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THE SLAVE OF LIFE

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LANGUAGE AND REALITY

The Slave of Life

A STUDY OF SHAKESPEARE AND
THE IDEA OF JUSTICE

By

M. D. H. PARKER

The justice of God is truth.

AQUINAS, SUMMA THEOLOGIAE

*But thought's the slave of life, and life time's fool:
And time, that takes survey of all the world,
Must have a stop.*

SHAKESPEARE, I HENRY IV

1955

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To my parents

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NOTES ON FOOTNOTE REFERENCES

Ethics means *Nichomachean Ethics*.

Summa means *Summa Theologiae*.

Summa Gent, means *Summa Contra Gentiles*.

In *Summa* references the first three numbers indicate Part, Question and Article, and in showing the First and Second divisions of the Second Part I follow the Leonine (1894) usage of 1-2 for *Prima Secundae* and 2-2 for *Secunda Secundae*. 'Suppl.', for Supplement, sometimes takes the place of the first number. If a number appears after the article number this refers to the Answer to the appropriate Objection. The letter c indicates *corpus*, the body of the article.

PREFACE

As every age creates God in its own image, so every age creates Shakespeare, and it is to this image rather than to Shakespeare himself that men react. Mr Graham Greene, for whom as a novelist I have a very great admiration, and who happens to be in militant disagreement with the spirit of the present age, has, in his introduction to the recently translated autobiography of John Gerard, an eloquent and remarkable passage, which provides, if there were no other, a reason for writing this book.

Tor isn't there', he says, 'one whole area of the Elizabethan scene that we miss even in Shakespeare's huge world of comedy and despair? The kings speak—the madmen and the lovers, the soldiers and the poets, but the martyrs are quite silent—one might say that the Christians are quite silent, except for the diplomatic tones of a Wolsey or Pandulpho, or the sudden flash of conscience in Hamlet's uncle at prayers. . . . And old Rome has taken the place of the Christian Rome—the pagan philosophers and the pagan gods seem to have returned. Characters speak with the accents of Stoics, they pay lip-service to Venus and Bacchus. How far removed are they from the torture chamber. . . .

If Shakespeare had sat where Bacon sat ... one wonders whether into the great plays which present on the inner side—however much on the outer Lear may rave or Antony lust—so smooth and ambiguous a surface, there could have crept a more profound doubt than Hamlet's, a deeper love than Romeo's.¹

I have quoted at length because I want to dispute at length almost every detail in this critical summary, as well as its fundamental contention, that on the inner side of Shakespeare there is no profound and Christian grappling with the significant issues of being and conduct, the essential nature of knowledge and love. For if Mr Greene had decided, as I did, to go to Shakespeare and not to the interpreters of Shakespeare, to

¹ *John Gerard, the Autobiography of an Elizabethan*, translated from the Latin by Philip Caraman, with an introduction by Graham Greene.

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read through the plays with as far as possible a mind carefully blanked of preconceptions, and furnished only gradually, and as understanding demanded, with the ideas of Shakespeare's time, he would have found rising before him a curiously different picture. Even on the outer surface of the plays the martyrs are audible, and the Christians are very vocal indeed. Characters who turn a Stoic phrase as Mr Eliot's might an existentialist, do not illustrate a Stoic view of life, and Venus and Bacchus are, as they were throughout the Middle Ages, at once the *decor* and the language of a civilization which expressed in them what we fail usually to express at all, lost in the cultural vacuum between Hollywood and Freud. To an age whose austerities are mainly those of the imagination, classical symbolism, like the Stoic phrase, may be an *embarras de richesse*, but it is as little fundamental to Shakespeare as Brighton rock to *Brighton Rock*.

Moreover, if Shakespeare did not sit where Bacon sat, one of his cousins stood where Father Gerard stood, and died where it was Gerard's ambition to die. On the inner side of the great plays, tautly knit indeed but ambiguous only in the sense that it is the nature of art to have more than one meaning, is a texture whose biographical implications are not, after all, my main concern. For in spite of the spirit of the age and the new monitors, at once shocked and shocking, who tell us to do more 'serious' reading, more biography, I remain, with Aristotle, shamelessly interested in fiction. Its truth in Shakespeare is indeed 'above that of history', of any history except that which claims also to be theology—mirrored, it would seem, in the plays, and not, this side idolatry, in the life.

'To hold a mirror up to nature' was Hamlet's dramatic recipe, and, he might have added had he lived to the later plays, 'to grace'. The dramatic art, like any other, is neither persuasion nor metaphysics; its purpose lies in what it makes; and though the didactic is a legitimate and universal mode of writing and speaking, and often uses the same technique, it is not art. Art indeed may arise in it, as it does by contradiction in Milton, in whose work some of the best things are said by the worst people, or as it does occasionally in Shaw, and almost continuously in Bunyan and Spenser, where the ethical end is forgotten in the means used to attain it, and the truth from

PREFACE

which we may make the moral deduction is told for its own sake. Such work is often, by virtue of the writer's very unself-consciousness, art of a peculiarly objective kind, but such work is not Shakespeare's. Whatever else he intended, he did not intend to convert the world. He left for other men 'to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline',¹ or to 'justifie the wayes of God to men'. He was content if, in the practice of his profession, he might justify them to himself.

Yet why did Shakespeare, who wrote for money, write precisely these plays? Artists, like other men and more sensitively than other men, encounter ideas as well as actualities, and unlike other men they express their experience, not in conduct or syllogisms, but mirrored in 'significant form'. In all art which achieves this, all good art, beauty lies indeed in the *splendor veri*, the light reflected back from truth, the relative truth of a peculiar vision or refraction, in which ideas may be both the thing experienced and the lens through which the experience is seen.

In judging art to be so, and to be 'good', we are concerned merely with an aesthetic value. But we often say that one work of art is 'better' than another, not only because for its peculiar vision it achieves a greater, a more absolute expressiveness, as if the glass of its mirror were clearer and more luminous, but also because the vision itself, which is reflected in the mirror, seems to us 'more deeply true'. That is, in such a case, and whenever we describe art as 'great', as we do Shakespeare's, we are superimposing upon the purely aesthetic judgement which distinguishes good art from bad—and in good art the more from the less expressive—a metaphysical judgement; we are looking in the immediate and reconciling image for something permanently and universally true. And if this may seem like substituting for Sidney's ethical dictatorship a metaphysical veto, the critic cannot in fact help himself. Artists—even the most abstract of them—do not create out of nothing. Out of the forms of life they create new forms, but they are still forms of life.

It was curiosity about the nature and origin in Shakespeare of this formative metaphysical pattern that led to the investiga-

¹ *The Faerie Queene* (1590), p. 591 (A Letter of the Author's expounding his intention in the course of this worke).

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tions which this book records. As an undergraduate I was struck by the appositeness to Shakespeare of the passages quoted below¹ from the *Republic* and the *Confessions*, an appositeness which eluded me in the much-cited Seneca and Montaigne. Shakespeare's recurring *motif* of charity and forgiveness and a mercy quite unlike the dehydrated Senecan clemency, the ubiquitous theological imagery which I did not then appreciate as either so extensive or so distinctive as it is, the curious reconciliation to life accomplished for the undeserved suffering of the tragedies, the 'mysticism' of the last plays, all these bore out an even earlier, almost childish impression that Shakespeare and the Prayer Book had not only a common language but a common interest—the same inscrutable economy of good and evil, focussed in suffering and death.

To test this impression entailed a thorough examination of the idea of justice in Shakespeare's tradition and among Shakespeare's contemporaries; for I wished to go beneath Dr Tillyard's apparently selective picture of cosmology, psychology and social ethics to the metaphysical conflict, to find whether, in his system of values, Shakespeare, who stood on the threshold of the modern era, was with the continuous tradition behind him or with Bacon and Montaigne. Of the difference between the Catholic and Lutheran theologies of justice I was still entirely ignorant. Indeed the tentative impression on which I began to work assumed, gradually and cumulatively in the course of my reading, a shape and consistency which still astonish me, and so, *speculatively*, looking in the mirror held up to nature, looking back at those other mirrors of metaphysics and history, I have left the chapters which follow to register my discoveries and opinions step by step as I made and formed them, tracing at the end more systematically in the metaphysicians the pattern found in the plays.

It may indeed be objected that Shakespeare, by the felicitous operation of what might be called arto-metaphysical parallelism, could have invented this pattern out of his own admittedly fecund head. No doubt—given the Nicene Creed—he could. Yet artists, however metaphysical, are not usually metaphysicians, either in the sense that they invent their metaphysic, or in the sense that they explain it. If indeed they did

¹ Pp. 204 and 219.

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explain it the critic would find much of his occupation gone. As things are, he who dives beneath artistic surfaces after metaphysical patterns may well find that he has involved not merely his livelihood but his life. For the treasure he brings up may have a surprising image and superscription, and sit oddly in the *confort moderne* of his twentieth-century mind.

CHAPTER I

THE ELIZABETHAN POISE

'... to which nothing of the future is wanting, and from which nothing of the past has flowed away.'—Boethius, of eternal life, *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, V, 6.

THE Elizabethan age was, to use one of its own favourite metaphors, a microcosm of human thought and human tendencies to think; and the Elizabethan, unlike most modern men, could experience what he disbelieved. The world which Professor Dover Wilson has called the world of Plato and St Augustine was the world also of Bacon and Calvin, of Machiavelli and Montaigne, a world of which the distinctive orthodoxy is less easy to determine than to discuss. Yet the sixteenth century remains the crucial century. Man was not reborn in it from darkness nor reformed in it to a new pattern, but he stood at its end endowed with a new self-consciousness—which was not quite the same as the self-knowledge he had asked for—staring at two distinct sets of values before he made the modern choice. There were more views of heaven and earth than he had dreamt of.

Dr Tillyard, in his commentary upon the fascinating but perhaps artificially homogeneous material assembled in *The Elizabethan World Picture*, sees that picture as a harmony. Yet it may be that he sees it so, because he looks at it either through the eyes of some writer not yet fully conscious of new perspectives, like the early Sabunde or the traditionalist Hooker, or through the eyes of some great artist, superimposing upon the antinomy of conflicting philosophies the essential harmony of art. What the curiously constituted class of Elizabethan *litterati* achieved was perhaps not so much a harmony as a poise or *στασις*, an equilibrium at once steady and insecure. From 1580 to 1610 men could see the world as we see it only in works of the imagination, the subject of fluctuating but solid visions through both the medieval and the modern perspective glass.

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The Elizabethan, of course, acted intensely and extensively. He was able to do so, because medieval and modern men differ far less in conduct than in belief, owing to the phenomenon variously described by the economic interpretation of history and the doctrine of original sin. Virtues and vices such as humility and ambition, hierarchical values such as truth and utility, justice and expediency, were changing places, but at the change-over the distinction between a bad Christian and a good Machiavellian is a matter of point of view. That it does not remain so is largely due to a re-definition of the term Christian, following upon two important if contradictory platitudes which had emerged by the eighteenth century in England from the interaction of religion and economics: the platitude that a man's salvation is wholly an affair between him and his God, and that the social and economic structure is something given and secular, outside the moral sphere, and yet that other platitude that success in it is to be attributed to moral virtues, that riches, far from being a spiritual peril, are a sign and reward of spiritual grace. And though it is not until the eighteenth century that the Puritan middle classes, grown strong and ruthless in combat with the flesh and the devil, concluded their long alliance with the world, the overtures began in Calvin's *Institutes*, the first steps in that curious semantic transfer of 'prudence' from moral wisdom to worldly wisdom, the *Calling of Piers Plowman* to be the *Tradesman* of Richard Steele.¹

Since a set of values can thus give sanction to what we habitually do without sanction, to the economic appetite which previous philosophies had sought to control, and since though men may change their minds to justify some of their habits they may continue to act from other habits long after they have changed their minds, what men think in a given period is more important to the historian of values than what they do. What they do is sometimes, however, instructive. One suspects some ultimate cleavage in standards between the nineteenth and sixteenth centuries when one finds under Elizabeth I, creditors, as well as debtors, in the Fleet. One is aware also of a divergence from the fourteenth century, when men build manor-houses instead of churches and the great nobles move from the City to the Strand. Yet there is little doubt with which century

¹ See Steele, *The Tradesman's Calling*, 1684.

