



1964

Tragic Vision in the Age of Shakespeare

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Recommended Citation

Fredman, Mr.; Rioux, Patricia; Martin, Sharon; Mach, Charlotte; Knilands, Larry; McFalls, Sherron; and Nickerson, Marilyn, "Tragic Vision in the Age of Shakespeare" (1964). *Honors Projects*. 29.

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ILLINOIS WESLEYAN UNIVERSITY. ENGLISH DEPARTMENT.

TRAGIC VISION IN THE AGE OF SHAKESPEARE

ESSAYS IN CRITICISM

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INTRODUCTION

The following essays - investigative, critical, or interpretative - were selected from the 1964 Senior Seminar in English.

It was the primary purpose of this Seminar to penetrate into the three types of tragedy written during the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods: the de casibus, Italianate, and Domestic. Madeleine Doran's Endeavours of Art was used as the basis for categorizing the various plays studied during the semester. Of the papers herein bound, only two of the above categories are represented: de casibus tragedy in Coriolanus, Dr. Faustus, and Bussy D'Ambois; Italianate tragedy in The Spanish Tragedy, Othello, and The Duchess of Malfi.

It should be noted that many of the papers use the same sources: Bowers, Bradbrook, Bradley, Doran, Farnham, Ornstein, Ribner, and Waith. These were the basic texts discussed in detail during the Seminar, and it would be expedient for any student interested in these plays to consult these texts as well.

I am quite proud to submit these essays as a collection for study by future students of English drama.

Raymond M. Fredman
Department of English
October, 1964

The Function
of
The Spanish Tragedy
in
Elizabethan Drama

Patricia Rioux

May 22, 1964

Senior Seminar

The Function of
The Spanish Tragedy in Elizabethan Drama

- I Foundations of Italianate revenge tragedy
 - A. Literary background
 - 1. Italian novelles
 - 2. Senecan drama
 - 3. Morality plays
 - B. Social Conditions
 - Italian influence
- II Elements of Italianate drama (examples from The Spanish Tragedy)
 - A. Theme of revenge
 - B. Intrigue
 - C. Madness
 - D. Action
 - E. Use of ghosts
 - F. Hesitation
 - G. Machiavellian villain
 - H. Parallels
- III Influence of The Spanish Tragedy
 - A. Extension of plot
 - B. Character development
- IV Comparison of The Spanish Tragedy with Aristotle's definition of tragedy
 - A. Plot
 - B. Main character
- V Conclusion
 - A. Doran's definition of Italianate revenge tragedy
 - B. Implications

It is the purpose of this paper to discuss the development of the Italianate tragedy of revenge, using The Spanish Tragedy as a model. Any discussion of a particular type of tragedy must necessarily begin with a review of the conditions of literature and society in which the form arose and must include a standard upon which comparisons may be made. The standard employed in this paper will consist of the Aristotelian or "traditional" concept of tragedy. Finally some speculation should be undertaken with regard to the influence of an early sample of the type on succeeding drama.

The sources of Italianate tragedy consist predominately of Italian novelles and their French and English translations and adaptations, of Senecan plays, and of morality plays of the Middle Ages. Although Italian novelles did not deal extensively with actual blood-revenge, the type contributed greatly to characterization and motivation in Italianate tragedy.

These various collections of stories not only provided a perfect mine of material for the Elizabethan dramatist, but also trained the audience to accept the plot and characteriza-

tion on the stage as dramatized truth....¹

The second source, Senecan drama, centered around three main themes, one of which formed the basis for the Italianate tragedy of revenge. The theme of importance to this paper is the portrayal of great crimes and the evil results of murder in which blood-revenge for murder or flagrant injury or revenge from motives of jealousy were emphasized.²

In Elizabethan England, great emphasis was placed on classical learning and, because little was known of the Greeks, upon Senecan tragedy as the highest expression of that learning.

His [Seneca's] methods of treating tragic situations were akin to Elizabethan temperament, for the men of the time were well equipped to understand this philosophy, which held that man, the individual, was more than a puppet of medieval scholasticism and was, indeed, to some extent the master of his fate. Even the fatalistic Senecan passages found a ready echo in the breasts of Englishmen already afflicted with the melancholia which sometimes turned them into practising malcontents. Seneca's cosmopolitanism was near to the Elizabethans, who were starting to cast

¹Fredson T. Bowers, Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy (Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1959), p. 61.

²Bowers, p. 43.

off their insular provincialism.³

Senecan tragedy was rhetorical and artificial, and the emphasis was upon sensationalism, and ghosts and forebodings were integral elements. Elizabethan dramatists adapted Senecan speeches depicting blood and horror to their time by replacing them with action.

Another influence, though not so important as the Senecan or the novelle, was the morality plays of the Middle Ages which closely approached the spirit of human tragedy.

It is in the non-dramatic stories of the falls of princes and of capricious Fortune and her wheel that one must seek the most important tragic legacy of the Middle Ages. These stories, which were drawn mainly from classical history, were, in the nature of the case, not of the people, as the early drama had been, but they did attract large audiences of readers. Then they attracted imitators and eventually supplied the tragic dramatists with materials for plots.⁴

In addition to the literary sources of Italianate tragedy, some attention must be paid to the attitudes of Elizabethan Englishmen toward the theatre in general. The Elizabethans, who were, at least

³Bowers, pp. 74-75.

⁴Karl J. Holzknecht, The Backgrounds of Shakespeare's Plays (New York: American Book Company, 1950), p. 77.

to some extent, the perpetrators of past history, accepted blood-revenge for murder although legally and religiously it was condemned. The son or heir was expected, in certain situations, to avenge the murder of his father, especially if that murder was treacherous. "Such being the case, the audience at the theater seems to have made the customary compromise between a formal set of religious and moral ethics and an informal set of native convictions."⁵

Because setting and characters in Italianate tragedy were usually foreign, it is necessary to understand the Elizabethans' opinion of those people and countries which dominated the English tragic stage.

"The Italian [exemplified by Machiavelli] was almost always regarded as a villain of a particularly jealous and revengeful nature...."⁶ The Elizabethans considered the Spanish people to be on a par with the Italians, and their opinion of the French was little higher.

With regard to the country, Italy itself was

⁵Bowers, p. 40.

⁶Bowers, p. 47.

regarded as a corruptive influence. "Atheism, sexual depravity, and murder were only a few of the vices to be learned in Italy...."⁷

We must, however, be careful to note that Italianate tragedy was not entirely a product of its literary and social environment.

Since Elizabethan culture was diverse enough to admit many, and, indeed, diametrically opposed literary currents, we cannot say that the nature of tragedy was determined by contemporary moral or religious viewpoints.⁸

If studies of dramatic tradition make the development of tragedy seem more logical and inevitable than it actually was, it is because they minimize the accidental and unpredictable nature of literary genius. They create the impression that literary ideas and forms have a life of their own, that they evolve and grow more sophisticated through some inner dialectical necessity or necessarily change as the climate of opinion in an age changes. Similarly studies of convention seem to rob the dramatists of their individuality and their artistic freedom by creating the impression that even the greatest playwrights were enslaved by the memories and expectations of their audiences. We study convention in an attempt to view Elizabethan drama through "Elizabethan" eyes, but our conscious scholarly attempt to

⁷Bowers, p. 54.

⁸Robert Ornstein, The Moral Vision of Jacobean Drama (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1960), pp. 19-20.

categorize characters and define formulas of plot is not equivalent to an Elizabethan audience's unconscious acceptance of contemporary dramatic practice.⁹

Having investigated the backgrounds of Italianate tragedy, we may turn now to a discussion of the elements of revenge tragedy. Since The Spanish Tragedy is usually considered to be the first Italianate tragedy of revenge, we may view Kyd's work as having set the precedent for this type of drama.

The usual theme of Italianate tragedy is that of revenge incited by jealousy and the play centers around crimes of passion. In The Spanish Tragedy, the motive of revenge¹⁰ "...does not appear as a determinant in the plot until the middle of the play, since the characters must first be set in conflict to provide the murder which is to be revenged."¹⁰ The Induction or Chorus, in which we find the Ghost of Andrea and Revenge, does not provide an adequate basis for revenge because these two characters do not actually become involved in the action of the play. Hence the death of Don Balthazar, the prince of Portugal, is accidental

⁹Ornstein, p. 20.

¹⁰Bowers, p. 63.

with regard to the desire of revenge of Andrea. The major motive of revenge occurs in Act II, sc. iv, when, after Hieronimo finds the body of his son, Horatio, he says,

Seest thou this handkercher be-
smeared with blood?
It shall not from me, till I take
revenge.¹²

After much delay, Hieronimo succ^eeds in avenging his son's death, but by this time the revenge has extended to include not only the murderers but also many innocent characters.

This involvement of accomplices and kindred leads us to the second element of Italianate drama, that of intrigue. On both sides, it is within the framework of connivance that the murders are committed. Lorenzo and Pedringano confer on the question of whom Ble-imperia really loves, and Balthazar, in love with her himself, reflects on the situation and makes his decision:

It makes me glad and sad:
Glad that I know the hinderer of
my love--
Sad that I fear she hates me whom
I love;
Glad that I know on whom to be re-
venged--
Sad that she'll fly me if I take
revenge.

¹²Charles Read Baskervill, Virgil B. Heltzel, Arthur H. Nethercot, "The Spanish Tragedy," Elizabethan and Stuart Plays (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1934), II.iv.166-167. All subsequent quotations refer to this edition.

Yet must I take revenge or die my-
self,
For love resisted grows impatient.
II.i.111-117

Thus Balthazar and Lorenzo eavesdrop on a conversation between Bel-imperia and Horatio and with the aid of Serberine and Pedringano, they stab as well as hang the innocent Horatio in the arbor.

Hieronimo too employs much intrigue in his act of vengeance. First he feigns madness in order to convince Balthazar and Lorenzo that they should take part in a play which he has written and which will provide him with a physical means of obtaining revenge.

Bal. /Aside./ How like you this?
Lor. /Aside./ Why, thus, my lord:
We must resolve to soothe his
humors up. IV.i.185-186

Hieronimo has already received the promise of Bel-imperia to assist him in taking the desired revenge and is now ready to proceed. During the play, Balthazar, Lorenzo, and the Duke of Castile are slain, and Bel-imperia and Hieronimo commit suicide. Thus the revenge is successful; however, many lives have been needlessly lost in the process.

Although we may consider the shedding of so much blood hardly worthwhile, we must remember that the Elizabethan audience enjoyed the horror of Italianate tragedy and would have been disappointed

if the play had been constructed without it. The third element in revenge tragedy, then, is that of action, as much action as was conceivably possible to present on the stage. In this play, we see eight characters actually killed on stage and almost as many means of executing the deaths. The scene shifts from the castle of the King of Spain, to that of the King of Portugal, to Hieronimo's garden. The characters move, rather than merely speak, for the most part; but when they do speak, their lines are brief and concise.

Hieronimo's madness, at times feigned and at times actual, becomes another dramatic device which Kyd successfully employs in The Spanish Tragedy.

Hieronimo is afflicted with passing fits of genuine madness brought on by his overwhelming grief and the overwhelming sense of his obligation and his helplessness to revenge which saps his will. It is not probable that in Kyd's original version Hieronimo ever pretended madness. There are two scenes in which his words are too glib and flighty (the reconciliation with Lorenzo and the plans for the play-within-a-play), but in both his nerves are under pressure owing to the role he is acting, and his wild talk shows the intense strain on a mind already somewhat weakened rather than a pretense to lure his opponents into false security.¹³

¹³Bowers, p. 72.

The next element of Italianate revenge tragedy, taken directly from Senecan drama, is the use of ghosts. Throughout the play, the Ghost of Andrea watches over the action, but at no time is the revenge undertaken for him, nor is it directed at his slayer on account of him.

An effective device introduced into Italianate drama by Kyd is that of hesitation before an action is carried out. Although Hieronimo is determined to take revenge for his son's death, he waits dramatically until he finds the perfect situation in which to act. It is not until he has acquired sufficient proof (Bel-imperia's letter and Pedringano's confession) and adequate encouragement (Bel-imperia's offer of assistance in bringing about the revenge and his wife's suicide) that Hieronimo devises a plan by which he can revenge Horatio's slaying.

It was the subtlety of character delineation in Kyd's work which must have appealed to the audiences of the time; they realized that here was something for which they had been seeking. (Kyd presented the hesitating type of character...and allied that with madness, feigned and real. Hieronimo does not sweep to his revenge. He moves a step forward, draws back, falls into a passion of indecision and then completes his task. The main characters in tragedy up to this time had been

"afflicted princes" or grandilo-
quent supermen....)¹⁴

We ~~ma~~We must also take note of the character Lorenzo. From the first, he is an opportunist who thinks that Bel-imperia would do well in fixing the peace between Spain and Portugal if she would marry Balthazar. Thus he bribes her servant, Pedringano, to inform him of Bel-imperia's love and then repeats the information to Balthazar. He then plans the method of killing Horatio, and after that first murder is executed, he becomes suspicious of his accomplices and destroys them also. As he finds himself inextricably involved in the situation which he himself has created, he becomes more and more deceitful and cunning. Eventually he develops into a Machiavellian, "...as full of villainous devices as he is free from scruples."¹⁵

We may hardly pass over the many parallels within The Spanish Tragedy that serve to reinforce the single element of revenge. Just as Andrea requires revenge, so also does Horatio. But a contrast immediately appears in that Andrea demands it (even though the revenger knows or cares nothing of this fact), while Hieronimo, rather than Horatio,

¹⁴Aldolphus W. Ward, A History of English Dramatic Literature (London; Macmillan & Co., 1899), I, p. 88.

¹⁵Bowers, p. 72.

decides to take revenge, and, consequently the latter is virtually forgotten by the audience. Balthazar's father grieves at his son's supposed and, later, actual death as did Hieronimo ~~did~~ when he found Horatio dead, and as the painter did at his son's death. The love that both Horatio and Balthazar (and we may include Andrea for the sake of parallelism) held for Bel-imperia is comparable; however, there is much contrast in her respective feelings for the two men. Because it is obvious that Hieronimo is truly mad at least part of the time, we may compare Isabella's state of mind at the moment of her suicide with his crazed condition. Also Hieronimo's many hesitations which need not have occurred in real life may be fairly contrasted to Bel-imperia's intense desire for revenge and her physical inability, at first, to carry it out. We may even consider the play-within-a-play as a close parallel to the actual total situation of The Spanish Tragedy. The names and places vary, but the essence of vengeance exists in both. Finally, the accomplices on both Hieronimo's and Lorenzo's sides, as well as the revengers themselves, die in one way or another.

The Spanish Tragedy, then, became a model and

provided a formula for later Italianate revenge tragedy.

The interest of Kyd's work is almost exclusively historical. Like Marlowe's it takes its place in the development of English tragedy by revealing new possibilities and offering a model in technique; unlike Marlowe's, it does not make a second claim upon us as great literature. The historical interest lies in the advance which Kyd's plays show in construction, in the manipulation of plot, and in effective situation. Kyd is the first to discover the bearing of episode and of the "movement" of the story on characterization, and the first to give the audience and reader the hint of the development of character which follows from this interaction. In other words, he is the first English dramatist who writes dramatically.¹⁶

Q Kyd, by placing the murder which was to be avenged within the play itself and by depicting that murder on the stage, laid the foundations for Elizabethan playwrights. In doing so, he digressed from his predecessors and thereby placed reality, rather than description, before his audience's eyes.

Another important innovation on the part of Kyd was that of developing the Machiavellian character who was a product of his own will and devices, rather than, as in Senecan drama, for instance, the portrayal of a comparatively helpless character upon whom the duty of blood-revenge was thrust.

For the most part, playwrights who drew on The

¹⁶Philip W. Edwards, ed., The Spanish Tragedy (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1959), intro., p. li.

Spanish Tragedy for inspiration merely extended Kyd's plotting and characterization rather than changed any essential aspects of his formula.¹⁷ Tragedies, then, became more bloody and more horrible while at the same time more intricate in plot construction than Kyd's work. With regard to action, whereas Senecan drama had portrayed simple rise-and-fall tragedy, Kyd introduced intrigue into his plot. The extension of this aspect of Elizabethan drama resulted in a series of revenges which wound themselves into a tangled web of situations. ~~the~~

In later tragedies, emphasis was placed on the Machiavellian villain to the point that in some cases he overshadowed the hero. The result of this development of the villainous character was a period in which

...the villains are the protagonists and the depiction of horror and tortuous intrigue is of such prime importance that revenge, while still the leading motive of the plot, does not carry the main interest of the audience except as a means to an end."¹⁸

How did the Italianate drama of intrigue and revenge come to be called tragedy? It is necessary now to turn to the traditional concept of tragedy

¹⁷Bowers, p. 109.

¹⁸Bowers, p. 138.

as put forth by Aristotle in The Poetics. Tragedy, according to Aristotle, is

the imitation of an action that is serious and also as having magnitude, complete in itself; in language with pleasurable accessories, each kind brought in separately in the parts of the work; in a dramatic, not in a narrative form; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its catharsis of such emotions.¹⁹

With regard to plot, Aristotle says that beauty depends on magnitude and order. A tragedy must have a beginning, a middle, and an end in a causal relationship and must be a unified whole. That plot must concern itself with action, rather than with a hero, and the action must be complex. That is, the change must be accompanied by reversal and/or recognition. Reversal consists of a change by which the action veers around to its opposite, while recognition is a change from ignorance to knowledge. These two produce either pity or fear since they both turn on surprises. (If the action is simple, the change of fortune occurs without reversal or recognition. Hence, the drama becomes a series of narrative speeches, not tragedy.) Because tragedy imitates not only a complete action

¹⁹Friedrich Solmsen, The Rhetoric and The Poetics of Aristotle, trans. Ingram Bywater (New York: The Modern Library, 1954), p. 230.

but also events inspiring fear and pity, the proper effect is best produced when events come upon us by surprise and at the same time follow as cause and effect, a combination of the inevitable and the unexpected.²⁰

In The Spanish Tragedy and in other Italianate revenge tragedies, the problem of creating a unified plot consisted of complicating and untieing the action in a necessary progression from beginning to middle to end. This complication was brought about by the motive of revenge. The denouement, a more difficult matter for Elizabethan playwrights, occurs--in The Spanish Tragedy--in the play-within-a-play in which the revenge is successfully carried out.

