; while the two evil daughters turn Lear into a raging, maddened philosopher; and the sin of others brings out unbelievable beauties of emotion and romantic pathos in Romeo and Juliet. On every count sin is an effective revealer of character.

Tragic sin may express itself in each plot in various forms and to varying intensities—ambition, avarice, hate, murder—with the different individual sins cast into sundry combinations; but in each plot, though every aspect of lawlessness has a separate identity of its own, it is more properly considered a part of a whole idea: that is to say that tragic sin has a unity somewhat of its own in each plot, moving in all its individual phases toward a total, final result. In that progression from beginning to result, it may originate in some elemental form like ambition, and evolve into a more advanced stage, e.g. uncontrollable aspiration, and eventually break forth into overt action in the form of murder, as Macbeth very graphically illustrates. Or according to the same pattern with merely the individual sins changed, the development of the same unity regarding sin may be observed as it builds around the wicked Iago and again around Lear's detestable daughters, beginning in some kind of hatred and advancing into extreme violence that fatally engulfs the sinner, as well as the relatively innocent person who has been sinned against. On the other hand, the fully-developed expression of the sin may be sprung into the action at the beginning: for instance the play might open with its principal theme the vindication of a murder committed previously, as we see in Hamlet. But regardless of this difference, tragic sin works toward the establishment of guilt and engages all the dramatic action either to involve the individual deeper and deeper in a state of

irrevocable guilt or to prove his guilt. Notice, as a case in point, that the plot tightens around the ambitious Macbeth from the beginning, even as it does around Regan and Goneril, and Richard II, for the express purpose of multiplying his sin and forcing him deeper and deeper into a state of guilt; as for Claudius, the action is directed more specifically toward fixing guilt upon him, although he is manifestly entangled more inextricably in the webb of guilt as he struggles to free himself.

Now as to sin's absolute ultimate objective implicit in tragedy, it is not essentially different from its philosophical counterpart stated in Hebrew-Christian theology: The complete overthrow of the ethical order—which it cannot accomplish—,involving the destruction of man, or better, the individual, which fact it can conceivably accomplish, indeed which it does accomplish in every one of the plays. Moreover it strives to destroy not only the guilty, i.e. the actual sinner, but also those who are involved quite against their will and relatively innocent, like Othello, a point that shall be clarified in later discussion. So in reality sin proposes to force its effects even beyond simply establishing guilt. The reasoning leading to that conclusion is simple: Sin has only one true result in its finality—destruction. The spectator cannot conceive of a sinner in the tragic sense eventually surviving the implied penalty for his deed; he must die for it. Accordingly, Claudius cannot conceivably outlive the just recompense for his murder, else it would not satisfy our sense of justice, an indispensable part of the final tragic emotion. Iago, rash Tybalt, Goneril and Regan could not escape death or it would strike the spectator as a travesty of tragedy. One Bible writer expressed it as follows: "sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death."[14] It is this

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[14] James 1:15.

quality in the nature of sin that portends impending disaster: it must of necessity reward all who taste of it with complete ruin. The moment we see the victim embark on a course of sin, sin in the tragic sense, we are smitten with the justified realization that this course must ultimately end in death, including hurt and probable destruction for others who are comparatively undeserving. So to this end the total idea of tragic sin must embrace the notion of lawlessness to the point of no return. The spectator, whether beholding the sinner committing his deeds, or simply being informed indirectly of their character, must sense in them the nature of such offense that repentance and reconciliation with the outraged elements are impossible; for instance, we know instinctively that Macbeth, after Duncan's murder, and Richard, after confiscating Hereford's inheritance, can never turn back and make peace, full peace, with the society they have offended. Or at least he, the spectator, must be inwardly assured that repentance is wholly inconsistent with the character of the sinner—Iago, Edmond, Goneril, Regan, all by their very nature assure us that a change of heart on their part is impossible, while Claudius at prayer actually tells us as much—so that redemption from the ordeal is unthinkable short of unconditional justice. In the working out of that justice in tragic plot, a kind of total disaster is always implicit; and tragedy springs from the disaster in that sin has destroyed something besides the sinner, something that was precious, of unrecoverable value, and essentially good, although imperfect. We sense approaching chaos as justice presses the sinner, Claudius, or Iago, or the evil duo, Goneril and Regan, to full payment of sin; but we are moved with a feeling of tragic regret that a priceless treasure like Hamlet, or Othello, or Lear, though faulty and to a certain degree deserving, is overwhelmed

in the tide of judgment. Even in regard to Macbeth and Richard II justice is forced to destroy something that could have been noble, good, and worthwhile.

That final justice just mentioned is familiar in criticism under the heading Retribution, the conclusive phase of the whole action when all wrongs are punished and right is restored. Only by it is the final tragic result effected, since it ties together, so to speak, all the various strands of the action and gives them a gratifying significance by setting things straight and equal that heretofore were unjustly out of proportion on the side of evil, a state of affairs amply described by Hamlet's memorable phrase, "the time is out of joint." Notice, however, that retribution has not one, but really two functions: first, and most important to us, it deals with the sin of the tragic sinner, or villain we might say for clarity's sake; and second, it deals with the fatal frailty within the hero(thinking now of those instances when the hero, e.g. Othello, is not the sinner. Regarding Macbeth and Richard II, who both fill the dual role of hero and sinner, we shall consider retribution as simply falling upon them because of their evil, without technical speculation as to which function is involved.). In regard to its first function retribution is an inevitable counterpart of tragic sin, since it follows sin as destruction follows in the wake of fire. It becomes a logical necessity in view of guilt, the finished work of sin: the sense of moral responsiblity on the part of the audience demands that it be so. As far as Elizabethan drama is concerned, without retribution for sin there would be no tragedy in the true sense; the action would appear as a series of episodes lacking a satisfactory conclusion. If Hamlet closed without Claudius feeling the chastening rod of justice, a principle common to all the plays, we

should consider ourselves quite imposed upon by one who possessed a pitifully imperfect conception of dramatic plot. The completed action must satisfy the tragic emotion, of which justice for sin is a very necessary part; and, moving into the area of retribution's second function, the completed action must leave the feeling that all enraged factions are at peace with the world. In accomplishing this, the terminating action mediates all conflicts of the preceding struggle, and brings harmony between rival forces.[15] In other words the sinner is judged and the hero, even though he represents the cause of right, suffers for his tragic weakness. By way of repetition, retribution's problem is broad: the spectator's sense of justice must be satisfied, all elements of the action must be reconciled to the moral and ethical order; in brief, as we have quoted Snider as saying before, the "deed must be returned upon the doer," both in respect to the villain and the hero. This done, retribution is accomplished and the action is satisfactorily terminated.