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Elizabethan public opinion would have allied itself. 'Wisdom, courtesye, justice, generosity' are the virtues attributed to 'the illustrious Duke Frederick' in Hoby's *Courtyer* in 1561 (translated from Castiglione's *Cortegiano*, 1516). It is doubtful whether a hundred years later the first virtue or even the third would be as much in demand. For 'all men suppose what is called wisdom to deal with the first causes and principles of things',¹ and on this dealing, justice is always ultimately based. If we wish therefore to distinguish, in the sixteenth-century conflict, between the dominant set of values and the set which in the age itself is gathering force, we must turn not merely to political practice but to the Elizabethan ideal.

We are all familiar with the expectancy and rose of the fair Elizabethan state, the new gentleman for the new monarchy, that 'fit servant for the Queen and your country' which Lord Burghley hoped (in his letter to John Harington) that his godson would become. Yet what we sometimes forget, in spite of Hamlet's, Sidney's, Raleigh's and even Burghley's efforts to remind us,² is that the 'courtier's, soldier's, scholar's eye' is still the eye also of the theologian and moralist, the eye which, treasured up to a life beyond life, stares unwinkingly in a late frontispiece to Sabunde's *Natural Theology*,³ the eye allegedly of 'an entire and lucid faith'.

The Short Title Catalogue gives, between 1580 and 1617, sixteen extant editions in English of *The Imitation of Christ*. During the same period Machiavelli, who enjoyed a reputation somewhat like that more recently enjoyed by Freud and Marx—and whose novel simplification of human issues seems to have produced, particularly among undergraduates, the same combination of fascination and shock—is represented by three editions of *The Arte of War* and one of *The Florentine History*. *The Prince*, of which there is an English edition in Italian in 1588, is not translated until 1639. Montaigne, more thoroughly subversive than Machiavelli, goes into two editions (in Florio's translation), 1603 and 1613.

What the Elizabethan *believed*, if one is to consult the well-thumbed treatises on education and government, the official

¹ *Metaphysics*, 982a.

² 'Next to God', said Burghley carefully of Queen and country.

³ The 1661 Amsterdam edition: *Oculus Fidei* (illustrated).

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theologian Hooker, the *Courtyer* and *Courtier's Academic*, the worn Sabundes and Bodins and La Primaudayes, is very largely what Aquinas believed. Reinforced with an extra dash of Neo-Platonism, a greater but not alien emphasis on the temporal prince, a devotion to Aristotle's *Ethics* rather than his *Metaphysics* and a subtilized but not secularized account of worldly good, the Elizabethan inherited essentially unmodified the scholastic philosophy and cosmology. This is distinguished by two things: first its conception of all reality, physical and metaphysical, as an order, hierarchical, inter-related, divinely appointed, divinely demonstrative and responsible to God; and secondly its intense consciousness of the at once crucial and paradoxical position of man. Nothing is merely individual, nothing is in our sense secular. Man's perfection has little to do with the manipulation of material resources or the accumulation of material goods, and it is ultimately achieved, not in this world of matter and history but in another world within and beyond.

It is in and from this other world alone that criteria of meaning are sought, not merely for moral phenomena but for all phenomena. Hooker's 'eternal law', 'being the order which God before all ages hath set down with himself for himself to do all things by', generates the multiple law, the law of nature, the law of reason, human law, divine law, the law of nations, whose application to a diversified creation and diversified circumstances Hooker proceeds in his first book to discuss:

We see the whole world and each part thereof so compacted that as long as each thing performeth only that work which is natural to it, it thereby preserveth both other things and also itself.¹

Now it is obvious that, if man is bound instinctively as substance and animal to obey the first mode of this multiple eternal law, as a rational being he can obey the law of reason and the divine law only if he knows them, and God's two books for his instruction, the book of nature and the book of the scriptures, lay open, it was alleged, for him to read. As Dante saw 'gathered in the depths of the eternal light, bound by love in

¹ *Ecclesiastical Polity*, I, ix, I.

one volume, the scattered leaves of all the universe',¹ so, in the universe, man might see that light as in a glass, darkly but no less truly, open and deducible by his reason, like the immortality of the soul:

By his own word and by this visible world is God perceived of men: which is also the understood language of the Almighty vouchsafed to all his creatures, whose hieroglyphical characters are the unnumbered stars, the sun and moon, written on the large volumes of the firmament: written also on the earth and the seas, by the letters of all those living creatures and plants which inhabit and reside therein. Therefore, said that learned *Cusanus*: *Mundus universus nihil aliud est quam Deus explicates*.²

This is indeed the *natural* theology of Sabunde, who produced in 1480 or thereabouts *Theologia Naturalis*, 'or the book of creatures, specially concerning man'. This is the book which Pierre Bunel recommended to Montaigne's father and which Montaigne himself translated in 1569 as one 'in which the truth of the Christian Faith is demonstrated by the order of nature'. Sabunde appealed to a wide public since his work was later printed 'as a help to the incredulity of atheists, Epicureans, Jews, Turks and other Infidels, specially Socinians and other Christians not attending to the mysteries of their faith'! As Montaigne's subtitle indicates, he goes much further than his master, St Thomas Aquinas, in what he thinks reason alone is able to apprehend, and this, in view of Montaigne's reaction to it, is important. St Thomas had said that though we can know by the unaided exercise of reason that God exists, we cannot know what he is like, but only what he is not like.³ His attitude to the book of nature uncollated with the book of the scriptures is even more cautious than that of Donne, to whom, though 'all the world is but a *speculum*, a glass in which we see God', the Thomistic distinction between sight and knowledge is of the first importance:

Now as for the sight of God here our theatre was the world, our medium and glass was the creature, and our

¹ *Paradiso*, XXXIII, 82-7.

² Raleigh, *History of the World*, I, i, i.

³ *Summa*, i :2 and 3.

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light was reason, and then for our knowledge of God here, our Academy was the Church, our medium the ordinances of the Church and our light the light of faith.¹

Yet, in their attitude to the book of the scriptures, St Thomas, Sabunde, Raleigh and Hooker in the high noon of the Elizabethan period are against Donne, since here also man's light is the light of reason as well as faith. He is to use his reason on and with revelation, so that there is no dichotomy such as one finds already in the later Jacobean orthodoxy, where faith and reason are assigned different spheres. The Elizabethan attitude to the performance, as distinct from the capabilities, of man's reason is bound up with its insistence on man's fall.

It was man's special duty to know his own nature, his own place in the divine order and the hierarchy within him of his own divinely appointed powers. To ignore the Socratic counsel, 'know thyself, would be construed not as a sign of innocence or modesty or healthy objectivity but as the mark of the boor if not the brute. 'Meekness is in itself, says the anonymous author of the fourteenth-century *Cloud of Unknowing*, 'nought else but a true knowing and feeling of a man's self as he is.'² Elizabeth's was not in the usual connotation of the term a meek age, but, in this sense at least, it admired meekness, and inculcated it as the first duty of man.

According to its tradition, man's position in the order of the universe was as precarious and paradoxical, as crucial as the age itself. Ideally he was not only the 'perfection and end of all creatures in the world'³ but more, the 'bond of nature', linking created things in this world to the purely intellectual creatures above him.⁴ Moreover, in the 'great chain of being' between the

¹ Sermon XXIII, Folio (1640), p. 230.

² E.E.T.S., p. 40.

³ Robert Fludd, *Utriusque cosmi Maioris*, etc., 1617, prefatory diagram quoted by Theodore Spencer, *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man* (Cambridge, 1943), p. 20. I have examined the diagrams in the Bodleian Library's copy of Fludd, but have been unable to find in connection with the diagram (of a man within a circle) obviously designed to illustrate it, the sentence quoted. Fludd constantly uses mathematical symbols accompanied by succinct remarks; for instance the triangle of the Trinity: 'Deus triangulo huic incomprehensibili comparari potest'!

⁴ Raleigh, *History of the World*, I, ii, 5.

pure actuality of God and the contingent existence of stones, he acted not only as a link between beasts and angels, but, to use Raleigh's expression, as an 'abstract or model or brief story' of the whole, the microcosm of a thousand allusions in poetry and prose. Donne¹ uses this double conception, in the orthodox way, to deepen the doctrine of the Incarnation, and the insistence in the Athanasian Creed on the 'reasonable soul' of Christ's human nature, is an insistence on the essentially human quality of his Manhood. For Aquinas's distinction² between reason (*ratio* or *intellectus humanus*), man's natural and special gift, and the pure intellect or understanding (*intellectus*) of angels, sometimes given to contemplatives, seems to correspond with the Platonic discrimination between *διάνοια* and *νοῦς*, between that knowledge which is obliged to make use of images derived from the senses, and that which the intellect attains 'without the aid of any sensible object'. As men shared their senses with other animals, so they shared their intellect, such as it was, with angels, and freewill, according to Romei's Miltonic suggestion in *The Courtier's Academic*, consisted in man's ability to live as any mode from plant to angel that he might choose! God, he added, with a wholly charming anthropomorphism, had used up his 'kinds' when he came to man.

He had not, however, used up his energy. This crown and summary of life is not a forgotten or static end. He is man 'for whom all these things were created *and are maintained and preserved in their being and moving by one and the same divine providence, always like unto itself** Between Providence and Fortune the world of Elizabethan tragedy lies, and its discussion of Providence, like Raleigh's, is essentially a discussion of justice. To the conventional Elizabethan, man was never entirely 'fortune's fool', either in this world or in the next. Like Aquinas and Raleigh he sought always behind secondary causes the prevenient first cause; for the conception which lay at the back of all his thinking was this of order, an order not merely created but sustained, and an order of which, for worse or better, he was the centre. As animals and plants and stones partook of God through him (as the inferior angels through the superior),

¹ Sermon LXXX.

² *Summa*, 1:79:8.

³ T.B.'s translation of La Primaudaye, *Academic Franfoise*, p. 10—my italics.

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so they served God in serving him, whether the service was punishment or reward. The heavenly bodies themselves were created for him; for 'Nature belongs to the class of causes which act for the sake of something',¹ and that Nature acted for the sake of man no period was more certain. It is not until 1603 in England that there appeared that famous and blasphemous cat which sported with Montaigne. Thus if Providence was not always a pleasant or consoling notion, especially to the wicked, it was at least a notion which made life in every detail an exciting and significant play. Its hero was man.