Unity for the Elizabethans, then, was hard to come by. For few were willing to sacrifice any variety to get it. In consequence, when it was achieved, it was a kind of multiple unity of many parts. It was bustling, lively, and generous. The motto seems to have been never to throw away anything that could possibly be tucked in somewhere.²¹

In Italianate drama, blood and horror were

²⁰Aristotle, The Poetics.

²¹Madeleine Doran, Endeavours of Art (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1963), p. 294.

necessary components of tragedy, but there was hardly even an arousal of the tragic emotions, much less a purgation of them.

With regard to the main character, Aristotle states that he must be good and his purpose good. He must have propriety, be true to life, and remain consistent. However, this character must not be perfect (rather he should be a little above ordinary man) because the audience, to be able to experience the tragic emotions, must identify with him.²²

In Italianate tragedy, this concept was modified to the extent that heroes were sometimes of lower rank. "When the tragic irony is not centered, as in the tragedy of ambition, in the distance of a man's fall, his rank ceases to be of quite so much importance."²³ Also Elizabethan dramatists categorized, for the most part, their characters so that the reader or spectator would easily recognize a type, rather than an individual. In The Spanish Tragedy when we learn that Bel-imperia is the pure young maiden, that Lorenzo is

²²Aristotle, The Poetics.

²³Doran, p. 136.

the treacherous villain, that Hieronimo is the crazed old man, and so on, we know what to expect in relation to actions, and we are not disappointed. In this way, Aristotle's requirements for consistency and propriety were satisfied by Elizabethan dramatists.

In meeting the challenge of characterization, we should notice how, contrary to Aristotle, the emphasis shifts, in The Spanish Tragedy, from action to character. The act of revenge, although important, is subordinate to the development of the character of Hieronimo. We are more interested in his reaction to Horatio's death, in his hesitations before seeking revenge, and in his method of revenge, than we are in the fact that Horatio's death had to be avenged. In fact, Hieronimo even has to show us the body of his son in order to remind us of the reason that the murders in the play-within-a-play were committed.

In effect, then, Italianate drama deviated far from the precepts set down by Aristotle for tragedy. Nevertheless, because of their literary heritage, their social environment, and their playwrights such as Kyd who introduced a combination of old and new techniques into drama, the

Elizabethans were able to accept revenge plays as tragedy. Rather than devise a name different from the one that Aristotle used to designate a certain genre of drama, the Elizabethans defined the same word in a different manner from him.

According to Doran, the definition of tragedy revolves around requirements for persons, for subject, and for ending. Tragedy, then, treats of "...the great affairs of kings and heroes, [and it] begins in happiness and ends in sorrow."²⁴ Of course this definition, which suits particularly Elizabethan tragedy, ignores much of the subjective aspect of Aristotle.

There are no Elizabethan requirements for a certain degree of goodness or badness in the tragic hero. In fact, there is no real hero, in the Aristotelian sense of the word. We do not know much about the character of Hieronimo (although we may make some accurate predictions on the basis of his "type"), his extent of goodness or badness. And by the end of the play, we certainly cannot consider him to be an Aristotelian hero, even though we do accept the fact, in Act II, that he feels morally bound to take revenge on those who mur-

²⁴Doran, p. 107.

dered his son. If we do not call Hieronimo a tragic hero, we can hardly attribute his actions throughout the play and his death at the end to a tragic flaw. Correspondingly, when, in the Second Act, Hieronimo, whether or not he is in full possession of his wit at a given time thereafter, decides to avenge his son, he proceeds--with some hesitation--to do so. There is no hint of reversal or recognition; we know from the time of his decision what Hieronimo plans to do and our interest in the rest of the play is maintained by the unfolding of his plans. Logically, then, if there is neither reversal nor recognition, there will be, obviously, no catharsis. Without the arousal and eventual purgation of the tragic emotions of pity and fear, according to Aristotle, we do not have tragedy. But as we have already discovered, the Elizabethan audience did not expect the same sort of tragedy as did the audience of classical Greece.

In the final analysis, our problem is not one of determining whether or not Elizabethan drama is actually tragedy with regard to Aristotle. If we look to the Elizabethan definition of revenge tragedy, we will find there a criterion for making such a judgment. Literature must be viewed

within the context of its time before any generalizations about it may be made. Just as people's tastes change, so also does literature change with ~~the~~ times.

The Spanish Tragedy--and Elizabethan drama as a whole--satisfied its audience to the extent that it became the model after which many succeeding works were patterned. No one can say that here is the best (or worst) concept of tragedy, just as no one can say that Aristotle was absolutely right (or wrong) in his definition of tragedy. The Spanish Tragedy gave the audience what it wanted, and thus it may be considered to be, in that respect, successful drama and in that particular form which in Elizabethan England was called tragedy.

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The Internal and External Worlds of
Coriolanus and
Doctor Faustus

Sharon Martin
Seminar
May 22, 1964

The Internal and External Worlds of Coriolanus and Doctor Faustus

- I. Introduction
- II. The de casibus classification
- III. The question of a Christian tragedy
- IV. The external world of Coriolanus
 - A. Roman state
 - B. Aufidius
- V. The internal world of Coriolanus
 - A. Duality of pride
 - B. Lack of depth
- VI. The external world of Doctor Faustus
 - A. Internal conflicts reflect external situation
- VII. The internal world of Doctor Faustus
 - A. Dilemma of rationalism and fatalism
 - B. Dilemma of human greatness and spiritual craving
- VIII. The implications of the discussion to the tragic success of the dramas
 - A. The posing of questions about the mystery of man's existence
 - B. The development of an emotional pitch that arouses pity and fear

The questions of this paper are based on my initial reactions to the plays Coriolanus and Doctor Faustus. Without attempting to analyze the characteristics of either play, there seemed to be for me at work in Doctor Faustus elements which make his situation more tragic than that of Coriolanus and in turn more meaningful to the reader of his tragedy today.

Starting from such a subjective reaction, it is the aim of this paper to compare the internal and external worlds of these characters in an attempt to reach some conclusion about the tragic success of each of these plays. In such a process it will be necessary in the end to define that element of tragedy which goes beyond a classification system, that element which perhaps may be one that deals with a deeper internal question of man's existence, one which reflects man's complicated soul and the mystifying questions of man's relationship to his universe and to a power which is above him.

There is little doubt that Coriolanus may be classified as a de casibus tragedy; Doctor Faustus, however, while it fits into the basic characteristics of de casibus tragedy, has within it medieval dramatic traditions which have been claimed as inconsistencies in the play; but these inconsistencies in fact add to its tragic significance. In Marlowe's combination of the Renaissance and medieval approach to tragedy, he has created increased tension and speculation about man's ultimate questions.

"Could Marlowe's Doctor Faustus be a tragedy at all?" has been questioned when it has been called a Christian tragedy.

In terms of Christ, man it was felt need not despair over his suffering, for it could lead him not only to more than a knowledge of his human existence, but to a closer identification with Christ. Man was to accept the mystery of his life, shoulder his burdens, return good for evil and approach death with confidence. But whether the Christian doctrines have promised such easy answers to human existence or not, the tragedy of life has not been diminished. The ambiguity of his suffering, of good and evil and of his values presents itself as strongly to the Christian as to the Greek. Christianity has perhaps deepened man's internal questionings. He must decide whether he is to believe or not to believe, whether he is to pass his dark night of the soul and make a leap of faith or whether he is to face life in terms of his material concepts and possible meaninglessness. The Christian view of tragedy may deepen the tensions and stresses which man must face. Such a view can add an additional way of "giving the fullest account of all the forces, within and without, that make for man's destruction, all that afflicts, mystifies, and bears him down, all that he knows as Evil."¹ The suffering of man in world which presents choices which involve concerns of infinity add a new level to the "mental and spiritual anguish as the protagonist acts in the knowledge that what he feels he must do is in some sense wrong."² He must have the ability to understand "the full context and implications of his action."³ The conflict between man and his destiny may assume the ultimate magnitude.

¹Richard B. Sewall, The Vision of Tragedy (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), p.46.

²Ibid., p. 47.

³Ibid.

But in my comparison of these two plays there seems to be little need of calling attention to the fact that either play is Christian or non-Christian. While the fact that Doctor Faustus is built around the Christian theme does not detract from its tragic demension, the fact that Coriolanus is secular need not alter its possibility of posing equal questions of ultimate concern. The questions of tragic success revolve rather around the depth of the heros' internal worlds and the conflict of the forces of their souls. It is the difference in "whatever forces act in the human spirit, whether good or evil, whether personal passion or impersonal principle, whatever can animate, shake, possess and drive a man's soul."⁴

Both plays provide us with a hero whose life is the main concern of the tragedy. Their external worlds set the stage for a de casibus hero who is of mean estate, whom we are able to see ascend to power and glory and end in death.

Coriolanus is built on a grand scale of military greatness. He has the superiority of skill to lead the Roman army against an enemy who alone is his equal. Only he it seems has the ability to inspire his soldiers to victory; only he, of the Romans is able to meet Auficius and match his strength. He has a Herculean character. Comminius when telling Menenius that Coriolanus has joined the Volscians says:

He is their god, he leads them like a thing
Made by some other deity than Nature,
That shapes man better; and they follow him
Against us brats with no less confidence
Than boys pursuing summer butterflies,
Or butchers killing flies.⁵

⁴A. C. Bradley, Shakespeare: Tragedy (New York: The World Publishing Co., 1955), p. 25.

⁵ William Shakespeare, The Tragedy of Coriolanus, ed. Louis B. Wright (New York: Washington Square Press, 1962), IV, iv, 115-120. All subsequent references to the play will appear in parentheses.

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Menenius adds in reply to Cominius, "As Hercules/ Did shake down mellow fruit." (IV, iv, 126-28) Lartius describes Coriolanus's battle with the Volscas:

Thou wast a solder
Even to Cato's wish, not fierce and terrible
Only in strokes, but with thy grim looks and
The thunderlike percussion of thy sounds
Thou madest thine enemies shake, as if the world
Were feverous and did tremble. (I, iv, 71-75)

Coriolanus welcomes the opportunity to display his valor and to meet Aufidius in battle. There is almost an intense hatred established toward the man who may be his equal. He states about the Volscas:

They have a leader
Tullus Aufidus, that will put you to 't.
I sin in envying his nobility;
And were I anything but what I am,
I would wish me only he. (I, i, 254-258)

He continues:

Were half to half the world by the ears, and he
Upon my party, I'd revolt, to make
Only my wars with him. He is a lion
That I am proud to hunt. (I, i, 260-264)

The Roman state is the scene of conflict where Coriolanus displays the disposition of his character. As an aristocrat, he believes strongly in the excellence of his class and of his position. He speaks insultingly about and toward the citizens whom he sees as fickle and below him.

Hang 'em They say;
They'll sit by the fire and presume to know
What's done in the Capitol, who's like to rise,
Who thrives and who declines; side factions, and give out
Conjectural marriage, making parties strong,
And feebling such as stand not in their liking
Below their cobbled shoes. They say there's grain enough!
Would the nobility lay aside their ruth
And let me use my sword, I'd make a quarry
With thousands of these quartered slaves, as high
As I could pick my lance. (I, i, 204-216)

He, indeed, feels that he belongs to a different world than the people when he denounces them:

You common cry of curs, whose breath I hate
 As reek 'o th' rotten fins, whose loves I prize
 As the dead carcasses of unburied men
 That do corrupt my air, I banish you.
 And here remain with your uncertainty:
 Let every feeble rumor shake your hearts;
 Your enemies, with nodding of their plumes,
 Fan you into despair; Have the power still
 To banish your defenders, till at length
 Your ignorance, which finds not till it feels,
 Making but reservation of yourselves
 Still your own foes; deliver you
 As most abated captives to some nation
 That won you without blows! Despising
 For you the city, thus I turn my back
 There is world elsewhere. (III, iii, 150-165)

Coriolanus has few desires or ambitions in the wielding of political power. Rather he has convictions and a desire to excel in his military deeds. He refuses material plunder of battle:

I thank you, General,
 But cannot make my heart consent to take
 A bribe to pay my sword, I do refuse it,
 And stand upon my common part with those
 That have beheld the doing. (I, ix, 41-46)

For Coriolanus the conflicts of his external world are those of aristocrat against common citizen and of Roman against Volscian. The deepening of his world is apparent in the quality of his character which has a predisposition in the direction which proves fatal to him. His pride is a marked one-sidedness, but it is a tragic trait which is also his greatness. His pride is that quality which causes people to admire him for his deeds of courage and skill. It is his pride which spurs him against Aufidius. But it also is his pride which will not allow him to alter from his personal honor in bowing before the citizens in a robe of humility. From the opening scenes of the play

the pride of Coriolanus is emphasized:

The present wars devour him! He is grown
Too proud to be so valiant.
Such a nature
Tickled with good success, disdains the shadow
Which he treads on at noon
But I do wonder
His insolence can brook to be commanded
Under Cominius. (I, i, 296-304)

In Act II Brutus and Sicinius again state;

He's poor in no one fault, but stored with all.
Especially in pride.
And topping all others in boasting. (II, i, 17-20)

The superiority that Coriolanus displays is a shocking quality to the modern believer in democracy. Despite the possibility of such a bias the question must still be posed whether the pride which Coriolanus displays and the integrity he shows to himself is adequate to arouse in the reader of his tragedy the feelings of pity, fear and sadness. In his refusal to present himself before the citizens, he remains true to his character. But in his insolence and arrogance shown toward the citizens he sets up an aversion to him which can be overcome only in a severe rationalization of his character and actions. It is admirable that he can stand before the citizens being true to himself.

Most sweet voices!
Better it is to die, better to starve,
Than crave the here which first we do deserve.
Why in the wolfish toge should I stand here
To beg of Hob and Dick that do appear
Their needless bouches? Custom calls me to 't. (II, iii, 115-120)

It is his mother, to whom he owes his first honor, who can force him to appear before the entire mass of citizens.

Let them pull all about mine ears, present me
 Death on the wheel or at wild horses' heels,
 Or pile then hills on the Tarpeian rock,
 That the precipitation might down stretch
 Below the beam of sight; yet will I still
 Be thus to them....

I muse my mother
 Does not approve me further, who was wont
 To call them woolen vassals, things created
 To bury and sell with groats; to show bare heads
 In congregations, to yawn, be still and wonder,
 When one but of my ordinance stood up
 To speak of peace of war.
 I talk of you (Volumnia)
 Why did you wish me milder?
 Would you have me
 False to my nature? Rather say I play
 The man I am. (III, ii, 1-6, 7-20)

For Volumnia, Coriolanus is too absolute. She would have him
 sway from his proudness so that he might obtain the consulship.

If it be honor in your wars to seem
 The same you are not, which for your best ends
 You adapt your policy, how is it less or worse
 That it shall hold companionship in peace
 With honor as in war; since that to both
 It stands in like request? (III, ii, 60-65)

Her claims are that for him to speak would

no more dishonor you at all
 Than to take in a town with gentle words,
 Which else would put you to your fortune and
 The hazard of much blood.
 I would dissemble with my nature where
 My fortunes and my friends at stake requires
 I should do so in honor. I am in this
 Your wife, your son, these senators, the nobles;
 And you will rather show our general louts
 How you can frown than spend a fawn upon 'em
 For the inheritance of their loves and safeguard
 Of what that might ruin. (III, ii, 72-84)

Because of the pleas of his mother and his honor to her,
 Coriolanus can compel himself to appear before the citizens.
 In persuading him Volumnia states:

Let
 Thou mother rather feel thy pride than fear
 Thy dangerous stoutness; for I mock at death
 With as big heart as thou. Do as thou list.
 Thy valiantness was mine, thou suckedst it from me,
 But owe thy pride to thyself. (III, ii, 151-156)

Here even Coriolanus's mother recognizes that the fault of Coriolanus may at times outstand his virtue. It is this fact which seems to be the weakness in allowing us to enter into the internal world of Coriolanus. We are able to feel very little attraction to the character who has openly denounced the people of Rome. He shows little reasoning capability, but rather seems to follow his passions and the biases of his birth. The reader may analyze Coriolanus's character and determine that he has shown integrity above all. But he allows us little opportunity to join with him in any inner conflict of spirit. In remaining true to his integrity he is allowed to join with Aufidius against the Romans for at no time has he pledged himself in allegiance to a country. He has banished himself from Rome "to a world elsewhere." Coriolanus seems to isolate himself from the characters in the play and in turn from the reader of his tragedy. What Coriolanus gains because of his pride is relevant to him. What he loses because of his pride affects many around him. Yet there can be the rationalization that with Coriolanus's death integrity dies. If we feel little identification with his internal conflicts we must question the value of integrity.

At one point in the play, Coriolanus displays the human emotions which soften his character enough to allow us to enter his internal world and to feel what he feels. He departs from his Herculean image and dismisses his pride when he holds his mother's hand and says in answer to her pleas:

O mother, mother!
 What have you done? Behold, the heavens do ope
 The gods look down, and this unnatural scene
 They laugh at. O my mother, mother! O!

You have won a happy victory to Rome;
 But for your son believe it, O, believe it!
 Most dangerously you have with him prevailed,
 It not most mortal to him. But let it come.
 Aufidius, though I cannot make true wars,
 I'll frame convenient peace. Now, good Aufidius,
 Were you in my stead, would you have heard
 A mother less, or granted less, Aufidius? (V, iii, 199-210)

This reaction to his mother's entreaties is quite different
 from the cold reply he had given to Menenius.

Wife, mother, child, I know not. My affairs
 Are servanted to others. Though I owe
 My revenge properly, my remission lies
 In Volscian breasts. That we have been familiar,
 Ingrate forgetfulness shall poison rather
 Than pity note how much. Therefore be gone
 Mine ears against your suits are stronger than
 Your gates against my force. (V, ii, 87-94)

The intermission in his pride allows him to become more human,
 but it also leads to his destruction.

Thus only at the close of the play does the reader feel
 rather than rationalize the immense force of Coriolanus, the
 greatness of his soul and the impression of waste. He is a
 character who could never be assimilated into any city. He thus,
 too, seems to be a character whose conflict allows us little
 opportunity to feel towards his disposition and actions.