The fact itself that retribution has a broader office in Shakespearean drama than the judgment of the tragic sin needs further explanation. If it did not have such dual function, then retribution's work would not be exactly tragic. For instance, if absolute justice in due proportion to guilt is rendered to the sinner, then there is of course no real tragedy, since tragedy purports the idea of judgment out of proportion to desert. We have genuine pleasure in seeing wrong fully punished; we only rejoice at the sight of a cruel man being repaid with cruelty. Strict retribution for sin, then, would be more akin to the spirit of comedy than tragedy, since the villain would suffer and the good hero would go unscathed.

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[15]This sentence is a loose paraphrase of Snider, p. XXV.

Therefore if Claudius and Iago did suffer fully for their guilt, while Hamlet and Othello triumphed finally, not even then would we have tragedy. On the other hand, we are simply shocked at seeing a completely innocent man suffer. Retribution, then, must deal with more than actual sin and yet not fatally involve the completely innocent individual, which is to say that the hero must be at fault at least to some degree. In the most excellent expressions of tragedy, say Hamlet, Othello, or Lear, Shakespeare has beautifully worked out the proper combination. He has so interwoven the element of sin in the villain and the principle of the tragic flaw in the hero into the thread of the action that retributive justice falls on both in the end; but the real tragedy lies in the fact that the hero in the final analysis brings calamity upon himself through his own frailty, not that the tragic sinner is destroyed.[16] The office of tragic sin accordingly is not to produce the tragic effect directly. While heightening the suspense and intensifying the action, it acts indirectly upon the final tragic result by agitating the fatal weakness within the real tragic individual. The effectiveness of this relationship is clear in Othello. There is no tragedy in that Iago is delivered to the torturers in the closing scene, but certainly the real tragedy in the story is the result of his sin, since by his wicked intrigues Othello's pathetic weakness is amplified and aggravated to the point that he commits a act warranting no less than death itself. It is Othello who is actually tragic, but it is Iago the sinner who causes him to become so.

The significant relationship between tragic sin and the hero's fatal

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[16] When the hero is himself the tragic sinner, as in Macbeth, the final result cannot be as truly tragic as when the villain and the hero have different roles.

weakness or frailty (considering for the moment only those instances when the hero is not the tragic sinner) is made still clearer by Snider's discussion of the latter under the heading, the Nature of Tragedy: "There must be something within the Individual which brings him to destruction; there must be a principle which fills his breast and drives him forward to his fate; his death is to spring from his deed."[17] The last clause does not refer necessarily to the tragic sin, except concerning Macbeth and Richard II, but refers more properly to the tragic error arising from the frailty or flaw within the hero. Tragedy, therefore, is something more than the result of purely external forces acting against the tragic Individual. In a real sense he, the noble hero, must bear within his nature the embryo of tragedy if "his death is to spring from his deed." In other words, he must be so constituted within that circumstances conspiring from without produce tragedy through him. Lear and Othello, for two excellent examples, cause the tragedies of Lear and Othello by their very nature, but unfortunate circumstances concurring in both cases for the purpose of destroying the tragic Individual, are responsible for bringing out the worst within him, forcing him, as it were, to destroy himself. Very important in this process is the "principle" which possesses him and "drives him forward to his fate." That principle within the hero is the central propelling force of the tragic movement. Hamlet, Othello, Lear all illustrate how forcibly the hero is borne up on the strength of that principle, how the action is literally driven to greater intensity by it. Significantly enough, tragic sin and its retribution supplies the hero with this compelling principle, remembering of course that we are still

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[17] Snider, p. 1.

considering plays in which hero and sinner are different characters. The tragic Individual inherits the responsibility of dealing with the lawlessness involved, as does Hamlet, in which case he becomes the agent to effect its retribution; or he is forced, like Lear, to wear out his days resisting it and denouncing its horror; or else, like Othello, he is deceived by evil and is imbued with a false principle. At any rate, sin provides the hero with an all-powerful motive overshadowing all else, which in turn urges him on until he falls under retribution's all-engulfing stroke. And in those instances where the hero is himself guilty of the tragic sin, as is Macbeth, the very sin itself supplies him with that principle which drives him on to destruction.

We have already noted that strict equality is not observed in the outworking of retribution's two functions; i.e., first, the sinner's punishment and, second, the hero's judgment--indeed, herein is the very essence of tragedy, to reiterate an earlier observation: one receives judgment according to desert but the other receives judgment out of proportion to desert. As to the hero we experience a sensation akin to surprise regarding his judgment: we do not wish for, nor instinctively insist upon, retribution for his faults; so that we do not look forward to it with any degree of expectancy. For example, though Lear's fault brings on his misery, our thoughts are not bent upon seeing him punished fatally; and therefore his death somewhat stuns us. But turning to the sinner, we not only expect, but instinctively demand that he pay in full, because justice has no reservations concerning him. We look forward with desire to the moment when Iago and Claudius will be exposed and destroyed. Now since retribution's clearest, most obvious work is in regard to tragic sin, which is, after all, its first function, that phase is the most signifi-

cant to our study. With this in mind we will proceed further into the investigation of retribution's nature and work regarding sin.

To begin with, the principle of retribution, in some form, is as old as drama itself: Oedipus, Creon, Theseus all suffer a form of retribution. But retribution in its application is hardly the same in any age. In their cases fate is penalizing man for his frailty. In Seneca an almost-personal fate punishes man for his monstrous perversity, not for a mere flaw or error of judgment. In the Morality Play a personal God vindicates His righteous justice against sin. In Revenge Tragedy, as in Shakespeare, the divine element is still ultimately responsible for the punishment of moral wrong, but man through temporal means carries out divine order, as both the Spanish Tragedy and Hamlet amply illustrate. No matter in what age it is found, however, retribution's strength lies in the innate assurance in human nature that justice will prevail over wrong; and this confidence was strong in the Elizabethan mind.

This basic demand that justice be satisfied is given one of its most powerful expressions in all dramatic action by Kyd in his play just mentioned, the Spanish Tragedy, a decade before Shakespeare began to create his greater tragic plots. Isabella, while Hieronimo for the moment thinks only of mortal revenge, displays the expectation, the characteristic unfaltering assurance of an unaltering providential law of retribution when she cries out in grief for her murdered son, Horatio:

> The heav'ns are just; murder cannot be hid:
> Time is the author of both truth and right,
> And time will bring this treachery to light.[18]

In a following soliloquy Hieronimo vents a similar confidence:

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[18] Thomas Kyd, The Spanish Tragedy (London, 1925), II,v,109-111.

> O sacred heav'ns! if this unhallow'd deed,
> If this inhuman and barbarous attempt,
> If this uncomparable murder thus
> Of mine, but now no more my son,
> Shall unreveal'd and unrevenged pass,
> How should we term your dealings to be just,
> If you unjustly deal with those that in
> your justice trust?[19]

It is this strong sense of assurance in the Elizabethan mind, that crime and trespass of divine law, from the moment it is committed to tis final consummation, must be vindicated, which gives tragic plot much of its suspense and power. Witness the immediate and sustained effect upon the action of Hamlet when the ghost exposes the crime element involved in old Hamlet's death. The real action has not actually begun until that moment. It is only then that Hamlet becomes endowed with his great all-engulfing purpose and every mind that follows that action throws its support to the end of accomplishing justice.