To the medieval hierarchy of being corresponded the hierarchy of the state and the psychological hierarchy, whose constant cross-references are never more arrestingly stated than in the magnificent rhetoric of Ulysses' great speech:

*The heavens themselves, the planets, and this centre
Observe degree, priority, and place,
Insisture, course, proportion, season, form,
Office, and custom, in all line of order:
And therefore is the glorious planet Sol
In noble eminence enthroned and sphered
Amidst the other; whose med'cinable eye
Corrects the ill aspects of planets evil,
And posts, like the commandment of a king,
Sans check, to good and bad: but when the planets
In evil mixture to disorder wander,
What plagues, and what portents, what mutiny,
What ragings of the sea, shaking of earth,
Commotion in the winds, frights, changes, horrors,
Divert and crack, rend and deracinate
The unity and married calm of states
Quite from their fixture! O! when degree is shak'd,
Which is the ladder to all high designs,
The enterprise is sick. How could communities,
Degrees in schools, and brotherhoods in cities,
Peaceful commerce from dividable shores,
The primogenitive and due of birth,
Prerogative of age, crowns, sceptres, laurels,
But by degree, stand in authentic place?*

¹ Physics, 198b.

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Take but degree away, untune that string,
And hark! what discord follows; each thing meets
In mere oppugnancy: the bounded waters
Should lift their bosom higher than the shores,
And make a sop of all this solid globe:
Strength should be lord of imbecility,
And the rude son should strike his father dead:
Force should be right; or rather, right and wrong—
Between whose endless jar justice resides—
Should lose their names, and so should justice too.
Then everything includes itself in power,
Power into will, will into appetite;
And appetite, a universal wolf,
So doubly seconded with will and power,
Must make perforce a universal prey,
And last eat up himself.¹

'Order' and 'degree' are almost synonymous; for 'it may not be called order', says Elyot in *The Governour*, 'unless it do contain in it degrees, high and base, according to the merit or estimation of the thing that is ordered' (ed. Croft, p. 5). So government and obedience are man's primary duties, a principle which survives in military and naval discipline and to some extent in the constitution of the public school. But then, as the tenth of the first book of compulsory *Homilies* pointed out, the whole state, the whole universe, was a divinely appointed discipline. Indeed for the general domestic and social responsibilities of man at this time there is no need to go as one writer does to the anonymous *Answer to the first part of a conference concerning pleasure*: one may find them with less trouble in the equally anonymous 'dutie towards thy neighbour' in the Book of Common Prayer. The Pardon which Truth gave to Piers was still the conventional Elizabethan's version of social ethics. He knew, not only that he ought 'to love, honour and succour his father and mother, to honour and obey the King and all who are set in authority under him', but that he ought 'to submit himself to all his governors, teachers, spiritual pastors and masters, to order himself lowly and reverently to all his betters, and to do his duty in that state of life unto which it should

¹ *Troilus and Cressida*, I, iii, 85-124.

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please God to call him'. In anticipation of Machiavelli, it is perhaps also worth remembering that he was to be true and just in all his dealings, to bear no malice or hatred in his heart, and to do to all men as he would they should do to him.

Distinct from this, although necessarily a prerequisite to it, was his duty to see that in his own soul reason should command the will. The psychological hierarchy closely studied in Shakespeare is that of St Thomas, as definite if not as simple as Plato's, and it was precisely here that the 'Fall of man', first operating, had upset the order of all things. For the Elizabethans knew and said no less than the Middle Ages—in their own typically polyphonic, unmedieval way—that 'we are all in effect become comedians in religion: and while we act in gesture and voice divine virtues, in all the course of our lives we renounce our persons and the parts we play'.¹ Moreover, they knew not only what the Age of Reason was to forget, to the peril of its posterity, that reason is not the master of man, but what Bacon was the first openly to call in question for the future, that man is not the master of things. Their songs were all after sunrise, and even Prospero must be relieved by prayer. There is perhaps no single work more nearly essential to an understanding of the period than Sir John Davies's poem *Nosce Teipsum*, written in 1599. It is not only a complete mnemonic for remembering the salient points of Elizabethan metaphysics; it has in its remarkable, near-doggerel stanzas the whole of Elizabethan drama, perhaps the whole of all drama. Three stanzas of Sir John extract the artistic nutriment of all the savants:

*/ know my body's of so frail a kind
As force without, fever within can kill;
I know the heavenly nature of my mind,
But 'tis corrupted both in wit and will.*

*I know my soul has power to know all things,
Yet she is blind and ignorant in all;
I know I am one of nature's little kings,
Yet I the least and vilest things am thrall.*

¹ Raleigh, *History of the World*, Preface.

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*I know my life's a pain and but a span,
I know my sense is mocked with everything;
And to conclude I know myself a man,
Which is a proud and yet a wretched thing.*

Yet the fall, intellectual as well as moral, which had smutched alike the magnificence of man's reason both to see God and to command himself, and the sovereignty of his nature over the creatures beneath, had increased rather than diminished his importance, and St Teresa only echoed the theologians when, in the exquisite story told of her, she refused to disdain, in the mutilated body of the executed criminal, the soul for which Christ died. God had set upon man an incalculable value, and in his moments of intoxication, when the vigorous national and economic sap ran merrily but never quite singly in his veins, the Elizabethan before 1600 seemed to cry almost with self-congratulation, 'Oh happy fault'. Yet his optimism, doomed as it was to temporary seventeenth-century disillusionment, was, at its highest, a consciously emotional optimism, always aware of the Augustinian undertone, 'Man that bears about him his mortality, the witness of his sin'.¹ *Nosce Teipsum* is written in Elizabethan title-pages across the temples of a skull. Beneath the most magnificent and versatile of a magnificent and versatile age, he saw the corruptible flesh and the corrupt spirit, the road to tragedy, beaten, as Milton saw it, by Sin for Death.

All this—but heaven too. The beauty of the world may be Hamlet's quintessence of dust, but the image of God still lies stamped on man and his universe, and in God the image of Man. Reason, reinforced by faith, predicates certain absolute values: truth, justice, charity, humility—long sinned against but only now challenged.

For 'new philosophy calls all in doubt'. Though Donne meant the new astronomy, which seems to have had little general effect, what he says, in *The First Anniversary*, of Copernicus and Paracelsus is even more true of Bacon and Calvin, of Machiavelli and Montaigne. As Copernicus had upset man's relation to his universe, plucking the earth out of the central position which it had held even on the theory that it was a

¹ *Confessions*, I, i.

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cosmic cess-pool, so Machiavelli upset his relations to the state, substituted expediency for justice in political action and far from condemning with Cicero¹ the lion of force and the fox of fraud, incited his ruler 'to make good use' of both:

A wise Prince cannot nor ought not keep his faith when the observance thereof turns to disadvantage and the occasions that made him promise are past. For if men were all good this rule would not be allowable; but being they are full of mischief and would not make it good to thee, neither art thou tied to keep it with them.²

'Nor', he adds with the finesse of consolation, 'shall a Prince ever want lawful occasion to give colour to this breach.' Mrs Do As You Would Be Done By has become not merely Mrs Be Done By As You Did, but a much more alarming because less predictable governess, Mrs Do As They Would Do To You If You Gave Them The Chance.

The translation quoted above, the first in English, is that of Edward Dacres in 1640. Yet the Prologue to *The Jew of Malta*, spoken by 'Machiavel', is too like Marlowe, both in versification and in content, to be part of the thoughtful paraphernalia with which Heywood provided the play in its first extant edition, the quarto of 1633. This prologue, it seems, was written like the play, some time between 1588 and 1592, and it already alleges,

*Admired I am of those that hate me most;
Though some speak openly against my books
Yet they will read me.*

In 1591, Richard Crookback³ is claiming, with what can only be topical anachronism, to 'set the murderous Machiavel to school'.

The examples drawn so far have been mainly from non-creative writers, but it is worth noticing here also that Marlowe, in *The Jew of Malta*, in *The Massacre at Paris* and more ominously because less openly in *Edward II*, adapted Machiavelli's

¹ *De officiis*, I, xiii. 'Tully's offices' went through at least eleven editions in English between 1534 and 1616.

² // *Principe*, XVIII.

³ *Henry VI*, III, ii, 193.

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political ethics for general use. He assumed Machiavellian expediency to be suggested as a criterion in personal as well as political affairs, and there is little doubt that the general public assumed the same. Moreover, the Duke of Guise's soliloquy¹ not only substitutes expediency for justice but, as happens magnificently elsewhere in Marlowe's most sympathetic moments, ambition for humility.

The justification of ambition, linked as it is with the replacing of justice by expediency, is, as was suggested earlier, part of the attempt of such different men as Bacon and Calvin to make the best of both worlds. The quasi-dualism of Raleigh, still medieval, provides that 'worldly goods be well-gotten, and that we raise not our own buildings out of other men's ruins'.² Calvinistic logic on the other hand is perhaps not unduly misrepresented by the first citizens of Connecticut, who, when troubled about dispossessing the Indians, met after examining the scriptures to discuss three resolutions: (i) that the earth is the Lord's (carried), (2) that the Lord can give the earth to His Saints (carried), (3) that we are His Saints (carried).

Bacon is, after Shakespeare, the most difficult man in Elizabethan England to discuss, because, after Shakespeare, he has its greatest mind. There is nothing in which it is more essentially a modern mind than in its combination of idealism—in the modern conversational sense—and philistinism. This manifests itself in the practice of the *New Atlantis* and the theory which precedes it as a marked utilitarianism, and tinctures both the *Essays* and the *Advancement of Learning* with that suggestion of expediency as the real desideratum which is heard in his most exalted moments moral and metaphysical alike. For Bacon's writing is of one piece with his life, and the contrast between the clear Sabbath light of altruism and philanthropy and the at least doubtful details of his political career is foreshadowed in the series of scientific treatises and essays which reveal with a pitiless accuracy what manner of man he was.

An 'hydroptic' Renaissance thirst for knowledge, as such, is often cited as Bacon's major virtue. Yet dubious comment on this too currently accepted belief is provided by the scientific achievements of Solomon's House and the confession of faith

¹ *The Massacre at Paris*, II, 40-9.

² *History of the World*, Preface.

upon which it is built, a confession made—or rather manifesto issued—in the *Conference of Pleasure* and the Latin proem to an intended but unwritten work. Although 'the knowledge of causes' is the theoretical end of Solomon's House, even this is 'to the effecting of all things possible',¹ which, being interpreted from the *Conference of Pleasure*, is 'to endow the life of man with infinite commodites' (p. 13). For 'among all the benefits that could be conferred on mankind I found none so great as the discovery and exploitation of new skills and commodities for the bettering of man's life'.²

Moreover, there is no doubt from the *Commentarius Solutus* (L. & L., IV, p. 66) that Bacon was eager not merely to explain his method to the world, but also to 'set the machine on work'. Since 'the sovereignty of man lieth hid in knowledge' and 'if we would be led by nature in invention we should command her in action',³ he himself desires to establish in England something like Mr C. S. Lewis's National Institute of Coordinated Experiments, to be 'the propagator of man's empire over the universe and the conqueror and subduer of necessities'.⁴ The 'removes and expulsions' which the *Commentarius Solutus* suggests are to take place in the achievement of this mastery, 'in case within a time some invention worthy be not produced', sound perhaps slightly ominously in our ears.

The psychologist of the Essays and the 'philosopher' of the *Advancement of Learning* betray the same preoccupation with material benefit and success. 'Avoid . . . Anxious Feares; Subtil and Knotty Inquisitions. Entertain Hopes' are his dicta, as if a metaphysic were to be carefully induced for the state of the health rather than accepted as a true explanation of phenomena. The *Regiment of Health* is in the edition of 1597, but the same bias appears in the later essays, which show considerably more profundity of thought and feeling; the reader is conscious

¹ *New Atlantis, Philos. Works*, ed. Ellis, Spedding and Heath, III, p. 156. Volume and page references below are to this edition, L. & L. indicating the separately volumned *Life and Letters* section.

² *De Interpretatione Naturae Proemium*, III, p. 518.