The world of Doctor Faustus does not leave such an
 impression. Both his external and internal worlds allow the
 reader to become involved in his conflict of spirit. There
 is a genuine identification with Faustus as he battles the questions
 of the "modern man".

Although he has been born of parents of base stock, Faustus
 is a doctor of high intellect who much the reverse of Coriolanus,
 shows a thirst for power and knowledge.

Are not thy bills hung up as monuments
 Whereby whole cities have escaped the plague
 And thousands desperate maladies been eased?
 Yet are thou still Faustus and a man.
 Would'st thou make men to live eternally,⁶
 Or, being dead raise them to life again?

There is little that can be stated about the world in which Faustus lives. His internal conflicts, rather than his external, are those which place him in his setting. Marlowe demonstrates the poles of decision which were available to the man of the Renaissance and which are still present today. Faustus was made to choose between rationalism and fatalism, between human greatness and a spiritual craving, between individualism and dependance.

Faustus's first sin is his pride in the ability of man and his thirst for power. With an increased hunger for knowledge, he puts his trust in necromancy.

These metaphysics of magicians
 And necromantic books are heavenly;
 Lines, circles, scenes, letters and characters,
 Ay, these are those that Faustus most desires.
 O what a world of profit and delight,
 Of power, of honor, of omnipotence
 Is promised to the studious artisan!
 All things that move between the quiet poles
 Shall be at my command. Emperors and kings
 Are but obeyed in their several provinces,
 Nor can they raise the wind or rend the clouds,
 But his dominion that exceeds in this
 Stretcheth as far as doth the mind of man.
 A sound magician is a mighty god.
 Here Faustus, try thy brain to gain a deity. (I, i, 46-60)

Faustus must question what it is to be a man. His conflict is within a soul that is torn between the desire to exploit new mysteries and the claims of old teachings which when doubted

⁶ Christopher Marlowe, The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus, in English Drama, ed. Edd Winfield Parks (New York: Norton and Co., 1935), I, i, 20-25. All subsequent references to the play will appear in parentheses.

leave guilt and a sense of alienation. In search of the truth of his nature, Faustus is urged "to realize himself fully in the face of all that would rob him of his deserts or repress what he feels to be his true nature; the gauge of his heroism is the magnitude of the risk he is willing to take."⁷ To remain content with his limitations seems to deny his capabilities; yet to seek beyond seems somehow evil and threatens suffering and the horrors of an eternity.

It is not difficult for the reader of Faustus's tragedy to feel this tension within him. The Good and Evil Angels carry on the dialogue of his soul:

O Faustus! lay that dammed book aside
And gaze not upon it lest it tempt thy soul,
And heap God's heavy wrath upon thy head.
Read, read the Scriptures: that is blasphemy

Go forward, Faustus, in that famous art,
Wherein all Nature's treasure is contained:
Be thou on earth as Jove is in the sky,
Lord and commander of these elements. (I, i, 67-74)

Faustus makes his decision to sell his soul in full responsibility for his action. The devil himself warns him about the implications of his decisions that

There is no chief but only Belzebub,
To whom Faustus doth dedicate himself.
This word "damnation" terrifies not him,
For he confounds hell in Elysium (I, iii, 57-60)

when he points out that Lucifer, the most dearly loved angel of God had been thrown from the "face of heaven" by "aspiring pride and insolence. In added warning he responds to Faustus' question of "How comes it then that thou art out of hell?" by

⁷ Sewall, p. 60.

stating:

Why this is hell, nor am I out of it.
 Think'st thou that I saw the face of God,
 And tasted the ternal joys of Heaven,
 Am not tormented with ten thousand hells,
 In being deprived of everlasing bliss?
 O Faustus! leave these frivolous demands,
 Which strike a terror to my fainting soul. (I, iii, 77-84)

The tragic character of Faustus, much more than that of Coriolanus is "made of the stuff we find withing ourselves." But his life is intensified and raised above us. His temptations could be ours.

What boots it then to think of God or Heaven?
 Away with such vain fancies and despair
 Despair in God, and in Belzebub.
 Now go forward, no Faustus, be resolute.
 Why waverest thou? O something soundeth in mine ears
 "Abjure this magic turn to God again"
 Ay, and Faustus will turn to God again.
 To God? He loves thee not. (I, v, 3-10)

It is with the congealing of his blood as he bequeaths his soul to Lucifer that Faustus begins to question his arrogance.

What might the staying of my blood portend?
 Is it unwilling I should write this bill?
 Why streams it not that I may write afresh?
 Faustus gives to thee his soul. Oh, there it stayed.
 Why should'st thou not? Is not thy sould thine own?
 (I, v, 65-67)

Once the contract has been signed we begin to see the irony of Faustus's situation. As Coriolanus in responding to humanity brings about his destruction, Faustus realizes the disproportion between the price men give to wordly power and its actual worth. While Coriolanus's destruction comes from an intermission in his pride, Faustus falls into despair. Once again we are allowed to experience with Faustus his tensions.

My heart's so hardened I cannot repent
 Scarce can I name salvation, faith, or heaven,
 But fearful echoes thunder in mine ears
 "Faustus, thou art damned!" Then swords and knives,
 Poison, gun, halters, and envenomed steel
 Are laid before me to dispatch myself,
 Had not sweet pleasure conquered deep despair.....

I am resolved: Faustus shall ne'er repent.
 (I, iv, 18-25, 33)

It becomes increasingly ironic that all that Faustus has desired from the devil could have been found in his own books. What he gains are only sensual pleasures and powers which eventually become an escape from his internal torment. To Faustus's question, "Tell me who made the World," Mephistophilis answers, "I will not." "Villain," Faustus questions, "have I not bound thee to tell me anything?" (I, vi, 67-68)

The tragedy of Faustus may have been averted if he had been able to repent of his sin. But it is the theme of despair which brings out the dilemma of mankind in his quest for an understanding of the mysteries of his life. Man asserts his self sufficiency in pride and seeks superhuman power. But in his craving, he grows aware of his insufficiencies and craves the completion of his knowledge in the spiritual realm. Deprived of a feeling of self-esteem, he concludes by denying any of man's greatness and shrinks into despair. It is thus, in a sense his greatness, his craving for knowledge that is responsible for his destruction.

What art thou, Faustus, but a man condemned to die?
 Thy fatal time doth draw to final end;
 Despair doth drive distrust into my thought.
 Confound these passions with a quiet sleep.
 Tush, Christ did call the thief upon the cross;
 Then rest thee, Faustus, quiet in conceit.
 (I, xi, 35-40)

Faustus isolates the conflict of each man who searches and faces the inadequacies of his powers. He isolates the humanistic belief in mankind in contrast to a medieval subservience to God. He isolates the modern man's reliance on science in contrast to his search for answers to questions of a spiritual reality.

But Faustus' offenses can never be pardoned: the serpent that tempted Eve may be saved, but not Faustus. Ah, gentleman, hear me with patience, and tremble not at my speeches. Though my heart pains and quivers to remember that I have been a student here these thirty years, oh, would I had never seen Wittenberg, never read book! And what wonders I have done, all Germany can witness, yea, the world: for which Faustus hath lost both Germany and the world, yea Heaven itself, Heaven, the seat of God, the throne of the blessed, the kingdom of joy; and must remain in hell forever, hell, oh, hell, for ever! Sweet friends! What shall become of Faustus being in hell for ever? (I, xiv, 14-24)

"For vain pleasure of twenty-four years" Faustus lost
 "eternal joy and felicity." (I, xiv, 35-36)

The pity and fear which Faustus arouses because of his tragic dilemma requires no rationalization. Every man since Marlowe's time has felt the torment that is Faustus'. Every man feels the sense of sadness and mystery in his loss for he is a man whose intelligence and imagination had caught him

in a delima of his time-one which because of his greatness he could not avoid. His loss points to the mystery of life and to the worth of what has been lost.

The greatness of Coriolanus does not completely bring us to such an emotional intensity. There are in his character too many factors with which we cannot internalize. We remain an observer rather than a participator. With Faustus we experience all that he experiences and we can identify with his plight.

The watch strikes the hour before his death and he longs for time to discover the mystery of the soul.

Ah Faustus,
Now hast thou but one bare hour to live,
And then thou must be demmed perpetually!
Stand still, you ever moving spheres of Heaven,
That time may cease, and midnight never come;
Fair Nature's eye, rise again and make
Perpetual day; or let this hour be but
A year, a month, a week, a natural day,
That Faustus may repent and save his soul!

The discussion of these two plays has led me once again to a feeling of emotional intensity for Faustus which I cannot feel for Coriolanus. The facets of the discussion have tried to point out why, though both plays can be classified as tragedies, with equal success, Faustus created a greater feeling of pity, fear and sadness in his loss. It has attempted to show the importance of the internal conflict of the main character and the deepening of the tragedy as the reader is allowed to enter the character's internal world. Such deepening provides

feeling rather than rationalization of the tragedy. Further it has attempted to point out that Faustus, although written during the Renaissance and incorporating medieval conventions, poses questions which come closer than those of Coriolanus to the brink of finding out what it is to be a man.

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CORDELIA AND CORIOLANUS:
FIDELITY TO AN IDEAL

by

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English Seminar
Mr. Fredman
May 22, 1964

"The world is grown to that corruption that
he that cannot flatter is either accounted
envious or reputed proud or arrogant."

Note: It is my purpose in this paper to consider the characters, Cordelia and Coriolanus, on the basis of their dramatic and symbolic functions and of their contribution to the tragic effect of their respective plays.

- I. The Lear Universe.
 - A. Diffusion of evil through the essence of nature.
 - B. Concepts of appearance and reality (theory of recurrent imagery).
 1. Nothingness.
 2. Nakedness.
 3. Plainness.
- II. The Cordelia/Lear Relationship.
 - A. Cordelia's character as "misinterpreted" by critics.
 1. Her pride--disprove this.
 2. Discussion of Act I, scene i.
 - B. Cordelia's function in King Lear.
 1. Pure symbol.
 2. Prime mover and ultimate goal.
 - C. Lear's progress in relation to Cordelia.
 1. From nothingness to nakedness and madness, to partial insight, to plainness.
 2. Discussion of Act IV, scene vii.
 - D. Discussion of Act V, scene iii.
 1. Relation of Cordelia and Lear.
 2. Discussion of finality of Cordelia's death.
- III. The Coriolanus Universe.
 - A. Diffusion of evil through the world.
 - B. Concepts of fickleness, flattery, and policy.
- IV. Discussion of respective functions of Cordelia and Coriolanus.
 - A. Place of pride in their characters.
 - B. Absolute fidelity to an ideal and its results.
- V. Discussion of tragic effect of King Lear and Coriolanus based on Cordelia and Coriolanus.
 - A. Discussion of Act V, scene iii.
 - B. General discussion of tragedy and tragic effect.
 1. Definition: The temporal ruin of an eternal value.

Common to the tragedies, Hamlet, King Lear, and Antony and Cleopatra is Shakespeare's depiction of evil diffused through the fiber of the world. In these plays, no one character can embody all the evil inherent in nature and the universe. Shakespeare sees evil as a soluble substance saturating the world; being soluble, it cannot be isolated. Therefore, the heroes cannot root out the evil by killing one person who contains it.

In King Lear treatment of the wide diffusion of evil through the essence of nature naturally leads to a treatment of a wide range of themes--as wide and as deep as the expanse of the universe. As evil is diffused throughout the Lear universe, so recurrent images or image patterns are diffused throughout the play, indicating and making concrete the abstract implications Shakespeare makes. Many of these image patterns are variations on the theme of appearance versus reality. One image pattern revolves around the concept of nothingness, or naught, or zero in a literal sense. In a figurative sense (naughty) this concept meant a serious violation to the Elizabethan, as opposed to the present day connotation. In a moral sense, naughty meant "of no moral value," "devoid of moral worth," or "a zero quantity of good." For example, the moral degeneration that forced Lear out into the storm made it a "naughty night to swim in."¹ This image pattern of nothingness is connected to

¹William Shakespeare, The Tragedy of King Lear, ed. G. B. Harrison (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1948). All subsequent references to Lear are from this edition.

the appearance versus reality theme in King Lear, for if a thing is "naught," then the only thing it can have is appearance. It is nothing but it can appear to be something it isn't. Nothingness does not necessarily always carry bad connotations. It may also indicate the absence of any quality. It may be a zero quantity of falseness, as in the case of Cordelia in her reply to Lear's question in Act I, scene i--"Nothing."

Another image pattern related to the appearance versus reality theme is the nakedness pattern. Literally nakedness is the absence of clothing. There is nothing deceptive about nakedness; it is the honest reality with which we begin. Figuratively, nakedness may imply the barest essentials necessary to survival. It does not carry the moral connotation which nothingness does.

Plainness is another image pattern associated with the appearance versus reality theme, and, more specifically, with Cordelia and Kent. What they call plainness or truth, Lear calls pride. What appears to him to be pride is really plainness. Plainness is the essence of a quality devoid of impurities. It is "the thing itself" (III, vi, 110) with nothing added. To compare these three image patterns, nothingness is a mirage--the appearance of water with no reality; it is not even naked water; there simply isn't any. The bare quantity of stale, tepid water, just enough to sustain life is nakedness; while the essence of water in whatever amount with no extemporaneous qualities--all water in purity--this is plainness.

What, then, is Cordelia's function in relation to the

play and to these themes? Cordelia is probably one of the most memorable of Shakespeare's heroines. This fact is noteworthy, for although she speaks scarcely one hundred lines, the reader is left with the impression of her being one of the principal speakers. The sparcity of Cordelia's verbalizations, I believe, is in accordance with the meaning of the play and with her function in it.

Some critics tend to soften Lear's fault by blaming Cordelia for sharing her father's pride. "Lear and his daughters have fallen into the first of all sins, namely pride, the love and worship of self, to evil and disruption.

...Who could not see that Cordelia loved her father but loved him less than she loved her own way and hated her sisters?"² Yet not one character in the play shares the critics

blame on Lear. Kent is exiled for supporting Cordelia; both Albany and Cornwall try to protect him; France defends Cordelia, and Burgundy does not denounce her; Gloucester calls Lear's actions catastrophic; and even Regan and Goneril comment on Lear's conduct after Cordelia has left them. Granted Lear has a tragic flaw--pride, in the Greek sense--but I do not believe we may say that Cordelia shares this pride. To say so would be fatal to the play by destroying its meaning and purpose. Should Cordelia have said differently in Act I, scene i? Was it her flaw that she could not say something nice to her father?

²William Haller, "What Needs My Shakespeare?", ed. Helmut Bonheim (San Francisco, Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc., 1960) p. 137.

Cordelia is the embodiment of what Lear must learn. She is a pure symbol of absolute love and truth. As France puts it, "She is herself a dowry" (I, i, 244). She has the essence; anything she has or does beyond her plainness would be an impurity. It is as if speech itself was not a simple or genuine enough thing for the expressing of what she is. It is a fallacy to search Cordelia for an Aristotelian tragic flaw. To find one in her would destroy her whole purpose in the tragedy.

King Lear poses, among others, the question of the nature of nature. What is the nature of nature if it produces evil people who become worse than animals, who become monsters? If Goneril, Regan, and Edmund are products of nature, and if nature even aids them in their evil acts (the storm), where is the escape, where is the hope? I believe Cordelia is the answer to the last question. Shakespeare says to me that the same nature which created the evil characters also created Cordelia. In this sense, she is nature's saving grace. In a world saturated with evil, she is the absolute symbol of love and truth--plainness.

Thus, in response to Lear's demand that she outdo her sisters' verbal professions of love, Cordelia can only say, "Nothing." She can be, but she cannot say. She has the love Goneril merely speaks of having. "Sir, I love you more than words can wield the matter,/...A love that makes breath poor and speech unable" (I, i, 56, 61). Cordelia sighs, "What shall Cordelia do? Love and be silent" (I, i, 63). She has the substance but not the appearance of love; this

is truly her dower.

Cordelia has been accused of being cold and unthinking in Act I, scene i. But Lear is the only one who takes her silence to be the absence of love. Everyone else realizes her nothingness of speech rather than of love, and they realize that Lear is wrong. Cordelia utters no word in excess of her actual feeling. She speaks to Lear precisely, in a metaphor which she believes he will understand. "I love your Majesty/ According to my bond, no more nor less (I, i, 95). The bond of which Cordelia speaks is to her a sacred bond of nature--the tie of natural affection and duty between father and child. Cordelia is "the thing itself"; she has only the substance of love. She would die for Lear but she will not talk about dying for him. She will not heave her heart into her mouth. What she is is there, and if Lear, at his age, cannot see it, there is nothing she can do or say about it. She can only be what she is and thus provide the prime motion of the action of the play as well as the ultimate goal of its movement. Lear, then, mistakes the absence of appearance for the absence of love. He misinterprets Cordelia's metaphor, for he is not really carrying on a dialogue with her or anyone near him during this scene. He has predetermined what everyone will say to him and what everyone will do and receive. Lear fully intended to give Cordelia the "largest bounty" and to spend the rest of his days with her, happily bearing his title but not its weight, his privileges but not his responsibilities. But how little he knows his favorite daughter. How little he has ever seen her worth. Although he values her, he does not know her worth. He

should have known that the Cordelia who merited his love was not the Cordelia who could give flowery answers to the question, "What can you say to draw a third more opulent than your sisters?" (I, i, 87-8). But Lear has determined in advance the answers he will receive--determined without insight. Hence, Lear completely misunderstands what Cordelia is implying by saying she loves her father according to her bond. He does not consider whether her words have quite another meaning than the superficial one, which is decidedly different from the one he had expected. Thus, he banishes the daughter he loves most. "Nothing will come of nothing" (I, i, 92). Of the love that asks for nothing in return, and of the forgiveness for injuries that is freely given, Lear is ignorant. It is Lear, then, and not Cordelia, who violates the bond of nature.

Yet Cordelia, in being true to her essence of plainness, hands the kingdom and her father over to her two evil sisters. Maintaining her absolute qualities untainted is not the practical thing to do. Some critics have criticized her for being true to herself at her father's expense--a selfish thing to do. They say she, like her father, is withdrawing from the world of action leaving it to her sisters through her refusal of responsibility. Perhaps this is one of the points Shakespeare wishes to make. The absolutely pure, those who are plain, are not those who best survive in the world; yet ultimately they are the ones who raise humanity above the level of the dogs and who are ultimately successful, though at tragic cost.