The entrance of the ghost into our discussion illustrates the part which the divine plays in the retributive justice of Shakespearean plot. As mentioned in the above paragraph, the divine, supernatural element is always active along with the element of mortal revenge, for divine law has been broken. Notice that Heironimo and Isabella address their appeals to the "heav'ns," Hamlet speaks of being "Prompted to [his] revenge by heaven,"[20] and the disillusioned Lear calls for "All the star'd vengeances of heaven"[21] to fall on his ungrateful daughter. Macduff likewise solicits the "gentle heavens" in a manner which assures us that Providence is on his side when

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[19] Ibid., III, ii, 5-11.

[20] Henry Norman Hudson, The Tragedy of Hamlet (New York, 1909), II,ii, 571.

[21] Thomas Parrott and Robert Telfer, "Lear," Shakespeare (New York, 1929), II,iv,164.

he desires to be brought to contest with Macbeth;[22] while Frair Lawrence reminds the hate-bearing Capulets in their sorrow that heaven is punishing their grievous error.[23] Even when not so specifically stated, this fact is implied, because human revenge is not enough; even though the actual execution of justice is delegated to man, something more than man must be interested in prosecuting evil. For instance, remove the supernatural interest in the case of Hamlet and delegate punishment of the murder to human revenge merely, as powerful as that motive is, and the plot is seriously weakened. Its strength lies in the fact that the spiritual realms bears an infinite interest in the matter, attested by the ghost's return to whet Hamlet's almost blunted purpose. In a word, this supernatural interest working itself out through human agency is the essence of retribution as it appears in Shakespeare.

The characters Macbeth and Richard II create a special problem in relation to tragic sin's definition, since, as has been pointed out before, they both sin in the tragic sense while enjoying the role of hero. It would seem that they might complicate matters by making tragic sin and lawlessness appear to be the same as Aristotle's idea of the flaw or frailty within the hero. In reality Macbeth and Richard are probably the best illustrations possible to make clear the distinction we are attempting to make between sin and genuine human weakness. For example, the distinct difference between the two is best appreciated by contrasting the moral failures of Macbeth and Oedipus. Most certainly the downfall of both results from inherent moral weakness; but the arrogance of Oedipus, culmi-

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[22]Richard Grant White, Shakespeare's Macbeth (New York, 1897), IV, iii,231-5.

[23]William J. Rolfe, Shakespeare's Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet (New York, 1921), IV,v,94.

nating in the unwitting and unpremeditated murder of his father and the bringing to light of his incest, is infinitely different in character from Macbeth's deliberate and diabolical butchery of Duncan, Banquo, and Macduff's family. Their reactions to their respective sins are at the same time altogether different. Oedipus acknowledges his guilt with the despair of a hopeless victim of fate—a fate fixed by the gods apart from his ability to alter. Macbeth, on the other hand, broods over his crime; his conscience afflicts him and provokes him to the vilest extremes, while he multiplies atrocious crime to cover crime. A normal response to Oedipus's plight is pity that attempts to justify him, at least to insist on his innate honor. For Macbeth one may experience a sense of pity for the fact that a man could become so enslaved by his baser nature when there were great possibilities of nobility of character in him; but at the same time he normally expects and innately demands that the crime be exposed and punished. Oedipus's error, in brief then, actually does result from an honest flaw or frailty, but Macbeth's from a basically criminal motive.

Before proceeding to the individual analysis of the plays, one more qualification is necessary. The over-all principle of tragic sin and its correction by divine retribution, working itself out through human agency, is not to be confused in any sense with didacticism. True enough, the Elizabethan's particular adaptation of sin and its retribution to artistic purposes most likely would not have been possible without his relation to a Hebrew-Christian theological background; and true enough Professor Schelling on good authority describes Elizabethan drama "as an artistic graft on the old sacred drama," an age of drama dominated by didacticism, often "diverted to the schoolmaster's purposes in moralities" with "its

roots in Medieval Christian ethics" and having as its "first main element...the religious elememt." While Hebraism and Christianity exercised visible influence on Elizabethan drama, and while the old sacred drama, as Schelling believes, transmitted powerful elements of its strength to Elizabeth's times, Shakespeare assuredly did not serve the didactic interest, nor were his tragedies meant to be moral lessons. The moral influences of the past upon him were not of the nature to make his work a kind of glorified preaching. Someone has clarified this truth beautifully by saying that with Shakespeare righteousness itself seems subject and subordinate to the masterdom of fate. This idea is well supported by line 6 of the prologue to Romeo and Juliet. It seems only fair to criticism to conclude that Shakespeare was not dedicated to persuading men to flee the fatal consequences of sin, but that he utilized the responses of an age that was subjectively convinced of that truth.

CHAPTER VI. TRAGIC SIN IN THE INDIVIDUAL TRAGEDIES

Romeo and Juliet

Romeo and Juliet logically heads the list of the six great tragedies in demonstrating the idea of tragic sin for two reasons: First, it is generally considered to be the earliest of Shakespeare's greater tragedies; and second, it presents problably the most unique problem relating to tragic sin found in any of the plays.

The element of sin as an influential factor in shaping the final tragic destiny of the lovers is unmistakable. The prologue announces clearly that two things are eventually responsible for the lovers pitiful end: Fate—they are "star-crossed" lovers—, and Sin in the form of an ancient grudge breaking forth into a new civil strife. Shakespeare means to underscore these forces by calling attention to them before the action ever begins; obviously they are to be regarded by the audience as tantamount to the action. Of the two, sin is the more emphasized, both in the prologue and in the action. Fate is unmistakably implied in the brief reference to the lover's stars, and the work of fate throughout the play is implied more than it is actually mentioned. Sin, embodied in the hatred between the feuding factions, besides being emphasized in the prologue, is reiterated again and again through dialogue and action. Shakespeare even calls the reader's final attention to the sin question in the closing moments of the play by re-emphasizing that the catastrophe's very purpose is to purge away the enmity between foes and effect complete reconciliation.

Probably the most pertinent statement in all criticism on the play

relative to our interest is credited to the eminent Shakespearean editor, William Rolfe:

> It is the parents, not the children, that have sinned, and the sin of the parents is visited upon their innocent offspring. This is the burden of the prologue; and it is most emphatically repeated at the close of the play.[1]

The principle employed here, the sinless, the just, suffering death for the unjust, is never used in quite the same form again in any of the poet's tragedies. It is the crux of the aforementioned unique problem which Romeo and Juliet presents. Shakespeare has depended almost entirely upon external forces, inevitability, in other words, to bring about the catastrophe. The particular method used in acquiring the sense of inevitability, namely the Senecan-like Fate and the Feud, has caused Charlton to criticise the structure of the play to the point of saying that "as a pattern of the idea of tragedy, it is a failure."[2] The Roman conception of Fate as an all-controlling force in human affairs, he feels, is too obsolete to be made real to the modern audience; and the feud, ancient to the extent of loosing its original ferocity is too weak to supply sufficient motive for so horrible a result. Regardless of the value of such conclusion, the sin character of the deep-seated grudge maintained by the feuding factions, the fact that the feuders are threatening the very foundational principles of Nature itself, is Shakespeare's way of providing the sense of immediate inevitability, his reason for the arbitrary destruction of the innocent lovers: the prologue says so, by way of repetition, and the action verifies it.