³ The *Conference of Pleasure*, p. 15. Bacon's 'knowledge' of the exterior world is in marked contrast to the *Nosce teipsum* of the traditionalists, or the knowledge of the form of the universe, the inner order, which 'makes it like God' (Dante, *Paradiso*, I, 103-5).

⁴ *De Interpretatione Naturae Proemium*, III, p. 518.

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of a sudden bathetic sincerity as he descends from the unethical nature of revenge to its lamentable inexpediency. Indeed, in the *Advancement of Learning* and *De Augmentis Scientiarum*, Bacon like Machiavelli makes success in life almost the first commandment. Not only does he set down principles of a Science of Negotiation with rules for self-advancement culled mainly from the Bible but filled out from his own experience, but in the *Advancement of Learning* he recommends that we should

by all possible endeavour frame the mind to be pliant and obedient to occasion; for nothing hinders men's fortune so much as this: 'Idem manebat neque idem decebat . . . and *nothing is more politic than to make the wheels of the mind concentric and voluble with the wheels offortune*'¹

Yet Bacon, the typical man of the Renaissance in England—more typical than Marlowe himself—comes as near as man can come to making, through selection rather than reconciliation, the best of both worlds; the other world of medieval values and the world of modern man's. His mind is an indissoluble texture of piety and snobbery, charity and expediency, a desire to know (but not as he says of Burton to 'trouble himself with speculative and unprofitable matters') and a desire to live comfortably. He shows at once an infinite sense of the foolishness of man and an entire unscrupulousness in duping him, a detestation of the conditions of success and a sense of their inevitability. And through the whole runs a vein of casuistry, which justifies success as the power to do good, good being the application of science to the needs of humanity. 'I have taken all knowledge to be my province', he says with the splendid arrogance of his age, and though he resided mainly in the sphere of physical enquiry and provided a philosophic method rather than a philosophy, he illustrates that plurality of ambitions which is one of the most astonishing characteristics of many of the great men of his time. Yet Bacon's versatility is not of the same sort as Sidney's or Raleigh's: it is the shape in microcosm of things to come. In him already the human intellect is free from the cohesion of a supra-mundane synthesis, and in his essays as in the diaries of Da Vinci and the memoirs of Cellini the reader is conscious of a certain desultoriness and

¹ III, p. 465—my italics.

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undirected energy, a certain disorder. But he is conscious of more—the divergence between science and morality. The effecting of all things possible becomes first what is useful to man and then what is useful to us. Both truth and justice have made unofficial exits between the acts.

Yet not Bacon himself is more subversive of the whole medieval structure than is Montaigne. Bacon, still believing in reason, is an optimist, but Montaigne attacks reason itself, the source of justice as well as significance, 'the image of God in the eye'. In what he ironically called the *Apology for Raimond Sebond* he strikes at Sabunde's key contention, that man's reason can know truth at all. Atheists presume, he says, to remain unconvinced by the *Theologia Naturalis* and actually to use reason against it, and 'to suppress this frenzy', his means are 'to crush and trample this pride and fierceness of man under-foot, and violently to pull out of their hands the silly weapon of their reason, to make them stoop and bite and snarl at the ground under the authority and reverence of God's Majesty.'¹

It is a full programme even if the last item is a little startling, and it is thoroughly performed:

Let us now but consider man alone without other help, armed but with his own weapons ... let us see what hold-fast or free-hold he hath in this gorgeous and goodly equipage. Let him with the utmost power of his discourse make me understand upon what foundation he hath built those great advantages and odds, he supposeth he hath over other creatures. Who hath persuaded him that this admirable moving of heavens-vaults; that the eternal light of these lamps so fiercely rolling over his head; that the horror-moving and continual motion of this infinite vast Ocean were established and continue so many ages for his commodity and service? Is it possible to imagine anything so ridiculous as this miserable and wretched creature which is not so much as master of himself, exposed and subject to offences of all things, and yet darest call himself Master of and Emperor of this Universe? In whose power it is not to know the least part of it, much less to command the same? . . . Shall we say we have seen the use of a reasonable soul in no other creature but in man? . . . Presumption is our natural and original

¹ Florio, 1603 ed., p. 257.

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infirmity . . . When I am playing with my cat, who knows whether she have more sport in dallying with me than I in gaming with her? . . . We understand them no more than they us. By the same reason may they as well esteem us beasts as we them . . . Miserable man with all his wit . . . as other creatures of his rank are, he is subjected in like bonds and without any prerogative or essential preexcellency . . . there is more difference between such and such a man than between such a beast and such a man.¹

The entrance of Montaigne's cat upon the stage of metaphysics is justly famous, but perhaps no less significant is the anticipation of such unlikely posterity as Fraser and Einstein, Engels and Marx. After a miniature *Golden Bough* the *Apologie* comes to a conclusion much like that of dialectical materialism:

If Nature enclose within the limits of her ordinary progress as all other things, so the beliefs, the judgements and the opinions of men, if they have their revolutions, their seasons, their birth and their death, . . . what powerful and permanent authority do we ascribe unto them?²

Montaigne quotes Heraclitus and Protagoras on the subjectiveness of phenomena and morality, as he quotes Pythagoras's contention that God is 'but the extreme endeavour of our imagination towards perfection' (p. 296). He attacks both physical and spiritual immortality in Plato and Mahomet, and disdains the jealous God of the Jews. And though he comes to a compromise much like Voltaire's, that 'il faut un dieu pour le peuple', he himself prefers the Sun to the Son. 'Finalement', or as Florio has it, 'In few, there is no constant existence either of our being nor of the objects . . . both the judging and the judged being in continual alteration and motion' (p. 350). Yet not quite 'finalement'. Perhaps with his tongue in his cheek Montaigne pulls the human chestnut at the last moment out of the confusing fire of an Einsteinian and Lucretian relativity, and deposits it, naked and unadorned with reason, at the feast of faith:

Oh what a vile and abject thing is man unless he raise himself above humanity . . . and it is for our Christian Faith

¹ Florio, pp. 258-68.

² *Ibid.*, p. 334.

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not for his Stoic virtue to pretend or aspire to this divine Metamorphosis or miraculous transmutation (p. 351).

Let us ingenuously confess that only God and faith hath told it us [the immortality of the soul]. For it is no lesson of nature, nor coming from our reason. And he that shall both within and without narrowly sift and curiously sound his being and forces without this divine privilege, shall not find nor see either efficacy or faculty in him that tasteth of any other thing than death and earth (p. 321).

Perhaps Montaigne's last avatar is Karl Earth.

So the dominant devotion of Protestantism to an unphilosophized faith, the subjectivist universe, the relative ethic, the insignificance of man, all is here. As in Bacon is the whole of nineteenth-century optimism, the belief in progress and paraphernalia, in worldly success and worldly perfectibility, the clear road and the exterior fight, in Montaigne is the whole of twentieth-century disillusionment and introspection, its clutching at faiths Marxist, Fascist, Oriental and Neo-Christian to find the meaning which reason has lost. The alteration in modern perspective, for us occurring slowly through three generations, happens in the sixteenth century in the transit from book to book. But the Elizabethan-Jacobean had also the other perspective glass to look through, held steadily before him by Church and State, the glass of his childhood, which to most men, whatever they may come to think of its accuracy, presents perennially a clear and cogent world.

CHAPTER II

THE HYPOTHESIS IN HISTORY AND COMEDY

Tush, what stand we here upon? It is a poesy and no divinity, and it is lawful for poets to fain what they list, so it be appertinent to the matter.—*A Mirror for Magistrates.*

IN the early plays, both history and comedy, Christian conceptions were perhaps little more to Shakespeare than a convenient way of looking at things; not entirely a conventional way, for no one could call the point of view of *The Merchant of Venice* a conventional point of view. Yet its unconventionality lies not in the principles which it enunciates with a dramatic dispassionateness but in the application of these to the solution of a psychologically tangled plot. *The Merchant of Venice*, though a very serious comedy, belongs inalienably to that succession of plays from *Henry VI* to *Twelfth Night*, which though they may not be undisturbing, are undisturbed. Here is life, Shakespeare seems to be saying; let us see what we can make of it if we look at it through Christian eyes.

So, in the histories, an interest in the hypothetical values of justice and mercy, which were in the end subjected to every agitation of which the human mind is capable, may control the choice of subject matter; but, having chosen, Shakespeare leaves his acquired plot alone.

Few modern critics are prepared to say with Aristotle that plot as such is the most important part of a play. Yet it is impossible to derive any theory about the views of a dramatist or the meaning of his work from dialogue or character isolated from plot. This should be a platitude, but such distinguished and sensitive critics as Theodore Spencer have proved that it is not. *Shakespeare and the Nature of Man* has, on page 148, the extraordinary statement; 'Gloucester's terrible observation

("As flies to wanton boys are we to the Gods,
They kill us for their sport"),

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made when he is at the bottom of his fortune, apparently expresses the final truth' [for Shakespeare] 'about the relation between man's fate and the forces which control it.' Yet—as appears below—Gloucester is contradicted, not merely by Edgar, as Spencer noticed, but by what happens in the play. There are indeed two kinds of dramatic statement which can be safely assumed to correspond to an opinion in the mind of the playwright. Some statements are out of character, and yet serve no dissimulatory end for the person who makes them, no end in the plot. Such is perhaps Valentine's unnaturally slick theology at the end of *The Two Gentlemen*, and certainly Iago's, 'There is a daily beauty in his life, that makes me ugly.'¹ Other statements, sometimes on a most casual stimulus, focus the facts of the plot itself. Edgar's

*The Gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
Make instruments to plague us*²

is, in terms of the plot, severe and literal truth, even if it is not a truth adequate to the whole plot. Similarly, Hamlet's casual 'Use every man after his desert and who should'scape whipping', forced out of him on slight and trivial provocation, explains a good deal not only about his character but about the play—and that portion of the play which is not derived entirely from his character.

Plot, moreover, if it be derived, as Shakespeare's plots nearly always are, will act in the play as a catalyst, producing changes in character to cause or be caused by action. In the later plays, however, where the dramatist starts with a derived plot as in *Lear*, and does not invent one as in *The Tempest*, this plot may, as a result of a conception of character or a vision of life, turn back on and change itself. It is no longer something which he must explain as it stands and in explaining learn from, but something which must be made to explain for him what he has learnt elsewhere. The English histories, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Julius Caesar* fall in the earlier class. Plot may change character, but it is not itself changed.

Dr Tillyard's *Shakespeare's History Plays*, dealing as it does with all the English histories except the only partially Shake-

¹ *Othello*, V, i, 19-20.

² *Lear*, V, iii, 172-3.

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spearian *Henry VIII*, obviates detailed exposition of their main and I think acknowledged theme. Dr Tillyard shows, with a wealth of documentation, how probable it is that Shakespeare derived from Hall and from *A Mirror for Magistrates* a view of history in which the period from Edward III to Henry VII appears as an organic tissue of crime and punishment, the punishment sometimes diminished or deferred in one generation by piety (as with Henry IV and Henry V), but inevitably achieving the full 'blood will have blood' in the end:

*For blood axeth blood as guerdon due,
And vengeance for vengeance is just reward.
O righteous God, thy judgements are true;
For look, what measure we other award
The same for us again is prepared;
Take heed, ye princes, by example past:
Blood will have blood either first or last.*

Dr Tillyard notices that the 'moral view of history', explained interestingly as a Renaissance transfer of religious earnestness from worship to profane events, is not to be found in the medieval chroniclers like Froissart. It is, however, to be found in the medieval theologians like Aquinas. St Thomas's doctrine of Providence and Fortune is precisely that stated in the *Mirror*, in *Romeo and Juliet* and in *The Book of Sir Thomas More* (an intensely interesting play into which five 'hands' enter, one of them indisputably Shakespeare's):

*It is in Heaven that I am thus and thus;
And that which we profanely term our fortune
Is the provision of the power above.²*

Romeo, 'starcrossed' and 'fortune's fool', says as he dons his mask for Capulet's feast,

*My mind misgives
Some consequence yet hanging in the stars
Shall bitterly begin his fearful date
With this night's revels . . .
But he that hath the steerage of my course
Direct my sail.*

¹ *A Mirror for Magistrates*, Thomas of Gloucester 196-203; cf. *Macbeth*, III, iv, 122.