Lear, then, rightfully bears the full responsibility for his error. His mistake is extreme--mistaking appearance

for reality--violating the bond of nature--and so his enlightenment must be extreme. He must come to value substance beyond any regard--absolutely. He must change from his perception of appearance exclusively (blindness to reality) to perception of reality exclusively. If Lear is to learn these things, and if Cordelia is to be his prime mover as well as his ultimate goal, she must be absolute. She must be all-truth, all-love, all-plainness; she cannot even seem to be any of these. She can have nothing of appearance and must have all of reality.³

Cordelia, as pure symbol, plainness, and prime mover and ultimate goal of Lear, is one of the principle characters of King Lear. Yet, as has been remarked, her actual lines are few--in keeping with her character and her function in the play. Shakespeare keeps us continually aware of Cordelia from the time she leaves us in Act I, scene i to the time she returns in Act IV, scene vii, by use of direct references, through Kent's letters, by the affinity between the Fool and Cordelia, and by repetition of image patterns connected with Cordelia.

Lear, stirred initially by Cordelia's words, moves

³Yet for all her qualities as an absolute symbol, Cordelia is also a real character. Shakespeare shows us Cordelia as a woman, down to earth, at the same time being an absolute symbol, in the interchange between her and her sisters following her banishment. In this mild squabble, we see Cordelia as not essentially a retiring, or a reticent person, but as one who is what she is and who recognizes others for what they are, who sees with insight into the essence of truth in the world. Often Shakespeare's villains have a clearer insight into moral truth than do his good characters. They can see things as they are, but their sight is unlinked with love, warmth of heart. Cordelia has this clear insight linked with love--an ideal combination.

through images of nothingness to nakedness images, to madness and spiritual blindness, then to full sight of Cordelia's face, and finally, to full perception of her plainness. The face which he wishes never to see again he suffers for four acts in order to see. It is beside the point of this paper to trace Lear's progress through these four acts, but it is necessary to indicate some of the intensity and complexity of Lear's change in order to appreciate the value of Cordelia as Lear ultimately sees her. Lear passes through some of the nothingness/naughtiness of Goneril and Regan in Act I, scenes i and ii. In Act I, scene iii, Edgar, the symbol of nakedness, introduces this pattern of imagery and prepares the audience to cast all illusion off and to hit rock bottom of reality. Continuing through the nothingness of the two sisters, then, Lear begins feeling his suffering physically, giving the audience presentiments of his madness. Leaving his daughters, Lear goes out into the storm, casting off his illusions one by one, opening himself in his increasing nakedness to the buffets of the storm and to sight of suffering beyond his own:

Come on, my boy. How dost, my boy? Art cold?
 I am cold myself. Where is this straw, my fellow?
 The art of our necessities is strange,
 That it can make vile things precious. Come, your hovel,
 Poor fool and knave, I have one part in my heart
 That's sorry yet for thee.

(III, iii, 68-73)

When Lear sees Edgar, disguised as Poor Tom, his mind snaps, and he views the lowest level of man--one living on the barest necessities of life. His mind focuses on an *idée fixée*.

"Hast thou given all to thy two daughters?/ And art thou come to this?" (III, iv, 49-50). In his madness, Lear con-

tinues to strip himself of his illusions until he sees Tom as the symbol of truth, associating truth with nakedness and calling Tom his philosopher. As Lear loses his mind--his eye of reason--to madness, so Gloucester loses his eyesight, even though he, too, is on his way to insight. Shakespeare has Lear go mad to cement into his person the beginning of insight he has achieved. Lear is an old brittle man who has been operating for eighty-some years without insight. He is too brittle now to bend, so Shakespeare must make his transformation complete, essential, and permanent through his madness. Thus, Lear, able to see into the world stripped of all illusion, can see in his madness the foulness of the world; he can smell out the stench of it. He has yet to see the whole of reality in the world. Upon awakening and seeing Cordelia's face, his total vision of truth is complete. Man must have more than stark nakedness to be truly human. Thus, dressed in fresh garments, Lear finds himself facing and seeing his ultimate goal--Cordelia and all she represents.

Cordelia, in Act IV, scene vii, speaks to the sleeping Lear as she cannot to the waking Lear:

Mine enemy's dog,
Though he had bit me, should have stood that night
Against my fire, and wast thou fain, poor Father,
To hovel thee with swine and rogues forlorn
In short and musty straw? Alack, alack!
'Tis wonder that thy life and wits at once
Had not concluded all. He wakes. Speak to him.
(IV, vii, 36-42)

True to the Cordelia of Act I, scene i, this Cordelia cannot, by virtue of her plainness, speak to the conscious Lear. She asks the doctor to speak for her. When prodded, she merely asks Lear how he fares, whether he knows her, and, "Oh, look upon me, sir,/ And hold your hands in benediction o'er me."

o'er me./ No, sir, you must not kneel." (IV, vii, 57-59). This is the same intense, tender feeling of reverence, love, and truth we feel in Cordelia at the play's beginning. And now Lear, struggling to gain consciousness, admits:

I am a very foolish fond old man,
Fourscore and upward, not an hour more nor less,
And, to deal plainly,
I fear I am not in my perfect mind.
Methinks I should know you and know this man,
Yet I am doubtful, for I am mainly ignorant
What place this, and all the skill I have
Remembers not these garments, nor I know not
Where I did lodge last night. Do not laugh at me,
For, as I am a man, I think this lady
To be my child Cordelia.

(IV, vii, 59-70)

And do we feel we want to hear more from Cordelia at this point than, "And so I am, I am." (IV, vii, 70)? And do we wish Cordelia to forgive Lear in any more words than, "No cause, no cause." (IV, vii, 75)?

Lear has come to the point where all that really matters is Cordelia--her plainness. In Act V, scene iii, he is content with her in their captivity. And later in the scene, when Lear enters carrying the dead body of Cordelia, he wails and cries, "She's gone forever./ I know when one is dead and when one lives./ She's dead as earth." (V, iii, 259-61). Calling for a looking glass, he holds a feather up to be stirred by any breath she may have. Perhaps it is his trembling hand that stirs the feather, but Lear says, "This feather stirs, she lives. If it be so,/ It is a chance which does redeem all sorrows/ That I have ever felt." (V, iii, 265-7). And to clinch our belief that Lear really does see his Cordelia now, he thinks he hears her speak, "What is it thou say'st? Her voice was ever soft,/ Gentle and low, an excellent thing in woman." (V, iii, 271-2). The Lear of Act I

would never have agreed. But is all the sorrow, all the suffering Lear has known, in vain because his Cordelia has died? Can we really believe that, for Lear and for us, Cordelia has died?

And my poor fool is hanged. No, no, no life.
 Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life
 And thou no breath at all? Thou'lt come no more,
 Never, never, never, never, never.
 Pray you, undo this button. Thank you, sir.
 Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips,
 Look there, look there.

[Dies]

(V, iii, 305-11)

Lear dies in ecstasy believing that his Cordelia lives, thus redeeming all of his sorrows. I cannot believe Shakespeare lets Lear die deceived, after all he has suffered in order to see the truth and to value plainness. Who can deny that Cordelia is alive? Nothing about her but her body is dead. Lear sees the highest reality--that she does live--that final reality--plainness--is indestructible.

Even the degenerate world of King Lear cannot prove fatal to plainness itself. And although Lear and Cordelia lose all in the world, they save everything essential. "This is the greatest and, we may think, the necessary way of affirming that human goodness may triumph over the evils of this world--at tragic cost."⁴

The evil of the Coriolanus universe is not as widely diffuse or as deeply ingrained as it is in King Lear. We find a Roman world characterized by compromise, policy, and flattery. The Roman people who compose the State, are, in

⁴Harold Wilson, On The Design of Shakespearian Tragedy. (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1957) p. 204.

contrast to Coriolanus, base to the low degree of dogs, curs, hares, geese, camels, mules, crows, minnows, goats--cowardly creatures which are to be hunted and despised by those true to an absolute ideal. In the Roman crowd we see the fickleness of an unreasoning people, easily swayed by corrupt leaders. We see a common people, cowardly in battle, and slow to recognize courage.

As in King Lear, the evil in the world is not focused in one character. We may call the crowd evil in its fickleness; we may call Aufidius' treachery villainous; we may accuse Volumnia of causing the downfall of Coriolanus. But none of these appellations is entirely sufficient to explain Coriolanus' fall. "The hero does not merely stand at the center of the tragedy; he is the tragedy. He brings no one down with him in his fall, and his character is entirely sufficient to explain his fall."⁵

Given the interpretation of Cordelia as plainness, what possible similarities can there be between this vision of purity and selflessness and the proud and self-centered Coriolanus? It is my contention that Coriolanus and Cordelia are basically similar characters and differ only in terms of their functions in their respective plays. Through a possible stretch of the imagination, Cordelia is a tragic figure; but Coriolanus is the tragic hero. We have pointed out Cordelia's function as a pure symbol of love, reality, truth--plainness. As such, we cannot admit of taints in

⁵Willard Farnham, Shakespeare's Tragic Frontier (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1950) p. 207.

her character--taints such as pride or even speech. The play Coriolanus is the tale of the rise and fall of a man. Pride is essential to this hero's character. Without it Coriolanus would not have risen to the heights of a tragic hero; but without it, he would not have fallen from those heights. As Cordelia's plainness is recognized by all but Lear at the beginning of the play, so everyone in Coriolanus recognizes the hero's pride, at times to praise its effects, mainly to condemn its results. Thus it would seem that on the basis of pride, Cordelia and Coriolanus are opposite in character. As plainness is the essence of Cordelia, so pride, a characteristic entirely absent from Cordelia, is the essence of Coriolanus. But it is one of the results of his pride that links Coriolanus closely to Cordelia. This result is Coriolanus' integrity which is based on his pride. Like Cordelia, he will do or say nothing that is contrary to what he is. Fidelity to an ideal, then, is common to both Cordelia and Coriolanus.

It takes more than a military hero to provide tragic hero material for Shakespeare. He prefers characters with more levels of complexity. To the figure of the military hero, Shakespeare adds the extra depth of heroic fidelity to an ideal; and since that ideal is really the hero's own integrity, Shakespeare makes pride, usually considered a vice, the basis for our evaluation of Coriolanus as one worthy of our respect and empathy as tragic hero. Yet placing this hero, dedicated to action and rule based on absolutes, in a world of men who thrive on compromise, policy, and flattery, Shakespeare makes the same pride, which we admire as the

source of Coriolanus' integrity, the source of his downfall--his tragic flaw. Volumnia says, "Thy valiantness was mine, thou suck'dst it from me,/ But owe thy pride thyself,"⁶ but she is only partly right. In Coriolanus, pride is the source of his valor, his integrity, but it is always pride and, as such, is in Coriolanus a tragic flaw.

In Coriolanus we must admire the man who is proud "even to the altitude of his virtue" (I, i, 40-1). Aware of the fickleness and cowardliness of the people, can we wish Coriolanus to say other than, "I had rather be their servant in my way/ Than sway with them in theirs" (II, i, 219-20)? Perhaps we may call him rigid, but do we wish Coriolanus to flatter, or, for the sake of good policy, to control his emotions? Do we wish the one man still faithful to his own integrity to violate it? We feel Coriolanus' pain as he tries to beg votes, as he tries to consent to the people's voice. Are we unhappy with him because he does not succeed? Even recognizing the fact that pride is the source of his integrity, can we condemn the Coriolanus who says of the crowd:

Let them pull all about mine ears, present me
Death on the wheel, or at wild horses heels,
Or pile ten hills on the Tarpeian rock,
That the precipitation might downstretch
Below the beam of sight, yet will I still
Be thus to them.

(III, ii, 1-6)

If we should wish Coriolanus to be less rigid, to compromise and flatter, would we not then wish him to be a clever politician equal to the other leaders of Rome and Corioli? This Coriolanus can never be, and how much more we respect

⁶William Shakespeare, The Tragedy of Coriolanus, ed. G.B. Harrison (New York, Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1948). All subsequent references to Coriolanus are from this edition.

him for it.

Shakespeare offers us various alternatives to Coriolanus' absoluteness. Perhaps we should choose to admire the people of Rome who "every minute...change a mind,/ And call him noble that was now...[their] hate" (I, i, 186-7), and who run from battle and must be driven back to it. Perhaps we should choose Aufidius, the valorous, though scheming, leader of men. Perhaps Volumnia, who wishes her son to bend the truth to please the populace. How much more we admire Coriolanus for being true to himself--for saying what he believes. Even in his pride, Coriolanus does not brag. Like Cordelia, what he is and does speak for themselves. For this reason, he hates relations of his deeds for the sake of his further glory in the hearing. For this reason he disdains to beg for what he has already earned. "Better it is to die, better to starve,/ Than crave the hire which first we do deserve" (II, iii, 120-1).

Characteristically, Coriolanus acts in passion, heedless and headlong in expressing the principles and biases of his upbringing. Yet, if he is truly expressing himself, can we ask him to express himself in bounds someone else sets for him? Coriolanus is a man of action, a soldier, who knows himself well. He does not know his political enemies as well, for, like Cordelia, he plays into his enemies' hands. They have only to call him "traitor" to have him fly into a rage by which they prove him to be one. Similarly Cordelia, in being true to her character, turns Lear over to the two sisters. Absolute fidelity to an ideal is not practical in a world of compromise and fickleness. We may understand

the proud impatience of Coriolanus, but we may also recognize the political irresponsibility of it. In the world of Coriolanus, as well as in the world of Lear, the absolute is not the practical. But need we condemn it for that reason? To serve their functions in their respective plays, Cordelia and Coriolanus must act as they do, must be what they are; ultimately their value will be evident; ultimately they will be successful. Perhaps temporal success is not meant for the absolute. Just as we must admire Cordelia for being absolute, so we cannot echo Volumnia's words to Coriolanus: "You are too absolute,/ Though therein you can never be too noble/ But when extremities speak" (III, ii, 39-41).

Cordelia's plainness cannot admit even speech. One of Coriolanus' chief characteristics is his emotionally charged speeches. Not being a pure symbol but rather a tragic hero and leader, Coriolanus must give voice to his beliefs--even when they are not thought-out beliefs. Cordelia cannot heave her heart into her mouth. Coriolanus is never called on to do this; rather the opposite, he speaks continually from the heart as part of his nature, and therein is he condemned. "His heart's his mouth--/ What his breast forges that his tongue must vent" (III, i, 257-8). Coriolanus characteristically reacts immediately to any situation; he reacts on the basis of his emotions and his old biases--yet on the basis of his integrity. Only at one notable silent moment is his response made on the basis of compassion plus integrity--on the basis of emotion felt for someone outside of himself, plus truth to himself. Correspondence of inner and outer is important to Coriolanus and to King Lear, but not to Cordelia. She is all-reality and no appearance, but this is

again in accordance with her function as a pure symbol.

Neither Cordelia nor Coriolanus utter one word in excess of their actual feeling. We find echoes of Cordelia's words, "I love your Majesty/ According to my bond, nor more nor less" (I, i, 94-5), in Coriolanus' speech to Brutus about the Roman people, "But your people,/ I love them as they weigh" (II, ii, 77-8).

We have said that the same pride which feeds Coriolanus' integrity also feeds his wrath and leads to his downfall. As Lear must learn to recognize and value the plainness of Cordelia, what must Coriolanus learn? Must he learn his mother's policy? What Coriolanus must learn is not so ultimate as that. Perhaps that is the reason why the turning point of the play comes in silence (not in a storm) with Coriolanus' decision to uphold his prime loyalty to his mother and to virtually sacrifice himself for Rome. What Coriolanus must learn is that his revenge, though true to himself, is not worth a city. He must learn to sacrifice his pride at the worthy moment without sacrificing his integrity. He must learn not to be ashamed of compassion.

Yet the only moment when this revelation can really occur in the play is when it does. It can happen at no other time without sacrifice of Coriolanus' integrity with it. For example, as Coriolanus takes on the robe of humility, he can still maintain his truth to himself by tossing insults at the citizens he petitions for votes. "I will not do't,/ Lest I surcease to honor mine own truth,/ And by my body's action teach my mind/ A most inherent baseness" (III, ii, 120-3). At this point were he to flatter the citizens, our

admiration of him would have flown. It is only at the moment when Coriolanus can feel compassion for someone other than himself that he can learn to sacrifice his pride.

"While I remain above the ground you shall/ Hear from me still and never of me aught/ But what is like me formerly" (IV, i, 51-3). Coriolanus' words shortly after his banishment indicate, once again, his consistency of character, for his actions after his banishment are entirely consistent with his previous actions. Coriolanus never professes loyalty to Rome--only to himself and to his mother. Acting on the basis of these two loyalties, Coriolanus can turn traitor first to Rome and then to Corioli without violating his integrity. Turning traitor to Rome, he is merely acting as he feels. "There is irony in the fact that he is banished and started on his way to ruin because his pride keeps him from being false to the truth. One of his heroic aspects is that of a martyr to honesty."⁷ Even in his turning traitor to Corioli--the act which spurs his assassination--Coriolanus is not false to himself, nor is he loyal to Rome. Coriolanus is saved by acting for once primarily on his loyalty to his mother, yet in accordance with his own integrity. Perhaps in his action we have learned that integrity is admirable--though impractical--but self-pride is not worth a city. Sincere feeling for another person means forgetting, at that moment, the self. It is perhaps the most selfless of feelings. We have seen little of what Coriolanus' personal relationships are like. We assume he and his wife have a degree of love but do not communicate well. We know he respects his mother. But neither of these relationships prompts Coriolanus

⁷Farnham, p. 253.

to action at any time except at the moment when he holds his mother's hand in silence, submitting unashamedly to his loyalty to her in true compassion.

O my mother, Mother! Oh!
 You have won a happy victory to Rome,
 But for your son, believe it, oh, believe it,
 Most dangerously you have with him prevailed,
 If not most mortal to him. But let it come.
 (V, iii, 185-9)

This one act, if no other, makes Coriolanus a tragic hero worthy of our empathy. In this one act, we are able to combine our respect of the military hero full of integrity and of the human being full of compassion.