Charlton's arguments almost certainly have some merit on the basis

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[1] William J. Rolfe, Romeo and Juliet, (New York, 1921), p. 22.

[2] H. B. Charlton, Shakespearean Tragedy (Cambridge, 1948), p. 61.

that the purest ideal of tragedy is lacking: the tragic Individual, or Individuals, have no real responsibility in the shaping of their doom, but rather external factors determine their fate apart from their ability to resist. Even though they are not necessarily passive, their only contribution to the clinching of their fate is an absolute surrender to uncontrollable passion. They merely become susceptible material on the basis of their weakness in the hand of ill-designing Fate. But since the universal ideal of tragedy--that the tragic Individual through some flaw in character or judgment causes his own fall--is lacking, the effect of tragic sin's part in the shaping of the catastrophe is seriously weakened. Its work is superficial; and it is hard to accept as justifiable. We are hardly willing to agree to the intolerable treatment given our heroes for the sin of others, sin which the lovers themselves deplored. Retribution and correction has been misplaced. At least we are not as resigned as we shall later be in the case of Lear or even Hamlet. This is essentially the problem of Romeo and Juliet relative to tragic sin.

Just as Romeo and Juliet is unique in one respect, it is basically typical in a deeper sense. There is a trend established toward a basic interpretation of life which is generally common to all the tragedies. We are shown what an inconceivably dreadful thing is Hate, the bitterest foe of the Good in life. Hate is the central sin of the play, the parent evil of all that is detestable and diabolic, contrasted with a world teeming with beauty and nobility. It is more than simple malice; it is inveterate, unnatural hatred that lives on after it has outworn its original meaning. Shakespeare most assuredly means for us to see this kind of hate as the principal sin of the play because he mentions it often in various ways. In the opening scene the prince calls it "pernicious rage"[3]

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[3] Rolfe, I,i,81.

and "canker'd hate."[4] Later he speaks of "your hate's proceeding"[5] and at the final spectacle of death and horror he reminds the feuding elders of what a "scourge is laid upon your hate."[6] Romeo, in conversation with Juliet scorns their parent's sin as "their enmity"[7] and "their hate."[8] Tybalt openly reviles Romeo with "the hate I bear thee."[9] Similar expressions bearing out Shakespeare's emphasis of Hate are abundant from prologue to conclusion. True enough the seriousness of the desired effect is almost spoiled by old Capulet when he reproaches Tybalt in defense of Romeo,[10] but it is somewhat regained in Tybalt's fiery display of malice. One critic sounds a keynote when he writes:

> To Shakespeare the greatest thing in the world was Love, not merely the love of man for maid, but the love of man for his country, his friend, and his household. And as Love was greatest so its opposite, Hate was to him the most terrible and destructive thing.[11]

As far as Romeo and Juliet is concerned Hate is that destructive, detestable thing; and in various forms that principle is reaffirmed in the later tragedies.

Richard II and Macbeth

Richard II and Macbeth are of singular interest in the study of

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[4] Ibid., I,i, 92.

[5] Ibid., III,ii, 191.

[6] Ibid., V,iii, 291.

[7] Ibid., II,ii, 73.

[8] Ibid., II,ii, 77.

[9] Ibid., III,i, 62.

[10] Ibid., I, v, 64-86.

[11] Thomas Parrott and Robert Telper, Shakespeare (New York, 1929), pp. 242, 243.

tragic sin in that they present a problem second only to Romeo and Juliet: they both alike have the tragic Individual acting in the dual role of hero and tragic sinner. The problem is still essentially the same: the production of a genuine tragic effect from material that lacks in some qualities the power to be actually tragic. Richard II and Macbeth differ considerably in their success as tragedies, but their problem is similar enough to place them in the same general category. In both, Shakespeare's avowed intent is to depict the moral failure of the tragic Individual. Richard's and Macbeth's faults are different in kind and degree; Richard is not the villain that Macbeth is later to be, nor does he manifest the manly quality in his evil that the latter does. But they both sin—and it is as sinners that they are judged, not as exemplary, noble men with tolerable defects, like Othello, or struggling against resistless external fate, as did Romeo. Their sins are willfully deliberated and executed; they are tempted and they yield knowingly to their baser natures.

Richard's Sin

Richard's sin is the most difficult in all the tragedies to isolate and analyze. His sin is more than multiple. It is so varied and complex that it lacks the clear unity which tragic sin usually has,[12] a unity so conspicuous in the Hate we saw in Romeo and Juliet. Rather than attempt to concentrate Richard's moral errors under several descriptive nouns, we may best investigate the various offenses themselves in arriving at an over-all picture of his moral failures.

First, we learn early in the play that Richard has previously been a prime factor in the murder of Gloster, an elderly uncle of his. He himself informs us of his shameful practice of farming out the royal realm

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[12]See p. 54 of the thesis for the treatment of tragic sin's unity.

to furnish certain projects inclining toward his personal liking, a practice denounced by old Gaunt as one of the vilest breaches of royal responsibility possible; and the king further enlightens us by implication that it was his jealousy which inspired the banishment of Bolinbroke. York and Gaunt, in the latter's dying moments, unveil the more intimate aspects of Richard's sin. The king rejects all worthy counsel while attracting to himself the basest sort of flatterers. He is completely given to vanity—the newest Italian fad, however vile, he eagerly supports. York denounces his vanity thus: "Where will doth mutiny with wit's regard." Gaunt portrays him as wanton and prodigal, and prophesies that his violent prodigality shall ultimately consume him. Richard's rashness and display of insufferable arrogance in return for Gaunt's wise reproof are even more indicative of his character. The cup of his iniquity is rapidly filling. The inevitable reaction throughout the realm to this abandon of justice and truth is sure to take its toll.