² Malone Society Reprints, p. 79.

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God is above all and 'Fate which is changeable in respect to mediate causes' [thereby becoming Fortune] 'is unchangeable', says St Thomas Aquinas, 'in the first cause'.¹ Moreover, when Romeo, on receipt of Balthazar's news, takes his immediate decision to die, he knows that what he does is not to be attributed to fortune:

*Is it e'en so? Then I defy you stars!
Thou knowst my lodging: get me ink and paper
And hire post horses; I will hence tonight.*

So, says the *Mirror*:

*It may be well that planets do incline
And our complexions move our minds to ill.
But such is Reason that they bring to fine
No work unaided of our lust and will:
For heaven and earth are subject both to skill.
The skill of God ruleth all, it is so strong.
Man may by skill guide things that to him long.*²

To this doctrine of personal responsibility the wily Cassius is to give a subtle inflection in *Julius Caesar*

*(The faulty dear Brutus, is not in our stars
But in ourselves that we are underlings),*

and the orthodox attitude has been put succinctly by Lyly in *Mother Bombie* (III, i), where Serena 'will yield to the success of fortune who, though she hath framed us miserable, cannot make us monstrous'. Chapman, however, in *The Conspiracy of Byron* (III, iii), rears man not only above Fortune but above Providence. Not only

*I am a nobler substance than the stars,
And shall the baser overrule the better?
Or are they better, since they are the bigger?
I have a will and faculties of choice,
To do, or not to do: and reason why
I do, or not do this; the stars have none. . . .*

¹ *Summa*, 1:116:1 and 4.

² *Jack Cade*, 8-14.

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But also

*There is no danger to a man that knows
What life and death is; there's not any law
Exceeds his knowledge; neither is it lawful
That he should stoop to any other law.
He goes before them and commands them all,
That to himself is a law rational.*

In Marlowe this man is doomed. 'Tamburlaine, the scourge of God, must die.' Guise is destroyed, and Faustus repents too late; but Byron remains to the last line of *The Tragedy* the same man we met in the earlier play:

*Strike, strike, O strike; fy, fly commanding soul,
And on thy wings for this thy body's death
Bear the eternal victory of death.*

So Chapman's Senecal man, hardened by a tincture of Aristotelian logic, stands against God. This man, who is to become the Satan of *Paradise Lost*, never appears in Shakespeare, to whom pride is always a sin and never a magnificent sin. Richard III, the most nearly Satanic character of the earlier plays, is without splendour or even dignity, a boar, a toad, a bottled spider, prefiguring the sub-human images of *Othello* and *Lear*. Macbeth, who begins indeed with the brightness of Lucifer suffused with human *kindness* (human nature), daring to do more than does become a man, becomes none, and must fight his course 'bear-like' at the end.

Even the humane and human Romeo, as he opens the tomb, applies to himself the word 'desperate', a strong word with theological overtones, and beseeches Paris, 'Tut not another sin upon my head'. He asks him instead to take a madman's mercy; for 'by heaven, I love thee better than myself. Romeo and Othello are the only Christian heroes in Shakespeare who kill themselves. In Bandello Romeo prays, 'Of His pity and infinite goodness may God pardon me, for not to offend against Him have I slain myself, but because without my dear wife I could not live.' And in Shakespeare's play, derived from Brooke—but with the notable alteration of Friar Lavvrence—though Romeo shakes off without bitterness the yoke of inauspicious stars, Providence makes of his death a 'scourge . . . upon the

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hate⁵ of the two warring houses, which, though it 'kills their joys with love' accomplishes their reconciliation.

The Prince ends rather obscurely, 'Some shall be pardoned and some punished.' If one takes this as a literal expression of intention its application is difficult, since only the apothecary remains to be punished, Friar Lawrence having already been pardoned. It would appear rather to be a comment on events, and the idea that 'God is so powerful that he can even make good out of evil'¹ whether the good be the reconciliation of *Romeo and Juliet* or the mere justice of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*, is a postulate throughout these early plays. The wicked are all ultimately destroyed, sometimes apparently by chance like Beaufort, usually by one another. So, at levels both material and spiritual, 'Heaven hath pleased ... to punish me with this and this with me'. To* this among the rest was I ordained', says Richard of Gloucester as he stabs Henry VI, and we deduce from a series of actions and comments which by no means exculpate Henry that it is true.

Yet this ordering of evil to punish evil implies no compulsion to *be* evil in order to punish. Elizabeth, one of the chorus of women, who, looking before and after in curse and comment, adumbrate the plot of *Richard III*, will not allow character to take refuge beneath any sort of determinism. 'All unavowed is the doom of destiny', says Richard glibly of the princes he has murdered. But she, with the wit which had wooed their father to marry her, replies:

*True, when avoided grace makes destiny.
My babes were destined to a fairer death
If grace had bless'd thee with a fairer life.*

'Of the evil of fault', said Aquinas,² 'God is not the cause, though he is the cause of the evil of punishment.'

The princes, it may be said, deserved none. Shakespeare derived from his historical sources the idea of the sins of the fathers visited upon the children, an idea common to Greek tragedy and Jewish scripture, and implying a *kind* of justice which is already tending to be not so much moral justice as moral consequence, in its operation on the family rather than

¹ *Summa*, 1:48:2:3.

² *Ibid.*, 1:49:2:0.

on the individual. It is noticeable, however, in these earlier plays, that Shakespeare stresses the idea less than it is stressed in Hall. Whenever he has the opportunity, as in his treatment of Henry VI and John, he emphasizes the personal as well as the inherited sin of his victim, and when the evil is strong enough to jump to a completely innocent generation it is shown as an evil of violence more personal than Henry IV's indirect murdering of Richard II. So Edward IV's perjury, noted by Shakespeare's sources, is even omitted, and his greatest crime is the stabbing, with his brothers, of Prince Edward, son of Henry VI. It is for this, Queen Margaret suggests, that his sons suffer, too young as they are to have any personal debits of their own.

Oddly enough, the apposite and orthodox speech about undeserved suffering, which Henry VI makes in the *Mirror*, has no counterpart in Shakespeare's trilogy:

*Thus of our heavy haps, chief causes be but twain,
Whereon the rest depend, and underput remain.
The chief the will divine, called destiny or fate,
The other, sin, through humours holp, which God doth highly hate.
The first appointeth pain for good men's exercise,
The second doth deserve true punishment for vice;
This witnesseth the wrath, and that the love of God;
The good for love, the bad for sin God beateth with His rod.¹*

Henry goes on to attribute his sufferings partly to the one and partly to the other cause. In Shakespeare, though there is no attempt to denigrate his good qualities, the pious Henry of history being a well-attested fact, there is, in the scene where he renounces his son's claim to the throne, unflinching stress upon his weakness and inconsistency. Conscious throughout of a weak title, he is led by his very consciousness into evils of a cowardly though not a violent kind. He is emphatically not simply a man of thought too noble for expedient action, a view which may be sustained only by removing fragments of his conversation from their context in his practical affairs. He is always complaining of being king, and yet buys his reign during his lifetime with his son's 'right', at once ignominiously and immorally. He has

¹ *Mirror*, Henry VI, 52-60.

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neither the courage of his own conviction, that 'things ill-got have ever bad success'⁵, nor the courage of what appears to be everyone else's conviction, that God is mocked as easily by rationalizations of power politics as are the Commons. Beaufort indeed makes a bad end in contrast to Humphrey's good one, but the rest who punish one another in the three parts of *Henry VI* all have extremely lively hopes of heaven and 'die well' though only in the sense of confidently, without forgiveness, repentance or even remorse. It is true that they all, like Oxford, prefer 'to meet the Queen's great power' to 'meeting in heaven', and the juxtaposition of these phrases cannot be unintentional. This natural predilection is, however, irritating only in Henry, who makes so much greater claims to supernatural grace, and even, in Cade's rebellion, practises some of his own precepts of mercy and humanity.

It is notable indeed how much that is to recur in Shakespeare is to be found already in 2 & 3 *Henry VI*, almost certainly the first of his plays and almost certainly the only Shakespearian parts of the trilogy. As one hears for the first time in the opening lines of Part II the authentic Shakespearian movement, so one meets, as one goes on, the affectionate, clear-sighted pity for the mob, the concern with mercy and justice, the theological phraseology which is soon to give spice and irony to Richard's villainy, and a hardness of intellectual texture to the delicate—and indelicate—lightness of *Love's Labour's Lost*.

Henry himself, when he must pay his penalty, does so as might be expected of the man who, in his comment on Beaufort's guilty and desperate end, anticipates Escalus's 'Heaven forgive us all'. 'Forbear to judge,' is Henry's verdict, 'for we are sinners all.'⁵ So he himself dies well in a more accurate sense than his fellow-sufferers, setting a pattern of humility to be followed in the next play by Clarence and Edward. He sets also a pattern of that forgiveness—on Hamlet's part more than conventional—exchanged with Laertes at the beginning of another period in Shakespeare's art, a period when the Christian hypothesis is not merely left to the comment, but subjected to the utmost rigours of life.

Yet the fact remains that Henry does not leap to the mind as an instance of underserved suffering. The 'good Duke Humphrey'⁵ perhaps does, and the Cardinal's comment on his death

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is an excellent instance of the danger of lifting dialogue out of its context. 'God's secret judgement' is certainly not the verdict of the plot. Humphrey is involved, one presumes, in the original sin of the Lancastrian succession, and has a wife less mildly wicked to an Elizabethan audience than to us; but personally he seems as blameless as the princes in the Tower. If Shakespeare, seeing that the *Mirror's* Henry initiated those 'unsearchable and inscrutable' problems from which Augustine fell back dismayed, suppressed Henry's analysis of suffering for the sake of a neater historical logic, he left the query of Duke Humphrey and the Princes where he had found it—in the plot. St Augustine had observed in the *De Civitate Dei* that both good and bad sometimes suffer in this world and sometimes not, and if Shakespeare had not yet had time to study the problem in J.H.'s 'Englished' *Citie of God*, he was to learn from the plot of his first play that, though a 'heart untainted' may not be a very strong breastplate, a tainted heart is still weaker. The general impression is certainly one of a Providence which may allow the good to suffer for the sins of others, but causes the wicked to suffer for their own.

The famous lines just quoted are spoken by Henry in Part II.