Coriolanus' death at the hands of the conspirators is necessary. We recognize that the city must be spared at the expense of one man's life. Yet we also recognize the fact that this one man is the last example of personal integrity in the world. "It is right that Coriolanus should yield to Volumnia's plea. No man's pride is worth a city, least of all for the sake of gratifying so ignoble a passion as revenge. But we may find little to rejoice at when Rome escapes. Coriolanus is not reconciled to Rome; we are not reconciled to his end, or fully satisfied that any lasting good has come of his sacrifice."⁸ There is some good for Coriolanus; he has learned to extend his deep capacity to feel to another human being; he has learned to act when necessary on a loyalty other than to himself; and all this while retaining his integrity. But his lesson is all "at the cost of his life, and he is greater than those whom he saves. We see nothing to make us hope for better things in either Rome or Corioli,

⁸Wilson, p. 110.

as a result of his loss."⁹

The death of the lonely dragon, the man whose "nature is too noble for the world" (III, i, 255), the god who leads the Volscians "like a thing/ Made by some other deity than nature,/ That shapes man better" (IV, vi, 90-2)--the death of this man somehow does not, for some people, call forth sympathy as does the death of Cordelia or of Lear. Perhaps it is the extreme central focus of the play--fully in accordance with its central character--that aids in leaving them with less of a tragic response. Perhaps it is the nature of the hero--noble, compared to the world in which he exists, yet full of pride, with only one personal touch as a saving grace. Perhaps it is because in our world today, we admire the leader who can appeal to the masses and win their support; we admire the individual who is not too individual and who can sacrifice, for the sake of appearances, his integrity without considering it integrity or sacrifice.

Lear sees that Cordelia is not dead and dies ecstatic. Coriolanus, killed ingloriously and later trod upon by the base Aufidius, is not even mourned sincerely. Now that the deed is done, Aufidius, using the policy Coriolanus hates, can pretend sorrow. Reminding the Volscians and us of Coriolanus' deeds against the city, he says that Coriolanus "shall have a noble memory" (V, vi, 155). It is not because of the manner in which he dies that Coriolanus will, like Cordelia, have a noble memory. It is because of what we have known Coriolanus to be throughout the play. In being what he had to be in order to be true to himself, in achieving what he

⁹ loc. cit.

had to learn because of his flaw, pride, Coriolanus has cemented absolutely in our minds his high stature. He has achieved the ultimate for himself with no loss of his own integrity. His death, as well as his immortality, is inevitable.

Tragedy is that type of drama in which all that we come to admire and love in the course of the play is given eternal life through its temporal ruin. I believe that this feeling of exhilaration at the close of a tragedy is based on the affirmation of man as capable of such qualities. If even one man can be a Coriolanus or a Cordelia or a Lear, we feel there is hope for mankind. Cherishing this one value exemplified in one person, we come to be grateful we are members of mankind, a group which contains at least one individual capable of embodying this value. In so feeling, we come to value our place as men rather than as animals which have no such potential. In Cordelia we have called this value of plainness; in Coriolanus we have called it integrity and compassion. In both we may call it fidelity to an ideal at tragic cost. It would seem as if, in their deaths, they have failed. But in reality, they have achieved immortality through their temporal ruin--the highest success that may be accounted man. That which we have come to value ultimately in the course of the play we know must reach the inevitable end in a world not attuned to ultimates. But tragedy viewed as the temporal ruin of an eternal value guarantees immortality to that value not in spite of, but because of its temporal ruin. Because of their deaths, we come to think of Cordelia and Coriolanus as ~~mere~~ symbols or names for values we would otherwise call plainness and integrity--fidelity to an ideal.

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Shakespeare's Attitude Toward Humanity
as Reflected by Othello

English 490

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Of course, any attempt to make a flat statement concerning the attitudes and philosophy of Shakespeare must necessarily be accompanied by a great deal of conjecture. This fact is made clear when one looks at what has been written about Shakespeare; the opinions which people have concerning him certainly do not have a narrow range, as we shall see in the progress of this paper.

The first big problem involved in analyzing the attitude of Shakespeare is the fact that he isn't around any more. Because he is dead, we can never go to the only real authority (Shakespeare himself) in order to have our opinions verified or denied. What is being said here is that anything conjectured about the man can only be considered as a guess.

Another block to our understanding of the purpose or purposes of Shakespeare is the fact that he wrote his plays some three and a half centuries ago. This automatically puts us at a disadvantage, because we are probably just about as much out of touch with the society and conventional attitudes of that age as he would be if he were able to see our way of life. One reason why the reading of Shakespeare is damaged is the fact that many people who read Shakespeare

have no knowledge at all of the time in which he worked. The average man in the street (assuming that he could be induced to read Shakespeare, and if once induced, to read a whole play) probably could not begin to guess the age of the work. But he probably would be able to tell you that the play is "old," and that many things happened in the course of the action which he did not understand. "They just don't do things that way any more," he might say. This statement can be disagreed with, and the reasons for so disagreeing will be a point of this paper.

However, one must take into consideration the idea that Shakespeare did write in a long-ago period, and he did write in an age which has a great many differences between it and our own age. It is to be assumed that an author can never completely divorce himself from the attitudes of his age, and there will be no exception to this in talking about Shakespeare, as we shall see later.

Because he did reflect somewhat the feelings of the period in which he was writing, it is necessary to investigate some of these attitudes in order to give a better guess as to what he was attempting to do when he wrote. And when we do begin looking into the age of Shakespeare, we will not find our task becoming any easier. The Elizabethan age is a complex period, and because it is so complex, there is great difficulty in picking out what Shakespeare felt to be the important points of the time.

The Elizabethan period was a time of great upheaval so far as ideas were concerned. England was beginning to come under the effect of the new rationalistic and scientific attitudes that the scientific segment of society had been following. The new investigations were bringing in new ideas about the structure of the universe and the relationship of man to himself and to the world. "There is scepticism in Shakespeare's age, and there is constant exploration of traditional values"¹ The word "scepticism" here would necessarily have to be considered a key word. The use of the term brings to mind the synonym "doubt," and this could be considered one of the important aspects of Elizabethan thought. Any time that doubt is present, the element of challenge is also present, necessarily so because doubt connotes the idea that some new idea has come along to do battle with an older, more conventional idea.

In the Elizabethan period one of the biggest doubts cast on the scene was caused by the new scientific investigations. Until that time, the church and the general public had been willing to accept the idea that the earth was at the center of the universe. This concept kept things fairly tidy for the men of religion, because a literal interpretation of the Bible would lead one to believe that God had constructed the universe with the earth at the center. Man was the child of God, created in God's image, and placed on

¹Irving Ribner, Patterns in Shakespearian Tragedy (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1960), p. 7.

the earth to do God's work. Man was to be considered the center of God's attention, and the earth was the sphere on which this creation operated for better or for worse. There was no mention in the Scriptures of any other creation so important as man, and no mention of any planet which could be considered as equal to the earth. The natural assumption was therefore to feel that the earth was the center of all things.

Of course, the interest in astronomy and the scientific disciplines at this time was soon to disrupt these theories--theories which man had been following for centuries. But in viewing this change in attitude on the part of the Elizabethans, we are hindered once more in the fact that we are looking back on them and not living among them. We can gather scraps of evidence and put them together and try to describe the age, but once more we are dealing only with conjecture. All that we can do in reconstructing the Elizabethan age is to read all that is available about the period, to investigate the works written in the period itself, and then to judge for ourselves what the Elizabethans thought about such matters. We certainly cannot make any simple generalization about the time, because it is not an age which lends itself to simplification. The best thing here perhaps would be to admit the complexity of the time and then to express those things which we judge to be most important in giving the period this complex nature. Certainly the philosophical and scientific debate concerning the nature of the

universe in itself would cause us to judge the period as anything but simple.

But in dealing with our ideas as to the concept of the Elizabethan time as complex, we still have the problem of being removed so far from the time so as to be something less than good judges of the period. An Elizabethan, if he were to appear today, may very well tell us that he does not feel his time to as tangled as we make it. It may be our interpretation of evidence which causes complexity, and not the true nature of the age.

It would be a mistake to assume that belief in rational order was challenged in the early seventeenth century as fundamentalist belief in the Bible was challenged by Darwinian theory in the Victorian age ... even Bacon admitted, nay insisted, that through a study of the universe man discovers the regularity of natural causes which bears witness to a divine plan. In the seventeenth century the Elizabethan world view slowly defaulted to the scientific because of its seeming sterility, because it offered ancient moral and metaphysical formulas to an age eager for empirical and utilitarian knowledge.²

But even if one plays down as much as possible the conflict between old and new ideas in the Elizabethan age, the conflict still remains as one of the central issues of the time. Even if the new scientific findings would have had ramifications only to the world of science, they would have to be considered important in the history of world affairs because of the findings themselves. Also of importance here is the already mentioned fact that the new thought

²Robert Ornstein, The Moral Vision of Jacobean Tragedy (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1960), p. 4.

also affected the outlook of many concerning the religious doctrines which they had been accepting. If the world and the universe were actually different from the concepts which religion had been following, then what actually was the position of man and earth in the universe? "...caught between old and new ways of determining the realities upon which moral values rest ..."3, the Elizabethans certainly had their doubts about what the world was really all about.

One of the biggest problems, therefore, in dealing with the Elizabethan age in general and the writings of Shakespeare in particular, is in deciding just what the predominating view was in considering man and the universe. It could be said here that perhaps it is the controversy itself and not any particular view which really sets the tone for the period. Because the old views are being contested, propositions concerning the role and responsibility of mankind are being offered in keeping with the new trends in thought. Taking man and earth out of the center of the universe probably caused some people in that period a great deal of concern. Before, one knew (or thought he knew) the answers to the basic questions about life. But during the Elizabethan time, man was forced to admit that there may very well be other explanations about existence.

Not all of the Elizabethans would have been troubled, however. The fact that man had made such great discoveries about such basic matters probably caused many to believe that

3Ornstein, op. cit., p. 6.

man was more important in the scheme of things than many had thought before. Man had been shown to have the capability of using the mind in a rational way to discover things which would have been held impossible with reference to dogmas of the pre-Elizabethan period. One can see the effects of the rationalistic concept in the writings of Spencer and others; although the possibility remained in the minds of many of the Elizabethans that God and predetermination still ruled the world, there were also those who began to feel that man may well have had the power to shape his own destiny. He could use his mind to create things of his own.

But this new rationality also created problems. If one were to accept the idea that the earth was not at the center of the universe, and yet hold to the idea that God and not man determined the nature of everything, then some would say that if part of the religious viewpoint were false then the rest of the doctrine could also be untrue. But if one were to say that man did have these rational powers, then the full responsibility for the evil in the world would have to be given to man along with the credit for whatever advancements that man had made.

This is one of the core problems in the reading of the Othello play as well as in Elizabethan thinking. If man was responsible for his own actions, then was one to be optimistic or pessimistic about the prospects concerning what man might do with the world? Not all Elizabethans felt the same way; some were glad about the new rationale, and some (Donne, for

instance) were more uncertain than ever about what the world was all about.

One strain of thought concerning this problem is the chain-of-being theory as expressed and explained by Lily Campbell. This will be treated more fully later, but for now a short explanation of this theory will be sufficient to show one more pessimistic line of thought. In essence, the chain-of-being idea includes the concept of everything in the universe having a place in creation. These places were assigned by God in a certain order, or chain, with some things being placed on a higher level than others. Thus we find according to this theory, God, followed on decreasingly lower levels by angels, man, animals, and inanimate objects. As stated, this chain was in a certain assigned order, and each being within this chain was to stay within the bounds of his "link." By having faith in God, man could hope someday to reach the level of the angels. As we will see, man also was thought to have the potential to go to a lower level if he did not keep his faith in God. Since the new rationalistic philosophies did to some extent cast doubt on "holy" matters, those who valued these matters as highly important would naturally take a rather dim view of the theories reflected in these new findings.

So, the substance of the problem here so far as interpreting Shakespeare's philosophy is concerned is whether or not Shakespeare recognized the capability of mankind. Perhaps he did not. Perhaps the message in Othello is that

mankind cannot fully take care of himself; but one of the objects of this paper is to show that Shakespeare was calling for rationality and responsibility in this play, not railing against it.

Getting down to the problems concerned particularly with drama in general and tragedy in particular, one of the biggest obstacles here to any interpretation of Shakespeare is the fact that we are trying to draw a philosophy from a dramatic presentation.

One factor here is the language used in many plays of the period. Some people praise Shakespeare for the full, forceful speech which he used. There is complaint often put forth by others which implies that one can become so entangled in the mass of words and their complexity so as to lose sight of the overall point of the play.

But, as stated, Shakespeare was only one playwright out of many who used a rather high level of language.

To understand the Elizabethan drama aright we need to see it against the background of rhetoric that is one of the distinctive features of the age. To the Renaissance rhetoric was a discipline, a tool, the expression of an ideal. It formed the central core of humanistic education, it embodied an ideal of the dignity of man. For speech, as the manifestation of reason, was taken as the measure of man's difference from the beasts.... Speech is the great civilizing force.... Speech ...is the measure of man's power.⁴

This statement not only explains the use of language in Elizabethan drama; if we accept the statement as true, the

⁴Madeleine Doran, Endeavors of Art (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1960), p. 4.

language used in Shakespeare's plays was assembled by a man who felt that man could express himself in a learned, rational way.

Also connected with the language of the play is another problem involved in interpreting dramatic literature. We must keep in mind that Shakespeare wrote his works for the most part as dramatic presentations. This is not to say that a reading of a play would necessarily be less informative than seeing the play performed. Probably many of the Elizabethan writers who are considered great, are great because their plays hold that certain quality of greatness whether they be read or seen on the stage. Shakespeare is no exception here.

However, we still are in the realm of drama, and because we are we must always keep in mind the fact that there are certain conventions to a dramatic presentation. These conventions can and do play a great part in shaping the story which the drama tells. We will look more at these conventions when the Cinthio source of Othello is discussed, but these conventions do affect an interpretation of dramatic writings.

The same thing holds true for the particular genre of drama with which we are dealing--that of tragedy. Audiences of the period were great followers of the tragic drama, and they expected certain things to present in any tragedy--murder, blood, emotion, etc. Also, "Elizabethan audiences expected good men and good women to fall before strong

temptation; they expected them to be carried headlong into crime, and not because Aristotle had propounded a theory of 'tragic flaw,' but because they knew that temptation to sin was the way Satan had for encompassing the ruin of mortal man."⁵ The audiences enjoyed great scenes of power and emotion, and Shakespeare gave them what they were paying for just as most of the other dramatists of the time did.

But within the framework of what was conventional, Shakespeare managed to build plays of the tragic type which have never lost their appeal to audiences. He was somewhat of a success in his own time, so the people must have liked him then. But why does Shakespeare have such a lasting quality?

We cannot expect that Shakespeare's drama will conform to a pattern derived from a study of his lesser contemporaries. They abide our scholarly questions because they were absorbed in typical and peripheral issues and because they used the stage for extraliterary purposes--to confute the politician or the naturalist. Shakespeare escapes the tyranny of scholarly exegesis because he grasped always the permanent significance of contemporary problems and because his vision of life was so comprehensive that his art never lost its relevance to the human situation.... Because he sees the world feelingly, Shakespeare performs the immemorial service of the artist to society: he humanizes the categorical imperatives which the stern didactist offers as the sum of ethical truth....⁶

The word "comprehensive" in the above quotation is yet another indication of a problem concerning an interpretation

⁵Doran, op. cit., p. 238.

⁶Ornstein, op. cit., p. 222.

of Shakespeare. In the course of his writing Shakespeare shows us such a vast cross-section of humanity, in a recognizable and believable way, that we cannot help but be amazed at the way in which he manages to catch the lasting truth about people for all generations to read and to agree with. Probably no one play can show all the characteristics about humanity that Shakespeare managed to capture in the course of his writings, so in the study of any one or two plays we have at hand only certain characteristics of humanity expressed. This necessarily limits any attempt at an overall view of Shakespeare's philosophy, and any statement concerning that philosophy has to be tempered by reference to a particular play or plays.

Taking one particular play and basing an entire statement about Shakespeare's whole approach on it would indeed be wrong, so that one would have the problem too of choosing a play or plays which would back up whatever set of characteristics that a person was choosing as most important in terms of the Shakespearean view. This does not necessarily need to be termed as a problem, however, because as we said before, Shakespeare is so comprehensive in his treatment of humanity when one looks at his works as a whole. "...because his view of life was deceptively neutral, his influence did not channel tragedy into as restricted a mode as that which Jonson established...."⁷

⁷Ornstein, op. cit., p. 223.

Our problems in approaching Shakespeare are not yet ended simply by choosing tragedy as a genre and a particular play as a reference as we deal with Shakespearean philosophy. In the course of writing his tragedies, we have said that Shakespeare generally followed the conventions of the period (although he was not necessarily limited by them). Thus we can see Shakespeare following the De Casibus traditions and approaches in some of his tragedies, while he was Italianate in his treatment of others. Because of the difference in approach to these two different types of tragedy, it is necessary to determine in which category a particular play belongs before making any conjecture about the philosophy reflected by the play.

This last condition is particularly the case when one is considering what Shakespeare's attitude toward humanity may have been. If one is dealing in the De Casibus form, the play or plays being studied can generally be depended upon to give a rather clear picture of the motives of the central character or characters. This is true because the De Casibus form of tragedy has ambition as the force which drives the character or characters along. Because of this, one gets a fairly good insight into at least some of the inner aspects of the character of the central figure or figures. Through an analyzation of these drives and motives together with the conduct of the character, one may come to a fairly defensible position as to the consistency of the character and the rationality which he shows in the course of the play.

In dealing with the Italianate form, the problem of character analyzation in most cases is compounded by the fact that revenge is playing the part in the Italianate form that ambition did in the De Casibus form. We still have a strong motivating force in the Italianate, but it does not lie within the central figures being affected by the revenge, but rather in figures outside them which affect them because of a desire for revenge. Thus the character analysis of particular figures in Italianate tragedy can be a pretty faulty matter, because one does not have the thorough view of at least one character which is present in the De Casibus form.

Othello may be an exception to this idea of the Italianate form lacking good inner character expression, and to make some of the assumptions about Shakespeare's attitude toward humanity in the course of this paper, it must be admitted that Shakespeare does show more insight as to individual character construction than some of the other famous Italianate plays. But we will have to consider the Othello work basically as Italianate.