Recalling the above reference to character, an editor's comment is particularly fitting at this point:

> Richard II is essentially a tragedy of character—the piteous fall of a prince who is himself the "author of his proper woe," and the victim of his own tragic weaknesses—insincerity, insolence, blind egotism, and inability or perverse unwillingness to live in a world of fact.[13]

Indeed, the sordid picture of Richard's abuse of right, his betrayal of the unquestioning devotion of his subjects is dreadful enough to illustrate that the entire tragedy is dependent upon his character; he writes the sentence of his own fate by his flagrant violation of moral law. To justify Richard's disposition and complete humiliation, the dramatist must fully convince us what a sinner he really is. The pivotal point of

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[13] K. J. Holzknecht and McClure, Selected Plays of Shakespeare (New York, 1936), I, 5.

this persuasion, the sin that is consummately fatal to Richard, is his ruthless, highhanded disregard of Bolingbroke's rights and theft of his lawful inheritance. Richard's guilt is now complete and his judgment inevitable. From here there is no hope of redemption. Bolingbroke's cause is just and righteous in the public eye; he has become the embodiment of Good combating Evil.

The poet has been so completely successful in convicting Richard that absolving or justifying him sufficiently to make him tragic is virtually impossible. Justice must be satisfied; and Richard fully deserves to feel the stroke of severe judgment that comes home to him in his humiliation and death. The only alternative is to make him pitiful, but in the process Shakespeare makes him womanish. Johnson has at some length argued this particular weakness of Richard II; and while praising it highly for its compensating strength of poetic beauty and character portraiture, he has called it one of the least rewarding of all the tragedies as far as tragic interest is concerned.[14] As a sinner Richard is successful, but as a tragic figure he falls short of the ideal.

Macbeth's Temptation, Corruption, and Final Ruin

Although Macbeth and Richard II broach a similar dramatic problem of weakness in genuine tragic effect, Macbeth's admitted superiority can be accounted for in numerous ways. There appear to be much greater possibilities of nobility in Macbeth than in Richard, yet Macbeth proves to be the darker, more dreadful villain. Macbeth is virile and strong in his career of crime, while Richard is effeminate and weak. While Richard's sin is more insolent, and spiteful, making him appear more hateful, Macbeth's is

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[14]Rolfe, King Richard II (New York, 1918), pp. 18-19.

more horrible, more thrilling, yet is of the nature to make him more pathetic in that it springs from a more genuine weakness. Richard's sin is so multifold and many-sided as to defy classification, but the progression of Macbeth's lawlessness from its genesis to consummation has a distinct unity.

The last point brings us up directly to the consideration of Macbeth's development from trusted warrior to bloody tyrant. The subjective mischief giving rise to the inner struggle and the later moral collapse can hardly be overlooked--irresistible ambition. It is at first merely the embryo of evil and later the monster that hurls Macbeth further and further into bloody violence. The dramatic possibilities in ambition as a virulent enemy of right was well-known to the Elizabethans. The Morality Drama, revived in the popular Mirror for Magistrates, made much use of it. Of the many plays in the Mirror "the fault most often dwelt upon is that of ambition or aspiration."[15] Shakespeare in Macbeth has employed it to the fullness of its strength, unveiling the sinister aspect of its darker, negative side.

Macbeth's latent ambition finds a concrete objective in the witches prophecy; he cautiously contemplates "black and deep desires."[16] The new temptation, struggling against the nobler side of his nature,--that nature feared by Lady Macbeth for being

> too full o' th' milk of human kindness
> To catch the nearest way[17]--

finds a fierce goad in Lady Macbeth's more audacious ambition. She in-

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[15]Williard Farnham, The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy (Berkeley, 1936), p. 285.

[16]Richard Grant White, Shakespeare's Macbeth (New York, 1897), I,iv,51.

[17]Ibid., I,v,14,15.

vokes the spirits to "unsex her," fill her with "direst cruelty," remove all "compunctious visitings of nature,"[18] in order that she may fulfil her Cassius-like role of provocation. In such manner she plays a significant part in the working out of tragic sin.

The murder of Duncan, the outward manifestation of ambition's thorough corruption of Macbeth's mind, is the crisis point of the development of the tragic sin: it is the point of no return. Macbeth's redemption is impossible. Retribution is inexorably fixed by necessity. Now begins the thrilling ordeal of completing his final guilt. Here the pattern of tragic sin is clearly drawn. The counteraction of one sin requires the commission of one more dreadful; meanwhile the sinner becomes more desperate, more entangled while struggling to free himself. Contemplating the death of Banquo and Fleance in order to secure himself, Macbeth expresses it thus:

> Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill.[19]

After Banquo is dispatched from the picture, Macduff promises to be a mounting threat to the security of the throne, and this time Macbeth stoops for his lowest conquest in that blood most innocent is shed. Macbeth's guilt is now complete, ripe for retribution. His sin is hereafter open before an outraged world.

Retribution is terrible and thorough in its twofold application. The external retribution is simple. As payment for her criminal collaboration with her husband, Lady Macbeth is smitten with a fatal distemper. Shortly Macbeth suffers the final mortal penalty at the hands of his bitterest foe, Macduff. But Macbeth's direst suffering, as well as that of

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[18] Ibid., I,v,38-42.

[19] Ibid., III,ii,55.

his wife, is retribution's inner whip—conscience. Here again hers is the simpler judgment. Her Machiavellian conscience is proof against the stings of compunction until her distemper finally overwhelms her. We never see her undergo the mental agonies to which Macbeth is subjected. His distress under the pressure of guilt is indicative of one of tragic sin's most important functions. Sin brings more than death; it causes such pain that death renders a degree of relief.

Shakespeare makes Macbeth's mental agony extremely vivid at times for our benefit; Symonds could well have meant Macbeth when he speaks of the English villain's "brooding" over his crimes. Plotting Banquo's murder Macbeth says: "O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife!"[20] Earlier he has spoken of "these terrible dreams that shake us nightly." Then he fittingly adds:

> Better be with the dead,
> Whom we, to gain our place, have sent to peace,
> Than on the torture of the mind to lie
> In restless ecstasy.[21]

At the last he surrenders to despair saying, "I have lived long enough;"—and bewails the fact that things which should accompany old age, "honor, love, obedience, troops of friends," he must not took to have.[22] The mental agony of Macbeth is one of Shakespeare's clearest intentions. Few men suffer as he did. Herein is his success as a tragic figure; and in that success sin is obviously paramount.

Othello, King Lear, Hamlet

Othello, Lear, and Hamlet are Shakespeare's supreme expressions of

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[20] Ibid., III,ii,36.

[21] Ibid., III,ii,19-22.

[22] Ibid., V,iii,22-26.

tragedy. And their greatness is inevitably linked up with their particular employment of the sin principle, as we shall see. They are enough alike in this respect to fall under the same heading. The villain (or villains) in each play, representing the negative forces of sin, clashes in violent contest with the hero, representing justice, for supremacy. Justice must win out to preserve moral order; but the tragedy stems from the fact that the hero, personifying moral law, is mortally wounded and perishes because of the struggle. The tragic sinner's retribution comes as a natural result, while the hero's, as explained earlier,[23] results from his tragic weakness as it is played upon and urged to violent rupture by the work of tragic sin. For the demonstration of this point we pass immediately to consider tragic sin in Othello.