*What stronger breastplate than a heart untainted?
Thrice is he arrfd that hath his quarrel just,
And he but naked, though locked up in steel,
Whose conscience with injustice is corrupted.*

To this Richard III has his answer, spoken before Bosworth in his own play:

*Conscience is but a word that cowards use,
Designed at fast to keep the strong in awe.
Our strong arms be our conscience, swords our law.*

Here is the same sort of problem as that presented by the conflicting philosophies in *Lear*. It is Henry who has support from the plot—of what is more accurately a tetralogy than a trilogy and a separate play. There is, as Dr Tillyard notices, a very marked difference between the cool, cynically efficient villain who claims, in *Henry VI* and the earlier acts of *Richard III*, to 'set the murderous Machiavel to school,' and the Richard

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whose timorous dreams wake his wife every night in Act IV. To account for him, however, it is not necessary to assume, as Dr Tillyard does, an interplay of type and individual, to assume that as John and Cymbeline's Queen fluctuate between personal frailty and the typical strength of a British Sovereign, so Richard becomes an embodiment of guilty evil by a process purely aesthetic. It is a process paralleled in life itself, and exemplified in Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth. It is, moreover, a process, not a fluctuation, a process not of character development in the sense of Lear's, but of character revelation. Richard's curse, under the psycho-analytic treatment of events, is to know himself—and to refuse the knowledge. For it is after the worst and most guilty of his 'bad nights'—from which the devil of a fellow who cited scripture for his own purpose starts up to cry, 'Have mercy, Jesu!'—that, in his definition of conscience, he tries to bluster back to a cynicism that he had once thought sincere and secure.

Queen Margaret, the greatest of those shadowy women who, as I suggested, adumbrate the plot, had told us what to expect in the first act:

*The worm of conscience still¹ begnaw thy soul!
Thyjnends suspect for traitors while thou livest,
And take deep traitors for thy dearest friends!*

In the last two lines there is not only a prophecy of Richard's mistakes with others, a prophecy fulfilled entirely by events, but an analysis of his dealings with himself. Perhaps indeed it is because his dealings are always with himself that he makes so many mistakes with others:

*And this word love, which greybeards call divine,
Be resident in^fnen like one another
And not in me. I am myself alone.*

This is in the Thomistic tradition of ultimate sin,² and he who had said proudly, 'I am myself alone', turns it at last, by a reversion like that of Lady Macbeth, into 'What! Do I fear myself?'—and answers yes.

¹ I.e. continually.

² *Summa*, 2-2:(162:6 and 7, 163:1:0), 1-2:84:2:0.

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Mr Harold Rosenberg writes in *Notes on Identity* (View, May, 1946):

The central intuition of Greek tragedy ... is there is one unique fact that each individual anxiously struggles to conceal from himself and this is the very fact that is the root of his identity. . . . Tragedy is the wilful exposure of the hidden fact by which the hero is identified.

On this Dr Sitwell comments:

Hamlet is a hunting story—that of a man who is hunting his own soul, or the truth of his own soul, and who never finds it.¹

Richard HI is also a hunting story, though it is not Richard who hunts but, as so often in Greek tragedy, Richard who is hunted. Or rather it is both Richard who hunts—the dreamer Richard—and Richard—the daylight Richard—who is hunted. Events are merely the spurs to whip the sides of that subconscious intent, the pursuit of self-deception, which ultimately destroys or saves men according as they turn from it or stand:

The justice of God doth require none other accuser than our own consciences. ... If any (saith Euripides) having in his life committed wickedness, think he can hide it from the everlasting gods, he thinks not well.²

Richard HI is throughout a play of conscience rather than simply of exterior justice. It is Clarence's conscience which creates for him

*A shadow like an angel with bright hair
Dabbled in blood.*

And in the same scene as this Macbeth-like phrase the second murderer, after denying conscience with something of Richard's witty cynicism, gives in to it in the end.

Til not meddle with it [conscience]; it makes a man a coward; a man cannot steal, but it accuseth him; a man cannot swear but it checks him; a man cannot lie with his neighbour's wife but it detects him; 'tis a blushing shamefast spirit that mutinies in a man's bosom; it fills a man full of

¹ *A Notebook on William Shakespeare*, p. 82.

² Raleigh, *History of the World*, Preface.

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obstacles ... it beggars any man that keeps it; it is turned out of all towns and cities for a dangerous thing; and every man that means to live well endeavours to trust to himself and live without it.

Yet after refusing to take part in the killing he comments,

*A bloody deed and desperately despatched!
How fain like Pilate would I wash my hands
Of this most grievous murder.*

Events happen generally in an atmosphere alien to the single-minded ferocity of Henry VI. From Henry indeed, not only Edward and Clarence, but Hastings and Buckingham have learnt to die humbly:

*O momentary grace of mortal man,
That men more hunt for than the grace of God!*

*That high All-Seer that I dallied with
Hath turned my feigned prayer upon my head,
And given in earnest what I begged in jest . . .
Wrong hath but wrong and blame the due of blame.*

Such phrases do not fall from the lips of Clifford and York.

Richard II, though it is an incident in the organic tissue of crime and punishment which is to culminate in the Tudor reconciliation, is also in its own right a tragedy. 'If I die no soul will pity me', said Richard of Gloucester: Richard of Bordeaux is perhaps the most purely pitiful of Shakespeare's kings. He is indeed a typical tragic hero of the Aristotelian sort, a man of middle character inclining to good, with one tragic flaw—the emotionalism of his imagination. This imagination seems to be almost entirely Shakespeare's invention, the result presumably of the questions: What sort of man would show this extraordinary fluctuation and contradiction in action? What sort of nature would, as Holinshed has it, be 'good enough' if it had not been for flatterers? It is interesting to notice that the sensuality mentioned by Holinshed and rather stressed by the *Mirror*, Shakespeare does not touch. His Richard is more subtle than Marlowe's Edward II.

E. K. Chambers places the play immediately after *Romeo and*

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Juliet, and there are elements in it of the tragedy of fortune. The storm which delays Richard in Ireland damages his chances almost as badly as the plague which delays Friar John damages Romeo's; but unlike the earlier play, this tragedy is not initiated by fortune but develops inevitably from Richard's own character, in which the normal relation between emotion and imagination is reversed. For what ruins him in the end is his ability to project his own fluctuating emotions, so that they take body in the objective things from which they arise, but to which they return transmuted and transmuting, by the power of an imagination, sensitive, subtle, but without stamina. The flatterers can induce in him emotions which temporarily transform the real England into a fairy-tale kingdom everlastingly fecund. Though Gaunt's frozen admonition 'makes pale his cheek', after desperately seizing the Lancastrian revenues to disprove in war the dead man's accusations of indolence, he returns from Ireland, confident and elated, 'God's Richard', legioned with angels—who cannot stay one scene's bad news:

*For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground
And tell sad stories of the death of kings.*

So he feels too much and too soon, and, sensing calamities before they come, creates them.

Most liable of all to this emotional transformation is his image of himself. He has made of King Richard a hero whom we are powerless to unmake. When he likens himself to Christ we are not slightly nauseated as we are at Shelley's similar apotheosis, and perhaps not only because this is drama not lyric, nor only because Richard has accomplished in us a willing suspension of our knowledge that 'God's deputy' has failed to fulfil his trust. It is rather that we believe in him, not merely as a king divinely right, or humanly wrong, but as a man, the very nature itself, the flesh and blood. 'Thou art a man, God is no more. Thine own humanity learn', not to 'adore',¹ but to fear and pity. Shakespeare gives to Richard the most terrible words he has yet written, a study for Lear's 'thing itself:

*Cover your heads, and mock not flesh and blood
With solemn reverence.*

¹ Blake, *The Everlasting Gospel*, 71-2.

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The lines are counterpoint. Men uncover their heads to the dead, and to the Host, as well as to kings; and the words come at the end of the famous speech where the court is the court of death. An act later

*A brittle glory shineth in this face:
As brittle as the glory is the face.*

'It is the blight man was born for.'¹ We mourn not for Christ or Richard, or for God's deputy, but for ourselves. Indeed, though the play and Richard know intellectually of resurrection, emotionally they know only suffering and death. This contrast between what is known and what is felt will continue throughout the tragedies till, in the wide, pagan world of *Lear*, what is known becomes only what is felt.

In the main the play bears out the conclusion of *Henry F* and *Richard Illy* though here there are no innocent sufferers. Richard is developed a little by suffering as Romeo is by love, knows more and is more charitable, more noticeably because more in isolation and with more imagination than any of the characters in the earlier plays. *Richard II* is already a play in which the historical pattern is giving place to life itself.

In *John* this historical pattern is again the most important element, although, as was suggested earlier, John's personal character is stressed rather than the illegitimacy of his claim. What has sometimes roused protests is that it is not stressed enough, that John in the face of foreign interference or invasion too easily assumes the aegis of English royalty at war with lesser breeds. To complain so is to complain not so much at a convention as at a fact. This is in effect what continually happens in history: it is a commonplace of political empirics and, one imagines, appears high up in the list of suggestions contained in the private notebooks of dictators.

The protests against the Bastard's comment on his master's death are perhaps more relevant.

*Art thou gone so? I do but stay behind
To do the office for thee of revenge,
And then my soul shall wait on thee to heaven,
As it on earth hath been thy servant here.*

¹ Hopkins, *Spring and Fall*.

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Yet in the first place the Bastard, who thought Hubert 'beyond the infinite and boundless reach of mercy . . . damned' if he did 'but consent' to Arthur's death, does not *know* after Hubert's denial that John had ordered much worse. Indeed his condemnation, as Dr Tillyard points out, is at once more complete and more cautious than that of the nobles:

*It is a damned and a bloody work;
The graceless action of a heavy hand,,
If that it be the work of any hand.*

Secondly, though John's reaction to Arthur's *supposed* death is hardly remorse, let alone repentance, the Bastard is not present at this illuminating piece of self-deception. Nor is he present when John makes his guilty speech:

*Within me is a hell; and there the poison
Is as a fiend confined to tyrannise
On unreprievable, condemned blood.*

It is *after* this that the Bastard enters, and as always in his presence John rallies his dignity and frail charm. Even did the Bastard believe him to have committed the crime, there is nothing theologically remarkable in a repentant murderer ending in heaven. The domestic tragedy assumes it constantly. Shakespeare has given us John's speech to set against the Bastard's hopes. He leaves the question open. On the whole he is more concerned with the political questions of deposition, rebellion and foreign aid.

Henry IV and *Henry V*, in spite of other and more important themes, are full of uneasiness about what is to come for the house of Lancaster. *Henry IV*, not yet clear-headed enough to ask with Claudius, 'May one be pardoned and retain the offence?', obviously hopes to 'shove by justice', and dies, as it were, in a doubtful repentance. *Henry V* appears to shuffle successfully, but the audience knows what will happen to his son. *Henry IV*, though not heavy with portent like *Henry VI*, records Richard's prophecy of Northumberland's rebellion. Warwick calls this a perfect guess, no more, and this is perhaps Shakespeare's comment at this stage upon the efficacy and exactitude of curse and prophecy in *Henry VI*. *Henry Boling-*

broke, the practical man, takes no sides on the theoretical issue, and the tragedies carry events back explicitly to a different and moral responsibility. 'We but teach bloody instructions', says Macbeth, whether the curses and prophecies of interested parties or disinterested observers comment on the event or not.

It seems, however, that the main relation of *Henry IV* and *Henry V* to Christian belief lies not in the problem of the Lancastrian succession nor the actual justice of events. Henry V is obviously intended to be a Christian King as he claims, at least until, provoked by the slaughter of the non-combatant boys, he orders the killing of his prisoners. His speech before Harfleur takes no responsibility, but he does actually issue orders against and punish violence and sacrilege. It seems impossible—from the scenes before Agincourt—not to assume that Shakespeare both admired Henry and saw through him. No one could write these—and the ironic prelude to war in the council chamber—without a clear notion of what he did. Henry is seen with the same kind of charity which saw Falstaff and Hotspur and Owen Glendower, and to some minds among his critics it is harder to see unconscious hypocrites so.¹ Shakespeare himself, like Raleigh, saw that 'we are *all* in effect become comedians in religion, and while we act in gesture and voice divine virtues, in all the course of our lives we renounce our persons and the parts we play'. Surely in *Henry IV*, and at a much lower artistic level in *Henry V*, the real theme is that of Augustine—whatever is, is good. 'Banish plump Jack and banish all the world.'