The Spanish Tragedy is primarily a lively play of intrigue ... in which there is a love affair (as well as the motive of ambition) and in which revenge within revenge cleverly managed furnishes exciting action.... The major Jacobean plays in this line are ... Othello ... Webster's White Devil and Duchess of Malfi ... and 'Tis Pity She's a Whore. ...all these plays belong in this same loosely conceived class because they are all tragedies of intrigue motivated by passion, they nearly all have a romantic interest, and when they achieve tragic

irony it is of a different sort from that of the tragedy of ambition centered about the theme of power.⁸

As already said, there could be a debate about the classification of this particular play, but one could say that the play Othello is basically Italianate with some of the character development of the De Casibus. This leaves us with a rather nice situation when dealing with the humanitarian view which Shakespeare probably held, because we then can feel that we have a combination of character depth (to a certain extent) and a picture of the relationship between people which arises out of feelings of revenge. By assuming this to be the condition of the Othello play, one could then say that Othello may very well be a key play in any development of a theory concerning Shakespearean philosophy. It may be so for the reason that it does have this combination of character depth and description of human relationships.

To summarize the ironic implications of these two major lines of tragedy we have been considering: The special irony in the tragedy of ambition, where it is fully realized, is in the final helplessness of man, in spite of his godlike aspirations for power, before an inexorable universe. The special irony in the tragedy of sex is in man's betrayal by his passions to a world of evil. A supreme realization of this irony is in Othello, where a man rich in all that we most admire in character--emotional depth, integrity, idealism, frankness, and generosity--is led by his very largeness into self-betrayal by the basest of passions, and led by a man who is the epitome of meanness, cynicism, malice, and intelligence directed toward evil ends.⁹

⁸Doran, op. cit., p. 130-1.

⁹Doran, op. cit., p. 142.

As shown by the above quotation, Doran does admit the presence of both Italianate and De Casibus characteristics in the Othello play, as well as in other plays of that particular period. This may very well be a primary reason why those plays which fit into this combination of categories are also plays which are considered by many to be among the greatest pieces of drama created in that period or in any period. Human action, revenge, and depth of character together form a line of thought which reaches deeply into the individual and group situations of life on this earth. Because of this combination we may have in these plays pictures of life which hold their significance for all ages, and not just for the Elizabethans.

With the conditions of the period and of the genre in mind, we can now look at the Cinthio source of the Othello work. In the course of this analysis, we may be able to find clues as to the way in which Shakespeare approached the writing of a tragedy, as well as perhaps being able to judge from the changes made in the Cinthio story just what Shakespeare had in mind so far as the human condition is concerned.

In the first place, the whole of the Cinthio story centers around the moral of the tale. Cinthio shows us an interracial marriage and the fact that it will not work.

It handled a particular problem of immediate contemporary interest, the situation created by the marriage of a man and a woman who are widely different in race, in tradition, and in customary way of life. Though Shakespeare probably picked the story up because of the rich promise in it of

passionate dramatic interest, his imaginative insight, once excited, pierced beneath the plot and its superficial circumstance to explore whatever essential dramatic substance might lie beneath. His genius sought to discover how far the composite stuff of the story shaped itself into a coherent human world.¹⁰

We see from this that Shakespeare did take the story for the core interest which it had, but in creating a tragedy, he also necessarily needed to include dramatic tension and a believable presentation of a love affair.

The love affair itself is something that Shakespeare changed greatly from the story by Cinthio. Cinthio was just saying that an interracial marriage would not work; he did not need to elaborate on the love relationship between Othello and Desdemona. In fact, for what he was doing, the love could have detracted greatly from the message. Shakespeare shows us two totally different people involved in an idealized sort of love. This love is necessarily of an idealized sort both because they had not been acquainted long and because they had nothing in common even if they had been together. Also lending to the idea that the love is necessarily ideal are the comments by various people in the play concerning the fact that the marriage is unnatural. One typical speech in the play expressing this idea includes this sentence by Barbantio: "It is a judgment maim'd and most imperfect That will confess perfection so could err Against all rules of nature." (1, iii, 96)¹¹ One cannot help but see that

¹⁰H. B. Charlton, Shakespearian Tragedy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), p. 115.

¹¹Charlton, op. cit., p. 116.

this love is not of the common sort; it must of necessity be somewhat ideal because it simply cannot have a practical side. This is done not only because it was the original condition of the Cinthio story; it also provides an emotional appeal to the audience because of its ideal beauty. It also gives Iago a wonderful way in which to convince Othello that Desdemona has been untrue. After all, they fully realize that each knows their love to be somewhat different.

"Shakespeare felt the need of more substantial information: for the quality of the bond between them was vital to his imaginative apprehension of the facts."¹²

Also, Cinthio gives Othello and Desdemona some time together before the trip to Cyprus; Shakespeare does not do this. He does not allow the idealized love he has given the two to materialize into a more practical relationship. In keeping with the particular kind of tragic emotion which he is evoking, the love must necessarily remain of an ideal nature; to give it a practical grounds would destroy part of the plausibility of the ease with which Iago convinces Othello of the unfaithfulness of Desdemona. Another good reason for not allowing time to elapse while this practical relationship builds is that this period would not be in keeping with the passion, emotion, and tension of the rest of the play. To put in scenes which portray "the mellowing" of the two would destroy the continuity of the tragedy.

¹²Charlton, op. cit., p. 125-6.

To inject a statement or two on the part of a certain character or characters would not be effective either; the audience would still retain the memory of a couple with nothing in common other than the almost magical love which they possess together. Shakespeare is paying close enough attention to the tragic game here to allow this air of practicality to come in.

Shakespeare also changed the Cinthio source in that he gives Othello and Desdemona a noble sort of character, whereas Cinthio did not. Again, Cinthio was directing his story toward a moral concerning mixed marriage; allowing the couple nobility would inject a question into the reader's mind which would involve why the marriage should fail if those involved were so good. Shakespeare gives the two nobility because their showing this quality is in keeping with their idealized love; without the willingness to accept each other and to show great strength in marrying despite all the objections--in other words, to be noble--they could not reasonably have come together. But the point is that they do show this nobility in Shakespeare's Othello, and the fact that they do not only makes the love of the two all the more believable; it also heightens the feelings of the audience as they watch with pity the fall of Othello from nobility and the murder of Desdemona. They see how a great man can lose all control of himself.

In speaking about the nobility of Shakespeare's Othello and the change this makes from Cinthio's source, one must

also point out the fact that Cinthio has Othello plan carefully the murder of Desdemona. Shakespeare's Othello is not this sort of man; he is a soldier, honorable, and noble. He loves his wife and is driven to distraction by the stories about her. He remains too much in love to plan for any period the murder which he finally commits. He also does not reflect the coolness and rationality in the play necessary to plan such a thing. He is hot-blooded and unfamiliar with the world he finds himself in. He never shows the mental processes necessary to match the cunning of Iago in planning the murder of Desdemona.

Also to be mentioned is the fact that, in the Cinthio story, Iago is after Desdemona from the beginning. Shakespeare does not do this, although it may have been able to be worked out somehow. But Iago seems to show a higher plane of revenge than the mere chasing of another man's wife. Iago was married, although at that time the condition of marriage did not seem to hinder anyone from finding new relationships if they so decided. It is probable that Shakespeare saw the dramatic power of starting Iago out with the idea that he deserved the promotion instead of Cassio (which he did), and that he suspected his wife of having an affair with Othello. Then he could allow the power and skill of the maneuverable Iago to grow visibly at the same time that Othello was growing in his doubts about the faithfulness of his wife. At one crucial point in the development of this relationship, Iago finds the handkerchief. In the Cinthio story, Iago

plans the stealing, but Shakespeare allows this episode as an accident, probably to accentuate dramatically the pettiness of what it takes to convince Othello of the accused unfaithfulness.

So, in regarding the play with reference to the source, we can see that Shakespeare took a story with obvious promise and made a drama out of it. He used the differences between the lovers to create tension and plausibility. He showed a certain amount of inner character development, and he managed to take jealousy and revenge and weave them in with love and nobility to create a drama with wide appeal.

But perhaps it is because Shakespeare managed to bring in some characteristics of both the De Casibus and Italianate types that opinions are so diversified concerning the meaning of the play and the way in which the play must be approached.

A. C. Bradley is one critic who evidently leans heavily to attention of the De Casibus quality of the play. Taking the position that Shakespeare was building integrated personalities in the play, Bradley proceeds to analyze the characters as though they were real people. He tries to explain away the actions of the characters by talking of their backgrounds and their total emotional makeup. In the case of Othello himself, "What other Shakespearean hero has Othello's carefully defined exotic past and racial background? When we ignore this particularity ... we only distort. That is to say, the jealous Moor would seem to us as fatuous as Roderigo were it not for the unique circumstances of his

personality, his race, his innocence of Venetian society, and his belated discovery of a love so rare and miraculous as to be outside the ordinary realm of belief."¹³

These things must be considered, and when Bradley says something like "Othello was trustful and thorough in his trust. He put entire confidence in the honesty of Iago, who had ... been his companion in arms.... This confidence was misplaced, but it was no sign of stupidity in Othello ... his opinion of Iago was the opinion of practically everyone ... and that opinion was that Iago was ... 'honest'...."¹⁴ This sort of statement certainly can be accepted; the trust which Othello had in Iago is the core action of the play. Going back to the fact that Shakespeare gives the lovers no time together to build a practical relationship, Bradley also recognizes the dramatic necessity of not allowing them to be together. The convincing of Othello is much more logical this way. "Iago does not bring these warnings to a husband who has lived with his wife for ... years ... he was newly married."¹⁵

Hardin Craig defends the De Casibus analytic approach to characters when he says, "...with ...a few corrections, Elizabethan psychology works well to this day. It is called

¹³Ornstein, op. cit., p. 228.

¹⁴A. C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1963), p. 157.

¹⁵Bradley, op. cit., p. 157.

faculty psychology.... Human beings still confront the same issues and still react in human ways.... Shakespeare ...knew humanity.... Men and women in the world do act pretty much as Shakespeare's men and women act.... Sudden jealousy ... does occur; and a man may strangle his wife in temporary madness."¹⁶

But the key to this sort of approach is the admittance that Shakespeare did have a view of the universal traits of humanity. He was able to take a plausible situation and put people into it whom we could accept as believable. He could make the actions of these characters seem very real, and he could evoke the tragic emotions with them. But he was not building individual personalities that were to be accepted as totally real.

From time to time and from place to place the drama varies its position on a scale between the two extremes of absolute conventionalism and absolute naturalism.... The position of Shakespeare is somewhere between these two practical extremes. His characters are not merely personified abstractions, but, on the other hand, they are not precisely like real people.... Conventionalism of this kind is so obvious, however, that nineteenth-century critics seem not to have reflected upon its implications; it was usual for them to treat Shakespeare as Ibsen is more appropriately treated: they fastened upon his characters as if they were historical personages, examining their psychology, weighing motives, allotting praise or blame to individual speeches and actions--even attempting to explain problems of character by imaginatively constructing the early life of Hamlet or Othello.¹⁷

¹⁶Hardin Craig, An Interpretation of Shakespeare (New York: The Citadel Press, 1948), p. 15.

¹⁷S. L. Bethell, Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1944), p. 3.

The point here is that people like Bradley can go too far in character analysis. It can carry such critics into worthless conjecture. Also, the psychological approach can lead one to determinism, which would destroy the power of the human will to direct itself. Speaking of Shakespeare, Craig says,

He found elements of tragedy in weakness, inefficiency, and defect of character as well as in positive tragic guilt. He made full use of the tragic backgrounds of life which appear in accident, untoward birth, and inescapable fate; but he never abandoned his faith in the human will, which is always allowed to play a part. He frequently lifts his defeated characters to a point where they may be said to defeat defeat. In his later works, as in Othello, he saw deeply into human nature and in terms of the psychology of his time presented terrific struggles of man against his own passions.¹⁸

One could say then that Shakespeare allows too much of the power of the will to be expressed in Othello for one to be able to accept the determinism which Bradley describes in the opening chapters of his book and in his treatment of the Othello play itself.

Turning to Ribner, it is interesting to note what Charleton says about Othello's regard for the metaphysical. "Feeling life as a thing to be lived rather than as a succession of experiences to be measured philosophically, his sense of values is built on the worth of those moral qualities which inspire fitting and effective action, and hardly at all on the abstract compatibility of articles comprised in a metaphysical or religious creed."¹⁹ This may

¹⁸Craig, op. cit., p. 195.

¹⁹Charlton, op. cit., p. 119.

well sound much more like the Shakespeare who looks for universal human traits and who gives ideas about the truth concerning mankind. One can see little in the play which really can be called Christian; heaven and prayer and damnation are mentioned, but they are mentioned in a way other than that of people strongly conscious of the Christian way of life. Human morals are put to the test in Othello; it is a match between men and another man, not between man and God. Ribner points this up when he says,

The historical critics who succeeded Bradley have taught us that drama is not life; it is an artificial construct controlled by the restrictions of the stage-audience relation, and in order for it to exist at all it must violate physical reality. A dramatic character is governed by the over-all design and purpose of the total play to which he contributes. ... There is a wide gulf between the naturalist drama of the nineteenth century and the conventional drama of the Elizabethans, with its continuity from the Middle Ages and its symbolic content. Drama is built out of individual character and event; the tragic hero must be a free, conscious agent, capable of deliberate moral choice. But the individual also may be a symbol of mankind, and the problem he faces may be that which all men face. Shakespeare's interest is in mankind more than in individuals. He endows his characters with a convincing illusion of reality, but through them he explores issues of wider significance than the psychological problems of any individual personality.²⁰

This can certainly be agreed with, and throughout the course of this paper, the attempt has been made to show that Shakespeare had a purpose in writing. His universality stems in part from the fact that he recognized the need to have a broad appeal built into his works, but he also had a sense which drove him beyond the realm of the ordinary dramatist.

²⁰Ribner, op. cit., p. 4.

He was also dealing with basic truth. "Every one of the tragedies is a separate attempt, if not finally to answer the great problem of man's relation to the forces of evil in the world, at least to pose it in such a way that new facets may be freshly illuminated in terms of human experience."²¹ It is easy to see from statements such as these how Ribner could become so involved in the Christian ethics in a play like Othello.

Lily Campbell, as was mentioned before, bases her analysis of human behavior, as expressed by plays of the Elizabethan period, on the chain-of-being theory. She says that passion has caused man to lose the position he once held in the chain. Passion blocks the intellect of man, dominates it, and causes man to act more as an animal than as a rational being. She calls Othello a good example of a play in which passion comes in the way of a man's more rational feelings. "If Othello had known the signs of the passions ... he could not have been deceived.... Othello was not able rightly to distinguish the signs of passion...."²²

The Campbell book, of course, commented against the determinism of Bradley. In the course of her comments, she states that the world as portrayed by Shakespeare was not governed by the magical force of Bradley's description. Both Campbell and Ribner give man some choice in the manner

²¹Ribner, op. cit., p. 8.

²²Lily B. Campbell, Shakespeare's Tragic Heros (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1963), p. 169.

in which he is to run his life. Both hint and state that behind the choice of what man does should lie the conscious recognition of what is morally right and morally wrong. Perhaps there is some personal objection here in this particular paper to construe the word "morally" to have some sort of religious connotation. Certainly the basic doctrines of Christianity are based on common sense, such as the ten commandments, brotherhood, love, etc. Shakespeare may well have had Christian ethics in mind as the ethic by which man should guide his life, but in the Othello play it seems that man is placed at the center of the action. It is the responsibility of man to make the right choice by which to live life. In the course of the play Shakespeare has shown us a love built on opposition. The love survived the initial opposition because the opposition was open and honestly stated to those affected by the opposition. But when hidden revenge on the part of a trusted companion of one of the two lovers comes into the picture, Othello is put to the test and he fails it. Here Shakespeare is only pointing out that the problems of life are not always clear and open; many times we do not understand the nature of that which we are up against. But just as Othello needed to investigate further before he acted, Shakespeare is calling on all mankind to be rational and moderate before judging a situation. He delivers this message within the scope of the conventions of the Elizabethan stage, but even though he is "limited" by this, the fact that he was such a great dramatist and had such a wide appeal makes

him probably one of the greatest moral philosophers of all time. Perhaps he is not an optimist concerning the total human situation, but in the course of the play Othello he has certainly called for rationality on the part of mankind. From this it is possible to say that man has the capability to act in that manner. Certainly man does not always act rationally; the Elizabethan period was as aware of this as it was of the potential for rationality. Two quotations from Spencer will help to bear this out. "In the periods when great tragedy has been written, two things seem to have been necessary: first, a conventional pattern of belief and behavior, and second, an acute consciousness of how that conventional pattern can be violated.... It was because Shakespeare ... was able to see individual experience in relation to the all-inclusive conflict produced by this violation, that his great tragedies ... give us so profound a picture of the nature of man."²³ With reference to Othello, he says, "It is solely because Othello is the kind of man he is that a man like Iago can destroy him. Consequently ... we do not find in it ... much use of the political or cosmological hierarchies. It is more a close and intensive study of man himself, and of the terrible contrast between the good and evil, the nobility and the bestiality, of which he is composed."²⁴

²³Theodore Spencer, Shakespeare and the Nature of Man (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1961), p. 50.

²⁴Spencer, op. cit., p. 124.

Judging from the Othello play, Shakespeare may not be an optimist so far as man is concerned, but he knows the stuff from which man is made and sees in it something of value among all the bad. He does not idealize man, but he does not totally condemn him either.

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The Tragic Elements of Bussy D'Ambois.

by

Sherron McFalls
May 22, 1964

The Tragic Elements of Bussy D'Ambois.

Most problems are best solved by going directly to the source of the difficulty. In determining the nature of George Chapman's tragedy Bussy D'Ambois I will first try to measure it according to genre. The source of its tragic genre is Boccaccio's De Casibus. My means of understanding what Boccaccio had done was to read the discussion of his work in Willard Farnham's The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy.¹ After determining the extent to which Bussy is a De Casibus tragedy, it will be necessary to determine what other tragic elements are involved in the play and to determine Chapman's degree of success in producing the type of tragedy he attempted to create.