Sin's Subtle Undermining of Othello, the Strong

Iago passes probably without dispute as the most fiendish in Shakespeare's gallery of sinners. He is the villain without a soul, the cunning intellect utterly deprived of scruple. In the first scene he announces his intention of concentrating his shrewd, hateful wit upon the naive Othello to subtly provoke the latter to bring about his own overthrow. The prime movers of Iago's evil intrigue are covetousness, envy, jealousy, spite--all ramifications of the Hate so prominent in Romeo and Juliet. Ambition, which needs no further treatment, is also present. The average Elizabethan mind was conditioned by Puritan severity and Renaissance literature to regard these with abhorrence. Covetousness, i.e. avarice, and envy enjoyed a notable reputation even from medieval times as two of the seven deadly sins, sins entailing spiritual death and un-

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[23] See pp. 56-57, 58-60 of the thesis.

timely temporal judgment. Piers the Plowman had given warning of their fatal power to ensnare the unwise. Puritanism re-emphasized this in its theology, and it further taught that "Jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame."[24] Spite stood in the line of direct antithesis of all that is good, inasmuch as it threatened the very foundations of Love. Iago's evil actually embodies more than these specific sins; he personifies the total idea of wickedness in its most hateful, vicious reality, paralleled by Satan himself who wrought mankind's first pitiful fall from Paradise into death's power. Indeed at the last Othello damns him utterly, calling him appropriately a "demi-devil."

In the spirit of tragic sin Iago sets upon Othello, as Satan upon Eve--a story common to every Elizabethan,--to rupture the fabric of his character at its weakest point. Othello's natural sense of right, his unqualified devotion to just cause and to Love is his great strength; but inherent in it is also his weakness. A latent strain of love-inspired jealousy, as Emilia accuses, could possibly contribute to his weakness; and of course his gullibility, his ignorance are extraneous factors; but his love and his demand for justice are principal. He refers to himself as "one that loved not wisely but too well."[25] Iago has indeed discerned his victim's most vulnerable spot and struck well; Othello, "perplex'd in the extreme" seals his doom by taking "justice" into his own hands, snuffing out innocent life through his own horrid misjudgment. His unspeakably faulty judgment appalls us; because of it we sanction justice's dealing

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[24] Song of Solomon: 8.6.

[25] William Shakespeare, Othello (New York, 1909), V,ii,6.

with him through self-destruction, yet because of it we tend toward forgiving him. While not absolving Othello entirely, we do pity him and contend for his innate integrity, even as he beholds her asleep, steeling himself to kill her; for he says, "Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men."[26] And he speaks of her balmy breath almost presuading "Justice to break her sword!"[27] He does love but his native sense of justice says she must die. Sin is to blame for his deception! and we instinctively demand its retribution. He erred but only because of the deceitful work of sin. Thus runs the true pattern of tragic sin. Moral order must ultimately be restored, and it is restored in that Othello executes judgment upon himself with the same hand that stifled the innocent life, while Iago is committed to the torturers; but evil is victorious to the extent that something of inestimable value is lost in the conflict.

Lear Disillusioned, Maddened, and Crushed by Sin

The double plot of King Lear greatly complicates plot analysis, especially relative to our study. The matter is simplified considerably, however, by omitting here the under-plot which Edmund practically dominates, important as it is to the tragedy as a whole, since Edmund's intrigue is too much a repetition of what we saw in Iago. In the central plot the theme is clear. The Hate present in the first tragedy embodied in a feud breaks forth into open, violent expression in the form of filial ingratitude coupled with contemptuous Pride; and to be sure the very openness of the Hate serves to heighten the effect. The evil daughters, Goneril and Regan, to intensify their depravity, conceal their Hate under

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[26] Ibid., V,ii,6.

[27] Ibid., V,ii,17.

the mask of Love; and when it lurks thus under such guise and assumes such aspects as "treason, breach of faith, or ingratitude"[28] it takes on its darkest, most terrible shade. Their sin is in one sense as unnatural and dreadful as Iago's, since the sacred bond that unites parent and child, especially father and daughter, is stronger than that uniting the dearest of friends. The daughter may conceivably grow up to be her mother's reval, and likewise the son may usurp his father's place; but in the normal world between father and daughter there can never be cause for jealousy or strife.[29]

With Goneril and Regan, tragic sin becomes most insufferable in that we behold the daughter grown strong turning upon an old father who has stripped himself to strengthen her. "She forgets the ties of blood, tramples upon the deep maternal instinct which leads the woman to protect the weak, and strikes the old man down with blow on blow to shame, to suffering and at last to madness."[30] This is the kind of hatred and pride turned to contempt that makes us recoil from before its distortion of what was meant to be surpassingly beautiful: the love of a daughter for a venerable old father. It yields the feeling of universal chaos, of the moral world reeling and plunging out of control. Shakespeare heightens this feeling by bringing on Lear's madness and unleashing the wrath of the elements, till we are relieved when the final horror of the catastrophe brings termination to sin's reign.

In Lear's case the catastrophe is not effected superficially by exter-

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[28] Parrott, p. 243.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

nal fate or even by sin's crafty overthrow of a naive soul. "It is Lear himself who brings about the tragedy of Lear."[31] His own faults—they have been named by professor Parrott as an absorbing self-will and a passionate temper—[32] co-operate with tragic sin as if to support its dire purpose. Lear unbidden determines to divide his kingdom. His own undisciplined will blinds his discernment between fidelity and falsehood, causing him to enrich his enemies and to cut down those whose love would have sustained and shielded him in his old age. His retribution is therefore more severe than Othello's but yet of a nature more tolerable than Macbeth's in that he is more sinned against than sinning.

In a word, the theme runs thus. Lear gives sin a coveted advantage, and sin, thriving in an unnatural world of distorted passion, engulfs all in the maelstrom of its wrath. None but faithful Kent and Edgar escape its stroke, and its retribution is all-embracing and final.

The Good-vs-Evil Struggle in Hamlet

Hamlet is a fitting conclusion to the study of tragic sin by virtue of its excellence as tragedy and its unparalleled demonstration of the sin question. The claim that Hamlet stands as the most consummate expression of tragedy in the English language is hardly contested anymore; a world of books on the subject attests the fact. It is so very significant then that the success of Hamlet as a tragedy depends signally on the employment of sin in the structure of the plot; the action really begins with the discovery of lawlessness and is terminated with law being restored. Hamlet's consuming purpose, the principle which fills his breast and

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[31] Ibid., p. 245.

[32] Ibid., pp. 245, 247.

urges him forward to destruction, is a product of sin: Claudius' disregard of law has created a fearful responsibility. Hamlet inherits that heavy responsibility—he calls it a "cursed spite"—of setting right the rotton something in the state of Denmark. He, more happily employed at philosophy than in the prosecution of sin, is called upon to correct a lawless situation. This is the burden of the action in its simplest interpretation.