Henry, of course, does banish him, but it is perhaps not without significance that four acts later, in his own play, he speaks the famous *sentential*

*There is some soul of goodness in things evil
Would men observingly distil it out.*

He speaks of event, not character, and yet in a sense character may be called a form of event. Certainly at this time life to Shakespeare was fundamentally good, and the immense vitality

¹ The soliloquy beginning 'I know you all' (i *Henry IV*, I, ii, 216-39) may be taken as* an instance of conscious hypocrisy also, or simply as necessary information, not really dramatic in intention, as Schiicking conceives such speeches to be.

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of Falstaff is never matched, not even in Cleopatra, in whom also this is the criterion of our homage. Cleopatra has more variety, but in Falstaff the sheer, intense force of crude being manifests itself in subtleties enough. And we are left to imagine he 'could sing psalms or anything'. He dies as he had lived, with the sort of innocence one might expect to find in an animated 'subconscious' confronted by the censor of Freud; 'a did in some sort indeed handle women' but 'a babbled of green fields'.

Julius Caesar falls both chronologically and emotionally into the category of undisturbed plays. Its prodigies squeak and gibber only in Roman streets: they do not, as they do in *Hamlet*, irrupt into the audience's life. I do not mean in the least that the characters in *Julius Caesar* are Romans rather than men; nothing could be more untrue. I do mean that its irrational disturbances have little effect on character; they do not yet convulse morals or metaphysics; they are mere concomitants of events, absorbed in the even tenour of the play itself, the simple working out of its main theme. For the main theme of *Julius Caesar*, reconciling the political and personal *motifs* to which critics according to taste frequently devote themselves, seems to be the old theme of the English histories, 'blood will have blood'. They that take the sword, however good their intentions, shall perish by it.

In one respect Brutus is unlike every other tragic hero except Macbeth. As Romeo and Richard II both in the course of the play become a little better, Brutus becomes—temporarily—a little worse. His self-deception as to the nature of the conspirators' action degenerates into an idealistic hysteria as he bathes 'up to the elbows' in Caesar's blood. This is a sentimental Brutus whom we have not known before and whom it is true we shall not know again. At the end of the play he is the same noble, credulous man as at the beginning, neither worse nor better for his experience. But this little loosening of the brain in the act of assassination seems to me significant. It suggests that Brutus is not to be considered entirely as a man too *noble* for events. It may, of course, be alleged that the fault is Shakespeare's not Brutus's, but *Troilus and Cressida* suggests that Shakespeare saw here, as so often, a problem for a later play.

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The early and middle comedies, unlike the histories, owe nothing to any attempt, however doubtful, to produce the manners of a bygone age. The religious imagery in them is more marked than in any of Shakespeare's dramatic contemporaries, even the pious Dekker and Heywood, and it depends not at all on the nature of his theme or on the date of his play. All it proves in relation to Shakespeare's life is that he had in his time absorbed a considerable dose of Catholic theology, and acquainted himself with a considerable area of Catholic practice, but this could conceivably have been done as a 'Church Papist' in the confused context of the contemporary Church of England. That these plays are more, and more explicitly, Catholic even than the liturgy, as distinct from the articles, of Elizabeth's Prayer Book may suggest the effect of recusance or a recusant family, the effect of an 'unsound' incumbent whom age or caution had saved from deprivation, or the effect of a national culture saturated with many theological notions which neither Thirty Nine Articles nor fewer years¹ were capable of eradicating. It could, in the chameleon practice of Elizabethan England, be the effect of all three.

But if this ubiquitous religious imagery in the early comedies proves little about Shakespeare's adult biography, it does prove something about his adult mind. Whatever theology he believed to be true—whether indeed he believed any to be true— theology as such was significant to him. It was an analogy in which his mind constantly worked. And it was even more significant to him than to his fellow dramatists. This suggests that when, as frequently in his plays, he causes his characters to make direct theological statements or to describe other characters in unmistakably theological terms, he knew quite well what he was about, and meant something which must be examined, as all dramatic statements must be examined, in the context of the plot. A great many of the direct theological statements concern justice and mercy, and the relevance of the Christian doctrine of the Atonement to Shakespeare's comedies is that his heroes and heroines, with a certain noticeable iteration, adduce it as a motive for conduct. This is the more interesting in view of the rather complex background to the

¹ Cf. *Formularies of Faith put forth by Authority during the reign of Henry VIII*, ed. Charles Lloyd (Oxford, 1825).

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word 'mercy', which existed in the educated Elizabethan and Jacobean mind.

There are in fact two Latin words translated by Elizabethan-Jacobean writers as 'mercy', *dementia* and *misericordia*. Elyot's *Governour*, in 1531, propounds a Senecan view of justice and mercy, derived, with quotations, from the *De dementia*. Seneca, in recommending *dementia* to Nero as something which makes rulers not only more virtuous but more secure, distinguishes it sharply and at some length from *misericordia*¹ which he entirely condemns, *dementia* he defines as 'a moderation of the mind which restrains the power of vengeance, or a lenity of the superior towards the inferior in determining punishment'.¹ *Misericordia* on the other hand is 'a sickness of the mind aroused by the sight of other men's miseries' (II, 5). *dementia* is opposed not to severity but to cruelty, and 'I will call those cruel who have cause to punish but have no moderation in their punishment' (II, 4). Yet 'it is as great cruelty to pardon all as to pardon none' (I, 2), and this is quoted by Elyot and La Primaudaye as a key doctrine. Cruelty and *misericordia* are the two extremes of severity and *dementia*. We must avoid both, lest under the appearance of severity we fall into cruelty, and under the appearance of *dementia* into *misericordia*. Seneca recognizes that many men will call *misericordia* a virtue, but insists that it is a vice. 'So all good men show *dementia* but avoid *misericordia*', which is 'most familiar to the worst minds' and thoroughly effeminate. "*Misericordia* looks not at the cause but at the condition, whereas clemency is rational.' So a wise man's mind is serene and he 'is not moved with sadness for another's misery' because he is incapable of being moved at all. He will, however, 'freely do all the rest that those who pity are in the habit of doing. . . . He will assist his neighbour who weeps without weeping himself. . . but know that tho^e eyes are weak which are bloodshot themselves in beholding another's suffusion'

(II, 4-6)

This may sound as if Seneca's distinction, as he himself suggests in his last chapter on 'Why a wise man does not pardon', is a 'controversy upon the word not upon the matter', or at least a controversy upon psychological states. He condemns pardon, 'the remission of deserved punishment', as con-

¹ *De Clementia*, II, 3.

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trary to justice, but alleges that 'the wise man does the same as if he pardoned without pardoning'. Yet from his more detailed exposition this is not the case; for he himself makes a genuine distinction between *venia* (pardon), which is 'not to punish those things which you judge worthy of punishment', and *dementia*, which 'pronounces those whom she dismisses not to be deserving of punishment'. Moreover, all the instances of 'clemency' which he gives in this chapter are applied to what we should call 'extenuating circumstances', youth, drunkenness at the time of the crime, or honest conviction. The only other instance, given in a previous chapter, is from the life of Augustus, and is stressed as an example of political expediency. So the real distinction remains, between mercy to those who have some claim to it, *dementia*, and mercy to those who have none, *venia* or *misericordia* (*venia* in action, *misericordia* in mind).

Now one has only to recollect the headings of the Psalter to remember that the word translated 'mercy' in the Prayer Book and in the Authorized Version is the Vulgate's *misericordia*, and that this quality is ascribed by the liturgy, by Jewish and Christian scripture, by the fathers, by the schoolmen, by Hooker and by the Homilies, to God. Aquinas with his usual thoroughness defines exactly why it is used as distinct from Seneca's *dementia*, of which he gives Seneca's definition, *Clementia* and *misericordia*, he says, may have the same effect according to different motives, *dementia*, which is not motivated by charity, is not therefore itself the greatest virtue, though it may in some cases have the same results. *Misericordia*, being caused by charity, is *in itself* the greatest of virtues (though in respect to its object less than charity, since the object of charity is God—who *of misericordia* can hardly be the object). *Misericordia* is 'in God', in the motion of the divine will moved by absolute charity. And though God, as God, cannot by definition suffer or 'feel' in our human sense, God Incarnate, 'made man' precisely in order to be able to suffer for us and with us, is in this as 'in all things like us, but without sin'.¹ So though St Thomas makes in the case of God unincarnate the Senecan distinction of a mercy without human emotion, in no case does he make the Senecan demand that mercy should be deserved. Indeed,

¹ 2-2: (157'4, 159'1:2, 363'3, 28:2:1, 32:1:0, 30:1-2, 30:4), 1:21:3 and 2-2:30:2:1.

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the constantly stressed and typical quality of God's mercy is precisely that it is undeserved, that 'while we were yet sinners Christ died for us'. It is interesting to notice, in this divergent attitude to the psychology of mercy, the recurring distinction between the Stoic ideal of a man who aspires to be, like God, without suffering, and the Christian ideal of a God who stoops to endure the suffering of man. The whole question has been put into a different context by the introduction of that charity, which, says Berowne in Shakespeare's second comedy, 'fulfils the law', fulfils that 'operation not violent or casual',¹ by whjch suffering inevitably follows sin.

Aquinas's doctrine is that of the Elizabethan and Jacobean divine when he speaks of religion or private ethics, and Lodge, translating the *De dementia* in 1614, quite accurately uses 'mercie' for *misericordia*, and 'clemencie' for *dementia*, throwing Seneca into direct opposition to Christian teaching. He censures the Stoic, by means of a marginal note, whenever he recommends suicide, but is perhaps content to leave the main issue to the operation of the Holy Ghost in whose 'school' he had—also in a marginal note—exhorted his readers to 'examine judiciously a Stoical paradox' of the *De Providentia*. It is not certain whether Lodge's insertion of the word 'every' before 'nature' in Seneca's last sentence, where he likens the clement man to the good husbandman trying to sustain and straighten distorted trees, is his subconscious attempt to Christianize his philosopher or just another instance of his slipshod translation. Elyot, apparently feeling in his much earlier derivations from Seneca that to translate *misericordia* as 'mercy' in this context would hardly do in a Christian society, invented the term 'Vaine pitie' for it, and uses 'mercy' to translate *dementia*, thereby obscuring the contradiction at the verbal level.

At the level of motive, however, it remains. Elyot's 'mercy', as indeed judicial and political mercy generally, is, throughout, Seneca's *dementia* and not the theologians' *misericordia*. Elyot defines it in the Senecan terms, distinguishes it from the Senecan 'excess' in 'vaine pitie', recommends it as politically expedient and as opposed to cruelty not to severity. Though like Seneca he suggests that men who stand in need of it from God would be wise to practise it themselves, there is in *The*

¹ Hooker's definition of a law: *Ecclesiastical Polity*, I, ii, 2.

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Governour no mention of the Atonement and neither mention nor tincture of Christianity in any form. The examples given, such as that of Augustus, are pagan and utilitarian. There are thus two distinct traditions and sorts of 'mercy' in Elizabethan writing and the Elizabethan mind, the theological sort recommended for private morals, and the Senecan sort recommended for the state.