Farnham feels that most of Boccaccio's tales in his De Casibus were of a similar type and that the majority of them fail to achieve a truly tragic effect. In this type of story man is found to be prey to a completely irrational force which could be called fortune, chance, the stars, etc. This force resulted from the disobedience of Adam and Eve. It is a force of God and yet is com-

¹New York: Barnes and Noble, 1963.

pletely unlike the forces he originally created and is in contrast to the way he rules in heaven. The only way to avoid the ravages of this cruelly irrational force is to deny the world and all its ways. Man accepts this type of fortune from the first moment he enters the active life of the world around him. The alternative, obviously, is a cloistered life. In the majority of Boccaccio's tales then the hero, a truly good man, chooses to be active in the world, and merely because of this choice he seals his ultimate downfall. These men are not only good but great so that they rise high before falling.

Thus far I think Bussy would fit without conflict into the De Casibus concept. Farnham, however, feels that this type of tragedy advocating a contempt of the world is incompatible with a truly tragic response. To understand why it is necessary to examine the type of tragedy Farnham feels Boccaccio occasionally achieves in his tales.

This higher type of tragedy, according to Farnham, requires an affirmation of the value of life in this world, a reaching out for higher things, and the bonding of the character with the action of the plot. First of all to maintain the reader's deepest concern there must be a

contradiction of the life in the world,
for the sake of the world.

centering on life in this world, for this world's struggles are of immediate and tangible interest to most readers. Secondly the boundless ambition of mankind was particularly thrilling to the Elizabethans. Thirdly there is the realization that a hero will be more inspiring if the audience realizes that his actions have an effect on his fate. For a hero to make a mistake also makes it possible for the reader or viewer to identify in a way not possible with the all good man at the mercy of fate. At the end of the De Casibus Boccaccio seems to endorse the view of the world presented in this second type of tragic story for he counsels men to seek honor and fame in worldly affairs--but to seek wisely and virtuously. I would like to quote Farnham in summary of what he thinks is the highest type of tragedy achieved in the De Casibus.

Thus Boccaccio momentarily sees tragedy in the grand manner: for a tragic character there are lines of cause and effect having to do with individual choice and its lawful result, which can be plotted and brought to the light of our understanding; mingling with these and ~~stretching dimly~~ beyond them are lines of destiny, which we may refer to as fortune, the stars, divine purpose, or some other ~~of~~ fateful forces, but which are to us inexplicable.²

²Farnham, pp.127-28.

Three of the critics who deal with the play in differing ways all seem to agree with what I felt was the way in which Bussy does not have the elements called for in Farnham's interpretation of De Casibus: that is, that in Bussy there are not "lines of cause and effect having to do with individual choice and its lawful result." Bussy doesn't make a choice except to be active in the world as in Boccaccio's other type of tragedy.

Willard Farnham in his Shakespeare's Tragic Frontier³ sees Bussy as natural man raised to an ultimate degree. He sees Bussy's downfall as due to his virtue, which is also a flaw. It is a flaw in that it is too great for the corrupt world in which it finds itself. Farnham does feel that Chapman attempts to show that Bussy's natural virtue can look ludicrous in a corrupt world, but I feel this appearance is felt by the reader rather than intended by Chapman. Farnham feels then that Bussy falls because he is too good for the world in which he finds himself not because he has made a choice. Farnham also feels that Chapman intends Bussy as an example to the world of a higher type of morality than that they practice.

³Berkeley: University of California Press, 1950.

Madeline Doran in her Endeavors of Art⁴ interprets Bussy as motivated by an intense desire to be himself. She too feels that Bussy is an essentially passive character who never makes a choice which determines his fate. Fortune in the play, she feels, is represented as an air of fatality surrounding the characters. Bussy's downfall comes because his desire to be himself cannot be encompassed in the scope of a corrupt world.

Bussy and Byron never recognize that their desire for an uninhibited exercise of "greatness" is inevitably a thrust at power. Since it is not easy to reconcile this absolute freedom to be great with any system of law and government, much less the authoritarian one Chapman himself allows, his heroes are doomed to bafflement and noble protest.⁵

Eugene Waith, as the title of his book⁶ suggests, considers Bussy a Herculean hero, a paragon of self control and solidity whose inner worth is reflected in his outer strength, particularly in the manner in which he meets his death. The stoic philosophy advocated involvement in the world, and perhaps it is again

⁴Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1954.

⁵Doran, p. 122.

⁶Eugene Waith, The Herculean Hero in Marlowe, Chapman, Shakespeare, and Dryden (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962).

the world he finds himself in that causes Bussy's downfall. Like Hercules he submits to his fate, accepting his limitations. "The World of court intrigue which Bussy opposes, yet the only world in which he can act, is his fate."⁷ This viewpoint again shows the whole world against Bussy, not Bussy choosing a course of action with ensuing consequences.

But, it seems to me, ~~that~~ it is only fair to judge Bussy D'Ambois for itself. I have been continually surprised at the variety of interpretations of the play which I have read and even more surprised at how validly these interpretations can be supported by the play. When we consider Farnham's interpretation of Bussy as natural man and then read the following passage:

Cousin Guise, I wonder
Your honored disposition brooks so ill
A man so good, that only would uphold
Man in his native noblesse, from whose fall
All our dissensions rise; that in himself
(Without the outward patches of our frailty,
Riches and honor) knows he comprehends
Worth with the greatest. Kings had never borne
Such boundless empire over other men,
Had all maintained the spirit and state of D'Ambois;⁸

we feel convinced that surely Chapman intended Bussy to be looked upon as a natural man. But little dispute

⁷Waith, p.110.

⁸George Chapman, Bussy D'Ambois in Elizabethan and Stuart Plays, ed. Charles Baskervill, Virgil Heltzel, Arthur Nethercot (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1963), III.ii. 87-97.

can arise against Doran's theory that Bussy tries intensely to be himself. Only a few lines from the passage describing Bussy as natural man we find Bussy speaking of Guise, "His greatness is the people's; Mine's mine own." (III.ii.75). And what doubt can arise of Bussy's intended comparison to Hercules? He faces death as he is pictured as facing life, without fear, with complete composure.

To define Chapman's tragic intent, I feel, we must begin by looking for a multiple intent. In fact, in order to include the many elements in Bussy and at the same time risk sounding ridiculous I would have to classify Bussy as a multiple, semi-successful philosophical tragedy. In other words I think that Chapman tries to include too complete a picture of life's tragic elements.

For example philosophical and psychological insight are in the play amazingly complex. The subtle comments of Monsieur on Bussy's character illustrate this complexity well. In the first act Bussy tries to explain to Monsieur his reaction to the corrupt life at court. In court he would be expected to "Flatter great lords, to put them still in mind why they were made lords; (I.i.90) or to "please humorous ladies with a good

carriage, tell them idle tales to make their physic work"(I.i. 92,93). After listing these characteristic foibles of court life, Bussy asks Monsieur, "Tis a great man's part. Shall I learn this there?"(I.i. 102,103). Monsieur has observed Bussy deeply enough to know that he isn't as naive as he might seem and replies, "No, thou need'st not learn; thou hast the theory; now go there and practice."(I.i. 104,105).

This view of Bussy as a man inclined towards and capable of success in politic life is given question in another act when Monsieur begins to fear that ~~there~~ there is more to Bussy than to ordinary/mortals.

I fear him strangely; his advanced valor
Is like a spirit raised without a circle,
Endangering him that ignorantly raised him;
And for whose fury he hath learnt no limit. (III.ii.400-1).

In this same act Bussy and Monsiery agree to honestly evaluate each others' characters, and by this time Monsieur is truly seeing the dangers inherent in Bussy's kind of naturalness.

That in thy valor th'art like other naturals
That have strange gifts in nature, but no soul
Diffused quite through, to make them of a piece,
But stop at humors that are more absurd,
Childish and villainous that that hackster, whore,
Slave, cutthroat, tinker's bitch, compared; (III.ii.472-8)

This insight again points up Farnham's idea that a man's virtue can at the same time be his tragic flaw,

another one of the aspects of the play. But the same man who senses the almost supernatural naturalness of Bussy, guesses that the best way to plat Bussy's downfall is through a means hardly supernatural, a woman. "I think it best amongst our greatest women; For there is no such trap to catch an upstart as a loose downfall," (III.ii.150-1). This may be a fatal weakness, but it is not a tragic one.

A final speech by Monsieur tells of Bussy as he is seen in the best light in the play.

Such another spirit
Could not be stilled from all th' Armenian dragons.
O my love's glory, heir to all I have . . .
If thou outlive me, as I know thou must,
Or else hath Nature no proportioned end
To her great labors, she hath breathed a mind
Into thy entrails, of desert to swell
Into another great Augustus Caesar,
Organs and faculties fitted to her greatness;
And, should that perish like a common spirit,
Nature's a courtier and regards no merit. (IV. i.95-107).

^{view}
This complicated of Bussy through Monsieur's eyes is far from being false--to life or to itself. In fact, here we begin to see what I feel is the strength of the play which is Chapman's ability to see if not to present clearly the idea that life is complex and tragic in many of its aspects.

Tamyra adds to the philosophical insights which also help to illuminate the nature of human character.

Note her justification of her fickleness to her husband in her romance with Bussy.

It is not I, but urgent destiny,
That...
Enforceth my offense to make it just.
What shall weak dames do, when th'whole work of nature
Hath a strong finger in each of us?

We cannot keep our constant course in virtue.
What is alike at all parts? Every day
Differs from others--every hour and minute,
Ay, every thought in our false clock of life
Ofttimes inverts the whole circumference. (III. i. 61-75).

She demonstrates a valid truth about the fickleness of fortune, and she also demonstrates how life's truths can be used to one's own purpose.

Before Bussy is about to be tricked into losing his life through her note written in blood, Tamyra sees life less as constantly changing than as evil by intent.

When will our human griefs be at their height?
Man is a tree that hath no top in cares,
No root in comforts; all his power to live
Is given to no end, but t' have power to grieve.
(V. iv. 9-12).

And finally she sees life in something approaching its tragic irony, in the sense that our striving to do right is often the very thing that makes our faults seem so terrible. She is discussing the fact that if she were a person who completely abandoned moral standards her affair with Bussy wouldn't be nearly as frowned upon.

O wretched piety, that art so distract
In thine own constancy, and in thy right
Must be unrighteous! If I right my friend,
I wrong my husband; if his wrong I shun,
The duty of my friend I leave undone.
Ill plays on both sides; here and there it riseth;
No place, no good, so good but ill compriseth.
O, had I never married but for form,
Never vowed faith but purposed to deceive,
Never made conscience of any sin,
But cloaked it privately and made it common,
Nor never honored been in blood or mind,
Happy had I been then, as others are
Of the like license. I had then been honored;
Lived without envy; custom had benumbed
All sense of scruple, and all note of frailty;
My fame had been untouched, my heart unbroken;
But, shunning all, I strike on all offense.
(V. iv. 166-82).

She is even aware of the honesty involved in admitting her illicit love openly and fulfilling it rather than harboring it in her heart.

We might expect that after having seen Bussy as natural man, as man trying to be intensely himself, as man defeated merely because he enters the corrupt world, and having seen the close observations of human character and philosophical observations of life, we had exhausted the extent of Chapman's intent in this play. But actually we have left undiscussed a multitude of other intentions.

Chapman was writing a play to be produced on stage, and another of his purposes was to create a play that

was good theater. As I have mentioned before, the idea of a man reaching for the heights of existence in any sense was a thrill to the Elizabethan audience. We may add to the elements of this play which made it good theater in its day many elements of the then current revenge play. The intrigue involved in setting up secret meetings for Bussy and Tamyra and especially the trap door device was certain to appeal to them. Add to this the violence of duels and the torture of Tamyra by her husband, which was presented on stage. Montsurry's whole purpose seems to be one of a counter plot of revenge.

Politics cannot be left out. Whether or not Chapman was influenced by Machiavelli's writings, he certainly made a comment on the nature of court life.

And possibly one of the most fascinating aspects of the play is the intended philosophy. To decipher Chapman's philosophical meaning requires more research than I have done. It involves a movement in his day called the School of Night. Its solutions to life were supposed to be esoteric, and these meanings were to be found in Chapman's plays only by the special intellectually initiated. This philosophy is especially presented in Bussy by the supernatural character Behemoth. It

is important to the School of Night interpretation of the play that Behemoth comes from the underworld, because this philosophy found answers in places not obvious to the ordinary world. The use of supernatural elements was also good theater in Chapman's day.

My concluding observation of this play is that it fails its artistic intention. It fails not just in falling short of the highest demands of its genre, but it fails in what it sets out to do. Just as disorder in the world is not best presented by disorderly writing, so a complex vision is not best presented by a form so complex that it obscures its own intention. Many other writers have a complex vision of the world, but they do not present more of its elements than they can successfully convey clearly. For example in Bussy's dying scene we are supposed to see him as a Herculean hero. But we are too aware of the Monsieur's success in causing his downfall through a woman, a loose downfall. In order for this scene to have been effective, Chapman would have of necessity had to have left a strong, convincing picture in the viewer's mind of Bussy as a Herculean type.

Certainly admiration is felt for the extent of

Chapman's vision, and both the language in which the play is presented and the individual moments of insight are memorable. Yet the play is incompletely conceived; we do not feel the complexity and confusion in a tragic world as strongly as we feel the confusion in Chapman's attempts to convey these complexities.

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THE DUCHESS OF MALFI
AS
AN ITALIANATE TRAGEDY

by

Marilyn Nickerson

English Seminar

May 22, 1964

Outline

- I. Purpose: to determine whether or not Webster's The Duchess of Malfi is an Italianate tragedy.
- II. Revenge tragedy: a general definition.
- III. Sources of this play.
- IV. Elements (as found in this play).
 - A. Revenge motive
 - B. Ghost to urge revenge
 - C. Hesitation by the avenger
 - D. Avenger's real or feigned madness
 - E. Intrigue and counter-intrigue
 - F. Action: bloody and horrible deaths, tortures, etc.
 - G. Parallels
 - H. Machiavellian villain
- V. Conclusion: that The Duchess of Malfi is an Italianate tragedy.

The Duchess of Malfi by John Webster was studied as an Italianate revenge tragedy. The purpose of this paper is to study the play in relation to the accepted elements of the Italianate tragedy of revenge and thereby to determine whether or not The Duchess of Malfi fits into this genre. First, there will be a discussion of the revenge tragedy in general, followed by a study of the sources of this particular play. Then will follow a discussion of the elements of Italianate revenge tragedy and their application to The Duchess of Malfi.

Revenge tragedy was prominent in the Elizabethan Age. In man's past blood revenge had been a universal code; but, as the state evolved, the acceptance of it gradually declined; Christianity ruled that it was forbidden by God. During the Elizabethan Age there was still controversy over it; the people were in a stage between advocating and condemning it. Thus, the stage was set for the revenge type of tragedy.

Revenge tragedy began with Thomas Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy. This line of plays was concerned with the tragedy of intrigue motivated by passion; it contained romantic interest. Kyd's chief sources of

influence were Seneca and the Italian novelle. From Seneca came the inspiration and technique. His tragedies made use of the five-act division; the Chorus for comment, the ghost, the cruel tyrant, the faithful male servant, the female confidant; action through narrative reports by messengers; blood and lust, unnatural crimes; motivation of revenge; rhetorical style; introspection and soliloquy.¹ Seneca was a great influence during this period because his ". . . methods of treating tragic situations were akin to Elizabethan temperament. . ."² and his sensationalism in horror appealed to their taste.³

There was also the Italian influence in the stories and characters; the novelle gave the Englishmen their picture of Italian villainy and provided material for the dramatists. From the Italians came the ideas of Machiavellian villains and vengefulness. These ideas were increased by the fears of Italy's religious influence and its supposed deceit. These dramas were placed in a foreign country, usually in Italy, so that practically everything would be

¹William Flint Thrall and Addison Hibbard, A Handbook to Literature (New York, The Odyssey Press, 1960), pp. 446-447.

²Fredson Thayer Bowers, Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy: 1587-1642 (Gloucester, Mass., Peter Smith, 1959), p. 74.

³Ibid., p. 75.

believable. Bowers said

The realism was clinched when the scene was laid in another country where, to their knowledge, the people were crueller and more revengeful, and where, as in Italy, the individualistic spirit still flourished among the nobility in despite of the law.⁴

The Italianate tragedy as developed by Kyd added court intrigue. It departed from the de casibus tradition on the following points: it held historical truth of less importance; heroes were of a lower rank; there was a movement towards a happy ending.⁵ In addition, the irony in the de casibus play is the final helplessness of man before an inexorable universe, whereas in the Italianate tragedy the irony lies in man's betrayal by his passions to a world of evil.⁶

The story portrayed in The Duchess of Malfi has an historical basis in Italy. The Italian Enrico d'Aragona had three children: Lodovico, a Cardinal; Carlo, the Marquis of Gerace; Giovana, who married the Duke of Malfi and had one child and then married Antonio and had two more children. It is not certain

⁴Ibid., p. 66.

⁵Madeline Doran, Endeavors of Art (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1963), pp. 135-137.

⁶Ibid., p. 142.

historically that the two brothers were responsible for her persecution and death in real life, however. Webster's direct source, William Painter's The Palace of Pleasure, was based ultimately upon a novelle by Matteo Bandello.

There are eight major elements of Italianate revenge tragedy: the motivation of revenge; the use of ghosts to urge the revenge; hesitation by the avenger; the avenger's real or feigned madness; intrigue and counter-intrigue; action, such as bloody and horrible deaths and tortures; parallels for contrast and emforcement of the main situation; the Machiavellian villain.⁷ There follows a discussion of these elements in their use in The Duchess of Malfi and several minor elements.

Revenge was certainly the motive for the murder of the Duchess by her brothers. There is evidence throughout the play that Ferdinand and the Cardinal felt that her remarriage was a blow to the honor of the family; this aroused rage in them, especially in Ferdinand.

Webster's audience would have seen the impropriety of her remarriage, whereas we do not notice this today.

⁷Bowers, pp. 71-2.

First, the Duchess was a widow. While second marriages were not condemned by the Church, there was a strong feeling against them.⁸ Ferdinand and the Cardinal express this feeling in the first act. Evidence of this is Ferdinand's statement, "Marry! They / are most luxurious / will wed twice." (I, iii, 235-6)⁹ Second, the marriage of Antonio and the Duchess was one of unequal rank. Since she was of royal blood, she had a public duty which she was ignoring in this marriage.