Hamlet is Shakespeare's masterpiece of blending the Christian idea of sin into the reality of action. The Greek conception of Evil as an abstract negation looks pale in contrast with Hamlet's concrete, precise convictions concerning wrong and right. He has very distinct feelings about the conduct of his mother and uncle. He tells us so very positively when he shares his inner thoughts with us, and especially in the memorable bedroom interview with his mother, a discourse worthy of a zealous divine. Hamlet's attitude toward his mother's compromise of principle has definite bearing upon the suspense element in the action by making us fear that he will eventually give physical expression to his inner disapproval; and his attitude toward Claudius' crime is of course the supreme issue. What gives this study significance is that Shakespeare is careful to show us the development of that all-important attitude into more than the desire for cold-blooded revenge or even the defense of honor. A rare touch to the whole picture would be lost if Hamlet were, without reservation, of a Machiavellian temperament, unscrupulously bent with an unerring purpose on bloodthirsty, heartless retaliation. He is a conscientious youth, so conscientious that he postpones his personal bias in the matter until he can investigate fully the veracity of the ghost, at least that is what he says. In fact we see him somewhat loathe to carry out the dreadful order of

bloodshed imposed upon him, except that "heaven and hell," honor, truth, nobility all exhort him to action and when he does finally address himself to bloody action, he does it more from an inherent sense of honor than unreasoning hate. It is beside the point to attempt to make Hamlet religious, though that element is present in him; but he is possessed of a strict code of morality which serves to offset the crime in the story and to deepen the complexion of the sin, rendering it more terrible. It is this Christian view of sin, directing its influence into the intricate structure of the story which gives a maximum of power to the dramatic movement.

Certain examples will serve to re-enforce these ideas, since much is said concerning Christian ethics and doctrines in the play. The ghost gives a commentary on the diabolical nature of Claudius' crimes and the Queen's unfaithfulness, touching on lust, adultery, incest, lewdness, luxury, gifts for the purpose of enticement, virtue, true love, and even informing us of the sinful state of his soul at death, with a bit of dogma thrown in on his state after death. Hamlet, before seeing the ghost, voiced his disapproval of intemperance and gluttony in Danish custom. In his first soliloquy he has already talked of "incestuous sheets," "wicked speed" and "unrighteous tears," in relation to his mother's hasty marriage and insincere grief for old Hamlet's death, meanwhile adding a note on the unlawfulness of suicide. When he sees Claudius at prayer, he informs us much more about sin and its effect upon the soul. To his mother he lectures at such length and with such intensity as to defy full paraphrase; but briefly his fiery sermon is of modesty and innocent love contrasted with incestuous pleasure, in which he waxes so vehement that the ghost intervenes in behalf of the overwhelmed Queen. The Priest, the

gravediggers, Claudius, Polonius all delve into issues of right and wrong. The issue of sin is so interwoven into the plot of Hamlet that they are indeed inseparable.

The setting here is the most conducive in all Shakespearian tragedy in several ways for the ideal blending of sin into the over-all structure of tragic reality. The "mighty opposites" of the action are matched in such happy proportions of balance and all circumstances concur so appropriately as to heighten the suspense of the Good-vs-Evil struggle to a maximum. As for Hamlet's side of the duel, we have dwelt at some length on his spiritual and emotional fitness to represent the side of moral justice in the conflict, taking for granted the excellence of his wit, as well as his physical competence. Now something on Claudius and the concurring circumstances.

Claudius is as ideal a villain as Hamlet is a hero. In Claudius we come to appreciate the finer distinctions between the loose meaning of villain and tragic sinner, while at the same time we survey his attributes as the ideal evil protagonist. Claudius is too human, too real a person to be an Iago or an Edmund, for they strike us as sheer personifications of demons. He is too warm, too vitally alive in the world of feeling and thought to be the cold negatives of Hate that Regan and Goneril are. Far less than demi-demon or cold, inflexible fiend, Claudius could easily have been a man of our own close association, with much to his credit, but that he became ensnared by his baser impluses: ambition overwhelmed him. The genuine humanity of Claudius is the basis for his success. He is probably Shakespeare's best character study from the stand point of the sin angle. He is Macbeth placed in the proper dramatic role, put in the most advantageous situation to lay bare the deepest recesses of the

soul. Like Macbeth his pleasure is interruped occasionally by qualms of remorse. He writhes under the mental pain resulting from his deed, in itself an exciting revelation of character, as well as a thrilling manifestation of the inner retribution administered by conscience. His deed, Murder, the very epitome of all evils, must surely have its compensations; and cold-hearted murder, when coupled with ambition, is of such magnitude of infamy as posses its own power to reward the guilty with inner destruction. Self-reproach finally drives him to his knees in prayer, at which time he is in such throes of spiritual agony that he likens himself to Cain, the first murderer, wondering if the sweet heaven's contain enough rain to wash away the stain of his brother's blood from off his hands. His inclination urges him to repentance but since repentance means loosing his crown, his ambition, his queen, then his "stronger guilt defeats his strong intent." This bears out the fact that repentance is inconsistent with the character of the tragic sinner, even if redemption from his evil were conceivable. We cannot imagine Claudius fully repenting, else the action would be meaningless. Since he cannot repent, then suffer he must, both inwardly and externally. His inner suffering is not so profound as Macbeth's, possibly, since Claudius is not to be heroically tragic; but it is severe enough to emphasize the horror of his sin, as we have in a sense shown already.

External retribution is somewhat tardy in its execution for several reasons. The only one of those reasons we wish to deal with is that Evil has the physical advantage for the moment in that Claudius is manifestly in control of the situation: he wears the crown and holds the sway. It is inconsistent with Hamlet's character to act rashly or upon imperfect knowledge; therefore retribution must patiently wait, in that its "minis-

ter" must bide his time. Hamlet, when he speaks among other things of a "divinity that shapes our ends"[33] and of his premonition of impending misfortune as he prepares to fight with Laertes,[34] hints of a divine Will that superintends the course of events, directing the mighty opposites into the particular relationship that results in catastrophe and the destruction of evil. This conception of the Divine supervising the human execution of retribution can hardly be overlooked in Hamlet, at least Shakespeare weaves a definite shade of that idea into the fabric of the action.

The very appearance of the ghost would not of course suggest to the spectator an exact embodiment of God; but he does connote the idea of providential interest in the punishment of sin. This divine-human relationship is pinpointed all along in the ghost scene. To restrain Hamlet, who is now convinced of something rotten in Denmark, from following the ghost, Horatio in vain assures him that "Heaven will direct it," undoubtedly meaning for him to leave the responsibility of justice to heaven itself. The ghost then urges Hamlet to vindicate the horrible murder, not to let the royal bed of Denmark be a couch for luxury and damned incest; but as for the queen's judgment, she is to be left to heaven. In other words, Providence appoints the specific area in which human retribution is to be exercised: Hamlet is to punish the King and heaven will be responsible for the Queen. In the bedroom scene the ghost re-emphasizes his exhortation to Hamlet. Hamlet himself makes probably the most pertinent pronouncement of the subject, when, looking on dead Polonius, he

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[33]Henry Norman Hudson, The Tragedy of Hamlet (New York, 1909), V,ii,10.