When the marriage is threatened through Ferdinand's confrontation of her, she at once thinks of saving the marriage by flight, without regard for her duty as a ruler Webster makes it plain that in this marriage there is a harm to public order, there is public disapproval, there is a neglect of duty.¹⁰

Third, the fact that her marriage was secret led to much scandal. She neither sought the advice of her brothers nor published the fact of her marriage. In addition, she did not receive the rites of the Church.

⁸Clifford Leech, Webster: The Duchess of Malfi (Great Neck, New York, Barron's Educational Series, Inc., 1963), p. 55.

⁹John Webster, The Duchess of Malfi, ed. by Charles Read Baskervill, Virgil B. Heltzel, Arthur H. Nethercot, Elizabethan and Stuart Plays (New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Toronto, London; Holt, Rinehart and Winston; 1934). All subsequent references are to this edition.

¹⁰Leech, p. 52.

In the light of these facts, it is not at all strange that her brothers would be furious. Their honor had been harmed by the scandal of the Duchess's apparent bastards. Their first motive of revenge was the scandal of her children. Later, her lack of sense of honor provided a motive for revenge. However, they obviously were carried away by their sense of injury. Other people of the time felt that, although the marriage was unwise, the brothers were extreme in their reaction.

Here's a strange turn of state! Who
 would have thought
 So great a lady would have matched
 herself
 Unto so mean a person? Yet the
 cardinal
 Bears himself much too cruel.
 (III, iv, 23-6)

In conclusion, the motive for the murder of the Duchess was revenge for the shame she had caused. Both brothers, but especially Ferdinand, speak of revenge from the time they learn of the Duchess's first child until they strangle her.

There is another revenge motive in the play: the revenge of Bosola. Bosola murdered both Ferdinand and the Cardinal in the last scene in the play. There can be two reasons for this. Instead of being properly rewarded for his part in the murder of the Duchess, Ferdinand pardoned him and told him

to keep out of his sight; he said that Bosola had no right to kill her. In addition, Bosola appears to have felt a great deal of pity for her after her death. Thus, Bosola too had a revenge motive for his murder of Ferdinand and the Cardinal.

The use of ghosts to urge revenge is an element of Italianate tragedies. We do not find any ghosts --- for example, that of the Duchess's dead husband --- to urge the revenge carried out by her brothers. Nor do we find her ghost returning to urge her revenge. It thus would seem that this element is lacking from The Duchess of Malfi. However, Bosola, speaking to Antonio reveals that he feels her presence.

It may be,
I'll join with thee in a most just revenge.
The weakest arm is strong enough that strikes
With the sword of justice. Still methinks
the duchess
Haunts me.

(V, ii, 368-72)

In Milan Delio and Antonio hear an echo which comes from the Duchess's grave. Although it is not her ghost, the echoed words seem to be a warning from her to Antonio, who says, "Tis very like my wife's voice." (V, iii, 27) Her presence is again felt.

The lack of a ghost does not at all detract from the play as an Italianate tragedy. After her

death her presence is felt in a ghost-like manner. In speaking of the fifth act, Leech gives a similar interpretation:

. . . the intention is surely to suggest the presence of the dead Duchess haunting those who have lived along with her. She is mentioned in every scene; her murder is the immediate cause of every detail of the action here. . . .¹¹ Webster does not need her ghost. . . .¹¹

A third element typical of Italianate tragedy is the hesitation of the antagonist in carrying out his revenge. This element is obviously present in The Duchess of Malfi. In Act I Antonio and Duchess get married; however, her brothers do not learn of it at this time. In Act II her first child by Antonio is born. Bosola, sent to the Duchess as a spy by Ferdinand and the Cardinal, had suspected her pregnancy. He was especially suspicious when she had all the guards locked up one night. Later, he found a slip of paper Antonio had dropped.

What's here? A child's nativity
calculated!
"The duchess was delivered of a son,
tween the hours twelve and one in the
night, Anno Dom. 1504" --- that's this
year --- "decimo nono Decembris" ---
that's
this night --- "taken according to the
meridian of Malfi" --- that's our duchess.
(II, iii, 56-62)

¹¹Ibid., p. 39.

He continues, giving evidence that her brothers will immediately know.

If one could find the father now! But
that
Time will discover. Old Castruchio
I' th' morning posts to Rome; by him
I'll send
A letter that shall make her brother's
galls
O'erflow their livers.

(II, iii, 75-9)

There is further evidence in the next two scenes that they have definitely learned of their sister's child. Ferdinand says

Read there --- a sister damned! She's
loose i' th' hiltz,
Grown a notorious strumpet.

(II, v, 3-4)

The next time we see these people, in Act III, several years have past.

She's an excellent
Feeder of pedigrees; since you last saw
her,
She hath had two children more, a son
and daughter.

(III, i, 5-7)

At this point, no revenge has been carried out. Ferdinand appears and learns of his sister's marriage; he leaves, vowing never to see her again. It is not until a further lapse of time that he returns to murder her in Act IV.

The reason for this delay is given early in the play. Ferdinand, in a rage at the knowledge of

the Duchess's child, says to the Cardinal:

Till I know who leaps my sister,
I'll not stir.
That known, I'll find scorpions
to sting my whips,
And fix her in a general eclipse.
(II, v, 77-9)

Upon learning of her marriage later, he returns to Rome, still not knowing her husband's identity. It is not until Bosola, told by the Duchess of her husband's name, gives this information to them that they enact their revenge.

The real of feigned madness of the avenger is a typical characteristic of this genre of tragedy. There were two people who enacted the revenge upon the Duchess in this play: Ferdinand and the Cardinal. Of these two, Ferdinand is the one who acts, who sees to his sister's murder. The Cardinal assents to the murder from Rome; in fact, he says,

By my appointment, the great Duchess
of Malfi
And two of her young children, four
nights since,
Were strangled.

(V, ii, 287-8)

Ferdinand, the avenger, was the one who became mad. It is he who saw his dead sister and her strangled children; and this action preys upon his mind. Leech

says, " . . . from the moment when he looks on his sister's body and asks for her face to be covered, he is pursued by his own furies."¹²

When Ferdinand returns to Milan, his madness is apparent. Pescara says of him,

Prince Ferdinand's come to Milan,
Sick, as they give out, of an apoplexy;
But some say 'tis a frenzy.
(V, i, 57-9)

This madness is indeed real. His doctor calls his disease lycanthropia:

In those that are possessed with 't there
o'erflows
Such melancholy humor they imagine
Themselves to be transformed into
wolves,
Steal forth to churchyards in the dead
of night,
And dig dead bodies up; as two nights
since
One met the duke 'bout midnight
in a lane
Behind Saint Mark's Church, with the
leg of a man
Upon his shoulder. . .
(V, ii, 8-15)

This madness continues throughout the remainder of of the play, so that the Cardinal locks him up and lets no one see him, for, in his madness, he might reveal what they have done. Ferdinand dies a madman.

¹²Ibid., p. 34.

Intrigue is present in The Duchess of Malfi from the opening of the play through the last scene. There are conspiracies, complications, suspense, and tension. The first sense of intrigue comes when we are informed that Bosola is at Malfi to spy on the Duchess. We soon discover why: Ferdinand and the Cardinal fear that the Duchess will remarry.

In this first act the Duchess does remarry. She marries Antonio, her steward and a man her brothers will object to. Their objections, as already mentioned, can be that Antonio is not a nobleman; that this is her second marriage, and that they were married in secret and without the rites of the Church. At this point the reader is in suspense as to when she will be discovered. Thus far, there is the intrigue of the spying brothers and Bosola, their representative; and there is the counter-intrigue of the Duchess's and Antonio's secret marriage.

Later in the second act we find hints of the Duchess's pregnancy and the suspicions to Bosola.

I observe our duchess
Is sick a-days. She pukes, her stomach
seethes,
The fins of her eyelids look most
teeming blue,
She wanes i' th' cheek, and waxes fat i'
th' flank,
And, contrary to our Italian fashion,
Wears a loose-bodied gown. There's
somewhat in 't.

I have a trick may chance discover it,
A pretty one; I have bought some
apricocks,
The first our spring yields.
(II, i, 85-93)

After making several other remarks in reference to pregnancy, Bosola gives the Duchess some rather green apricots which bring on the delivery of her child. The intrigue is intensified when the Duchess says that many jewels have been stolen and the the palace is to be locked. Bosola is certain that something is being hidden.

Sure I did hear a woman shriek.
List, ha!
And the sound came, if I received it
right,
From the duchess' lodgings. There's
some strategem
In the confining of all our courtiers
To their several wards.
(II, iii, 1-5)

His suspicions are confirmed when he finds the child's horoscope which was dropped by Antonio. After Bosola informs the brothers in Rome, we learn that Ferdinand and the Cardinal will seek revenge and wonder if and how the Duchess will escape.

After the birth of two more children, the Duchess is visited by Ferdinand, who seeks to learn the father. He learns that she is married, although not to whom, and he exits, leaving the reader wondering when he will take his revenge. When the Duchess trustingly confesses to Bosola her marriage to Antonio,

the reader anticipates the treachery that follows. The conspiracy thickens when Bosola and some soldiers, all masked, waylay the Duchess and her family on a highway near Loretto. The scheme for her torture and death reflects the intrigue of the entire play.

There is further intrigue in the last act when there are conspiracies towards revenge upon the former revengers. Ferdinand and the Cardinal, as Delio realizes, are still seeking to murder Antonio:

For, though they have sent their letters
of safe-conduct
For your repair to Milan, they appear
But nets to entrap you.

(V, i, 3-5)

Antonio, with the help of Delio, seeks vengeance upon the murderers of his wife. There is here his scheming for revenge and his mistaken murder by Bosola. Bosola is also seeking revenge upon Ferdinand and the Cardinal. He gains access to the Cardinal through Julia, the Cardinal's mistress. The Cardinal is also conspiring against Julia, who he poisons.

Thus, it is evident that there is definitely the element of intrigue in this play. There are plots and counter-plots; there is spying and scheming; there is suspense.

This play abounds in action in the forms of torture and murder. The first indication of this appears in the third act when Ferdinand hands the Duchess a dagger. There is indication that he wants her to commit suicide:

Ant. And it seems did wish

You: would use it on yourself?

Duch. His actions seemed

To intend so much.

(III, ii, 149-50)

Acts IV and V are filled with blood and horror, with torture and death. This is a neo-Senecan horror device which was popular at that time.¹³

The torture and murder of the Duchess occurred after her imprisonment in her own palace. From the beginning of Act IV until the death of the Duchess, Ferdinand seeks to make her lose her mind. First, he presents to her a dead man's hand, telling her that it is the hand of Antonio. Then he reveals the supposed bodies of her husband and children. In both of these horrors Ferdinand is bluffing, "To bring her to despair."

(IV, i, 112)

Excellent, as I would wish; she's
plagued in art.

plagued in art.

These presentations are but framed
in wax

in wax

By the curious master in that quality,

Vincentio Lauriola, and she takes
them

them

For true substantial bodies.

(IV, i, 107-11)

¹³Irving Ribner, Jacobean Tragedy: The Quest for Moral Order (New York, Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1962), p. 97.

He then presents the utmost torture of all those he has inflicted: the madmen. These men --- a lawyer, a secular priest, a doctor, an astrologian, an English tailor, an usher, a farmer, and a broker --- dance and sing in a dismal and insane manner before the Duchess. Yet even this horrible spectacle does not drive her to insanity.

I am not yet mad, to my cause of sorrow.
 Th' heaven o'er my head seems made of
 molten brass,
 The earth of flaming sulfur, yet I am
 not mad.
 I am acquainted with sad misery
 As the tanned galley slave is with his
 oar.
 Necessity makes me suffer constantly,
 And custom makes it easy.

(IV, ii, 24-30)

The only other horror done to the Duchess is her strangulation. The executioners appear and reveal to the Duchess a bell, the cords, and her coffin.

In addition to the torture and murder of the Duchess, there are many other murders committed on the stage. Cariola, a maid, is strangled immediately after the Duchess. The two strangled children are then presented on the stage. In Act V Julia dies after kissing a book which the Cardinal had poisoned. Antonio received a fatal stab from the knife of Bosola. Bosola also murders the Cardinal and Ferdinand, who in turn murders him, on the stage. A servant is also stabbed.

In conclusion, the element of action through blood and horror, torture and death, is a basic part of this drama.

The use of parallels for contrast and enforcement of the main situation, a basic element of Italianate tragedies, is found in The Duchess of Malfi. I will treat the more obvious and important ones here. The most outstanding contrast, due perhaps to proximity, is that of the deaths of the Duchess and Cariola, her maid. Leech says that Cariola's death, following that of the Duchess,

is one of the most painful contrasts in the play. If we need the assurance that the Duchess knew how to die, the pitiful behavior of her waiting-woman gives it more eloquently than any set comment.¹⁴

The Duchess faced her death nobly and without a whimper. On being told of her approaching murder, she says, "Peace; it affrights not me." (IV, ii, 87) After giving instructions for the care of her children, and after forgiving her executioners, she awaits her death almost anxiously.

Tell my brothers
That I perceive death, now I am well
awake,
Best gift is they can give or I can
take.
I would fain put off my last woman's
fault;
I'll not be tedious.

(IV, ii, 238-42)

¹⁴Leech, p. 23.

She then kneels and awaits her fate:

Heaven-gates are not so highly arched
As princes' palaces; they that enter
there
Must go upon their knees.

(IV, ii, 247-9)

Cariola's death is indeed a bitter contrast to this noble one. She wildly protests, "I am not prepared for 't. I will not die." (IV, ii, 259) Biting and scratching, all to no avail, she protests that she is contracted to a gentleman and that she is pregnant.

Leech has also suggested that Julia was included as a parallel to the Duchess.

Webster wanted to point a contrast, and suggest a resemblance, between her mode of sexual behavior and that of the Duchess both women are direct in their approach, both devise scenes with a hidden witness, both come to death through what they do. Yet the contrast is equally obvious. . . . The two women are opposed also in their respective constancy and promiscuousness, in the family relationship established at Malfi and the casualness of the Cardinal's protection.¹⁵

This seems to be a just and accurate analysis of the situation. Despite the similarities between the two, as mentioned by Leech, the reader can't help but hold an entirely different opinion of each. While the Duchess is questionable in some of her actions, she is noble and loyal; we admire and respect

¹⁵Ibid., pp. 32-3.

her. But we don't possess the same opinion about Julia; she is a silly and promiscuous woman who completely deserves all she gets. The Duchess truly loves Antonio and is loyal to him. Julia is disloyal to her husband; her avowal of love to Bosola; is a sharp contrast to the Duchess's words of love to Antonio.

It is also interesting to note the contrast between the Duchess and Ferdinand. She completely faces her predicament; he does not face his situation at all. He sought to drive her mad, but she preserved her sanity to the end. Yet he became mad because he had not been able to face the murder he had committed.

The problem of the Machiavellian villain is a more difficult aspect than the others in this play. The Machiavel is one who is crafty and cunning; he seeks his own end, without regard to morality. A case can be made for both Bosola and the Cardinal as Machiavellian villains; however, I don't think that either one fits perfectly into the category.

Bosola does show craft and cunning in his spying upon the Duchess. He gains her trust, so that she finally reveals her husband to him; he then sends this knowledge to the brothers. He later reveals

these same characteristics when he seeks his revenge upon the Cardinal. It is evident that he is doing this in order to advance his own desires.

What rests but I reveal
 All to my lord? O, this base quality
 Of intelligencer! Why, every quality i'
 th' world
 Prefers but gain or commendation.
 Now, for this act I am certain to be
 raised,
 "And men that paint weeds to the life
 are praised."

(III, ii, 332-8)

In all this Bosola does fit into the character of the Machiavel. His revenge upon the Cardinal and Ferdinand is due in large part to the fact that they did not reward him for his part in the murder.

However, he does show pity for the Duchess; and he does, in part, regret what he has done. During the tortures of the Duchess, he says to Ferdinand,

Faith, end here,
 And go no farther in your cruelty.
 Send her a penitential garment to put on
 Next to her delicate skin, and furnish
 her
 With beads and prayer books.

(IV, i, 112-16)

When she is breathing her last, Bosola says,

She stirs; here's life!
 Return, fair soul, from darkness, and
 lead mine
 Out of this sensible hell!

O, she's gone again! There the cords
 of life broke.
 O sacred Innocence, that sweetly sleeps

On turtles' feathers, whilst a guilty
 conscience
 Is a black register wherein is writ
 All our good deeds and bad, a perspective
 That shows us hell!

(IV, ii, 359-61 and 374-9)

A Machiavel would not show such concern for his victim
 and for his own conscience, especially not so soon
 after the deed. And at the end he implies that the
 final revenge is not only for the wrong done to him:

Revenge for the Duchess of Malfi,
 murdered
 By th' Arragonian brethren; for Antonio
 Slain by this hand; for lustful Julia
 Poisoned by this man; and lastly for
 myself,
 That was an actor in the main of all
 Much against mine own good nature, yet
 i' the end
 Neglected.

(V, v, 86-91)

He senses the evils of the entire situation.

Several critics of The Duchess of Malfi have
 cast the Cardinal as the Machiavel in the play.

Ribner feels that he

stands for the guile and hypocrisy which
 render religion but a shallow pretence.
 He carries on the traditional pose of the
 "Machiavel", a symbol of evil wearing the
 mask of a seeming virtue.¹⁶

Ornstein expresses a similar opinion:

He has a connoisseur's taste for flawless
 villainy, for security in evil. On the
 surface he is nerveless, emotionless. . . .¹⁷

¹⁶Ribner, p. 119.

¹⁷Robert Ornstein, Moral Vision of Jacobean Drama
 (Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1960), p. 146.

The Cardinal seems to be in the background through most of the play, but he admits in the last act that it was he who was behind the murder. He uses much craft and cunning to accomplish his end and to cover himself. He does everything for his end; he feels that she had disgraced him and that she should thereby be punished. Not feeling regret for his deed, even at his death, shows him to be more true to the Machiavellian type than was Bosola. The only omission in his character to be a true Machiavel is that he really gains nothing by his revenge.

In conclusion, I have found that John Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* does fit into the classification of an Italianate tragedy. It noticeably contains the eight elements characteristic to this genre.

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