[34]Hamlet says, "But thou wouldst not think how ill all's here about my heart;" V,ii,203.

says:

> but heaven hath pleas'd it so,
> To punish me with this and this with me,
> That I must be their scourge and minister.[35]

In the second soliloquy he has spoken of heaven and hell prompting him to his revenge, and later in telling Horatio in his reversal of the commission held by false Rosencrantz and Guildenstern he remarks pointedly how heaven was ordinant even in the fixing of the seal.[36] In such manner Shakespeare in Hamlet has built a general impression of a divine Will shaping the final retribution and the tragic termination, as Hamlet believes,[37] rather than the strong sense of Fate used in Romeo and Juliet. Even though we do not see the sin actually committed, we are privileged to see divine and human will associated in establishing, exposing, and punishing guilt. Moral order is restored, the conflict ended, and all hostile elements are at peace with the world. The tragedy, the thing that grieves and stirs our emotion, is the ironical fact that something of precious, inestimable value is lost to us; and that sense of loss in Hamlet is probably the greatest in all the tragedy of the ages.

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It is quite beyond reasonable possibility to treat completely of sin and lawlessness, as far as tragedy is concerned, in a single work. However the preceding pages should serve as an adequate guide for the Shakespearean student who finds the study interesting, since we have dwelt quite at length on practically every phase of the question. In Part I we saw generally the background forces that amply prepared the Elizabethan

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[35] Hudson, III,iv,171-3.

[36] Ibid., V,ii,48.

[37] We have already quoted him as believing in a "divinity that shapes our ends."

for his unique employment, and by all means his unique appreciation, of the sin element in tragic plot. Chapter I showed how that Hebraism with its extraordinary gift of sin-consciousness excelled Hellenism as a system of spiritual discipline; and how that through Christianity Hebraism passed along its tremendous spirit of righteous zeal, hatred of sin, and fear of retribution for sin to succeeding ages of Anglo-Saxon civilization. Chapter II pointed to Puritanism as a revival of Hebraism and to the great strides of spiritual conquest which that stern, sin-denouncing movement made in the latter part of Elizabeth's reign, as well as its prelininary influence which began much earlier; and how it prevailed over the Renaissance spirit---which was essentially a renewed Hellenism---checking civilization's trend toward levity and high intellectual attainments, meanwhile forcing upon sixteenth century culture an irresistible conviction regarding sin and sin's retribution that it could not abide by. Chapter III dealt with the Senecan tradition, and its historically established influence upon Elizabethan drama. We learned that it was Seneca, with his themes of the most inconceivable wickedness ending in bloody retribution, who emboldened the Elizabethan to place the thrilling horrors of sin and its violent retribution upon the stage. In Chapter IV we reviewed the ages of dramatic effort preceding the Elizabethans and noted that drama, beginning even in the dark ages, was given over either to purely religious instructions or to moralizing upon themes which emphasized the danger of sin and its fearful retribution in the present world.

We then summed up these several conclusions by asserting that Hebraism, Puritanism, Seneca, and early drama had profound influence upon Elizabethan drama: first, by affecting its form, its spirit, its content, etc., in that the playwright is greatly endebted to his own environment

for his particular conception of Truth; and, second, by educating and conditioning drama's audience to experience unreservedly the possibilities of emotional thrill and horror latent in the sin-retribution principle.

In Part II of the Thesis we proposed to treat of sin directly, defining it and seeing it as it is in the plays themselves. In Chapter V we saw that sin, i.e. "tragic sin" (since we are interested in sin only as it is related to tragedy) in simplest terminology means lawlessness, crime, vice, at least some ultra-extreme breach of moral right; and that in Shakespeare it means more than common villainy or a vague opposite of Good; it becomes a diabolic force attacking the moral order. We considered wherein Shakespeare departed from the Greeks and wherein he conformed, noting that his chief divergency from classic laws was in character treatment, the prime source of his sublime greatness; moreover, character and the idea of sin are inseparable in Shakespeare, sin serving meanwhile to probe into and to bring out character. We went on to see sin with somewhat of a bird's eye view, as it pertains in a broad sense to all the plays: it is not the same as Aristotle's "tragic flaw," considering the tragedies of Macbeth and Richard II, but serves in the four plays other than those two to aggravate the hero's weakness, as well as supply him with a consuming purpose, forcing him finally to bring on his own fate. Tragic sin, moreover, has a unity all its own, advancing from one stage to another, striving ever to fix Guilt upon the sinner in order that justice be forced to destroy him along with that which is essentially good and invaluable. Once the sinner has sinned in the tragic sense, there can be no return: he either cannot or will not repent and be reconciled to moral law. We saw then how Retribution serves to terminate the action satis-

factorily by satisfying our sense of justice through the fatal punishment of the sinner according to his sin and by producing the tragic emotion in us through the improportionate judgment of the hero's tragic error. In case the hero is also the sinner, like Macbeth, he is judged for his sin in due proportion, but we experience the tragic emotion in that great possibilities of nobility are lost to the world through the destructive power of sin. Finally, retribution regarding sin was, before the Elizabethan audience, a powerful dramatic instrument on account of the spectator's strong sense of confidence in ultimate divine justice working itself out through human means.

In Chapter VI we observed sin as it fits individually into each of our six plays. Romeo and Juliet posed a unique problem for us in that the lovers cannot be considered actively responsible for their fate; the parent's sin, inveterate hate embodied in a feud, is visited upon the guiltless offspring, a climax less tragic than when the hero is instrumental in bringing on his tragic fate. We noted too that Richard II and Macbeth present a slightly different, yet similar, problem: both heroes' deaths result directly from, and in proportion to, their evil; they are tragic only in that both suffer greatly and both possessed possibilities of nobility that were swept away by evil. We considered Othello, Lear, and Hamlet to be Shakespeare's consummate expressions of tragedy, for in each the ideal relationship exists between tragic sin in the villain and tragic weakness within the hero, sin in each case causing the hero to finally bring tragedy upon himself. Iago prompts naive Othello to strangle innocent life, and because of that deed to shed his own blood; Lear's ungrateful daughters drive him to madness and death; and the ideal villain, Claudius, holds the balance of power in his struggle against Hamlet

until the latter, while destroying the villain, brings death upon himself.

And thus we have seen sin as it contributes dramatic power to Shakespearean tragedy by affecting the action proper and by affecting the audience's response, heightening the tragic effect and augmenting the suspense. It is an important study for modern criticism; and if its appreciation renders the student's understanding more fruitful in the fundamentals of Shakespearean tragedy, and enlarges his capacity for greater enjoyment of Elizabethan tragic poetry, the effort here will not have been in vain.

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