This Senecan sort may also be recommended generally as in Bacon's essay *Of Revenge*:

It is a Prince's part to pardon, and Solomon I am sure saith, // *is the glory of a Man to pass by an offence*. That which is past, is gone, and irrevocable; and wise men have Enough to do, with things present and to come: therefore, they do but trifle with themselves, that labour in past matters. There is no man doth a wrong for the wrong's sake; But thereby to purchase himself, Profit or Pleasure, or Honour or the like. Therefore why should I be angry with a man for loving himself better than me? And if any man should do wrong, merely out of ill nature, why? Yet it is but like the thorn, or Briar, which prick and scratch because they can do no other.

This, in spite of the un-Senecan 'pardon', in spite of the reminiscent Thomistic-Aristotelian analysis of the motive for evil, is essentially the *serena mens* of the clement man. Aristotle, had he lived to see it, would have come into the controversy on the Thomist side. The Elizabethan Greek-Latin editions of the *Poetics* use *misericordiam* quite rightly to translate that *eleos* which tragedy is to excite and cleanse, and Aristotle himself obviously means *misericordiam*, since *dementia*, having no truck with emotion, could not be excited by tragedy or by anything else. Moreover, he obviously regards it in Christian fashion as a virtue (since to cleanse one's vices is a waste of time), but one which can easily become entangled with self-pity and other forms of sentimentality, from which tragedy can purify it by its objectivity and fearful truth.

It is this necessity for purification which is not sufficiently noticed by many modern psycho-therapists, who may be, in their own way, concerned with the Senecan view. Ian Suttie in *The Origins of Love and Hate* traces interestingly enough to Puritan and Stoic sources the modern identification of all 'tender' emotion with sentimentality, and the consequent

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attempt to repress its expression in daily life. What he does not give weight to is the fact that this Stoic repression—in which the Puritans were no doubt encouraged by an almost exclusive restriction of their Biblical reading to the fiercer passages of the Old Testament—did in fact produce not only the dour, the merciless, and the emotionally repressed. It produced also—in reaction to suppression instead of purgation of emotion—precisely that sentimental unreality in popular art and manners which Seneca thought inseparable from all emotion as such, and which is the striking accompaniment of ages of great utilitarian ruthlessness like the Victorian and our own. For, if the values lived by are those of a dehydrated expediency, natural emotions must of necessity be divorced from reality and consequently diseased.

The most profound and reverberating contrast, however, between the Senecan *dementia* and the Christian *misericordia* remains that Senecan insistence on desert or expediency by which the quality of mercy is strained of all that makes it so. Only a man of Stoic pride, it would seem, could advise us to practise *dementia*, since we stand in need of it from God.

When one turns to the Elizabethan-Jacobean drama, one finds in most of it only a comparatively infrequent—and casual—plea for this Senecan clemency, ill-sewn to an occasional, conventional and hurried exchange of forgiveness between those who, having killed each other, have leisure to crown the action with a graceful phrase. When action, not gesture, is at stake, the motive is nearly always Ciceronian and Senecan. Henry's proffered mercy to Byron in Chapman's play¹ is precisely the political expediency which distinguishes the Augustan instance of the *De dementia* and *The Governour*, and whenever mercy is proffered or given it is commonly of this sort. In the later passage in the same play, where Byron asks for mercy, he says that the Queen of England told him that she would have pardoned Essex had he asked,

*even as she praft to God,
He would let down a pardon unto her.*

But this again does not necessarily go beyond the Senecan range. When mercy is asked, it is usual for the petitioner to cite

¹ *The Tragedy of Byron*, I, i.

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extenuating circumstances as the Duchess does in *The Revenger's Tragedy*, or as Tamora does in the first scene of *Titus Andronicus*, where the thoroughly Senecan quality of her appeal, bearing out the quality of the verse, suggests that Shakespeare had no hand in the earlier part of this play. Tamora appeals first to the circumstance of honest conviction ('valiant doings in their country's cause'), as cited by Seneca in, 'for if they have undertaken war upon honest grounds as for their faith, confederates, or liberty'. Then her

*Wilt thou draw near the nature of the gods?
Draw near them then in being merciful*

is again the vague Senecan suggestion of the *De dementia*, not the precise theological reference of the Shakespearian comedy. In *Richard II*, Bolingbroke's lines to Aumerle,

*Intended or committed was this fault?
If on the first, how heinous e'er it be
To win thy after love I pardon thee,*

are Senecan enough. It is however, I suggest, a character piece; for Henry is throughout this play precisely a political opportunist. In *The Life and Death of Jack Strawe*, Newton's casual appeal to the princely nature,

*Sith mercy in a Prince resembleth right
The gladsome sunshine in a winter's day,*

is actually made in an attempt to delay the King's mercy till the most impressive moment.

It is probably due to Shakespeare's now well-established influence that in Middleton's *Women Beware Women* Isabella avows

*Equal assurance may I find in mercy
As you for that in me,*

and Bianca's rather vague and bookish appeal to charity strikes the reader as an attenuated legacy from the same source, though there is no specific reference to the Atonement or to the mercy of God. She is, of course, insincere, offering to the

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Cardinal an argument 'on his own ground'. She appeals to charity,

which some call
The first born of religion, and I wonder—
/ cannot see't in yours. Believe it, sir,
There is no virtue can be sooner miss'd
Or later welcomed; it begins the rest
And sets 'em all in order: heaven and angels
Take great delight in a converted sinner.
Why should you then a servant and professor
Differ so much from them?

Of all later dramatists Beaumont and Fletcher perhaps profited most from Shakespeare, as witness the verbal echoes not merely of phrases but of whole speeches, and the adaptation of situations and character combinations from Shakespeare's plays. Not least did they absorb his doctrine of mercy, and the moving scene between Amintor and Evadne in *The Maid's Tragedy*, a play abounding in other echoes, is the fruit not only of *Measure for Measure* but of *Hamlet* and *Lear*. Yet even here there is no theological reference.

Only in Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness* does Frankford have mercy on his wife and her lover because they are 'bought with my Saviour's blood', and the wife's comment is notable:

*He cannot be so base as to forgive me
Nor I so shameless to accept his pardon.*

He does not indeed leave her unpunished, and she does not accept his comparative mercy. She proceeds instead to starve herself to death to the admiration and edification of the county. Yet in spite of this pious suicide Heywood's motives for good action are throughout predominantly Christian, and he is, in this, closest to Shakespeare of all contemporary dramatists.

Yet though *the feeling* of Heywood is much more akin to that of Shakespeare, I know no passage outside him as careful in its theological terms as Castabella's appeal in *The Atheist's Tragedy*, which strikes me as a probable, rather dehydrated imitation of Shakespeare. The appeal is unsuccessful, being addressed to

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the atheist d'Amville, and as Heywood lacks Shakespeare's intellectual texture, Tourneur lacks his power to move:

*O father, mercy is an attribute
As high as justice, an essential part
Of his unbounded goodness, whose divine
Impression, form and image man should bear!
And, methinks, man should love to imitate
His mercy, since the only countenance
Of justice were destruction, if the sweet
And loving favour of his mercy did
Not mediate between it and our weakness.*

It remains to look briefly at the convention of forgiveness after revenge. It is a reflection in private manners of the processes of public justice, and is not remarkable in an age when recognizably good men died violent and 'just' deaths, and both headsman and hangman asked their victims' pardon. To us the Elizabethan convention may seem hypocritical; yet it is the result of the otherworldly frame in which human life still appeared. The odds that one would meet one's 'dearest foe in heaven' were very high indeed, and applied not merely to one's political foe. The Elizabethans felt, much oftener than we did until the psycho-analysts shook our complacency, 'There but for the grace of God go F. 'Instead of an epilogue' to Webster's *White Devil* 'only this of Martial supplied' him:

Haec fuerint nobis praemia, si placui.

So the domestic tragedy, showing less genius and more correspondence to the actual events of life than does the more nearly surrealist mode, probably reflects accurately the conventional view, justice In this world, mercy—for the repentant—in the next. Heroines like Alice Arden leave the stage for execution, but with ultimate hopes, more or less endorsed by the dramatist, of heaven: the unrepentant, usually heroes, are 'reprobates'. But should they at the last minute repent they will have no doubt

*Whose blood must save me for the blood I shed.*¹

¹ *Arden of Feversham*, V, v, II.

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Nor will the onlookers doubt that

*now this repentance makes thee
As white as innocence.*¹

Whether they repent or not, in the eyes of the law which condemns them, the theological background will give them a tragic dignity. They 'are now going to God'. One reason perhaps why judicial processes have become more intolerable to us is that they have become final. We pity our malefactors, but we are not led by the very texture of our public thinking to expect to meet them again.

In the finely felt last scene of Dekker's *Witch of Edmonton*, the universal forgiveness is unhurried, and Frank's long speech, moving even to those who do not accept its presuppositions, is aesthetically successful.

*He is not lost
Who bears his peace within him: had I spun
My web of life out at full length, and dream'd
Away my many years in lusts, . . .
my miseries
Had been as everlasting as remediless:
But now the law hath not arraigned, condemned
With greater rigour my unhappy fact
Than I myself have every little sin
My memory can reckon from my childhood:
A court hath been kept here, where I am found
Guilty; the difference is, my impartial judge
Is much more gracious than my faults
Are monstrous to be nam'd.*

Yet compared with Shakespeare, Dekker, like Heywood, seems slightly anaemic. His praise of patience in *The Honest Whore* has a tincture of piousness which is not quite piety, and it is no accident that it is this and not the quality of mercy which Candido embodies and upholds:

*Patience, my lord! Why 'tis the soul of peace;
Of all the virtues 'tis the nearest kin to heaven.
It makes men look like gods. The best of men*

¹ *The Witch of Edmonton*, V, ii.

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*That e'er wore earth about him, was a sufferer,
A soft, meek, patient, humble, tranquil spirit,
The first true gentleman that ever breathed.*

Here gentleness has almost become gentility, while in *The Winter's Tale* the old shepherd insists it should be the other way round. Compared even with an early comedy like *The Merchant of Venice*, *The Honest Whore* lacks the sinew of the Shakespearian mind as well as of the Shakespearian style.

In Shakespeare's last plays, and even in *Measure for Measure*, mercy is transferred from the heavenly to the earthly judge. But in the comedies of this early period Shakespeare is still working inside the conventional distinction, mercy for intentions, but for actions, justice in this world, mercy in the next. The tone differs from Dekker's and Heywood's only in so far as it is that not of tragedy, but of a comedy, at once more intellectual and more universally humane, where, as always in comedy, evil purposes are happily prevented. The object of Portia's theological argument may, illogically enough, be a Jew, but he is the object also of the mercy which she asserts flows from the argument. Antonio has a much less obvious and actual neighbour to forgive than has Carter in *The Witch of Edmonton*, who is melted to natural pity by the youth and repentance of one allied to him in race, religion and the social milieu. What is distinctive in the early Shakespearian comedy therefore is, first, the motive it adduces for a mercy which elsewhere in comedy is asked only for Senecan reasons; and secondly, its agreement in this with the tragedy of the two most professedly and markedly 'Christian' of Shakespeare's dramatic contemporaries. The quasi-parallels in Beaumont and Fletcher, Middleton, and Tourneur are, like other and verbal echoes, not really parallels but signs of influence.

Shakespearian comedy, early or late, is comedy not in the Renaissance sense of the exposure of ridiculous affectation but in the medieval sense of a story with a happy ending. Mercy must therefore always be substituted for justice, since, as Rosalind remarked, 'even lovers deserve whipping, and the reason why they are not so punished and cured' is that the malady is universal—'the whippers are in love too'. With this proviso, however, one may say that only two comedies of this early

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period, *The Two Gentleman of Verona* and *The Merchant of Venice*, discuss explicitly the issue between justice and mercy. The rest are related to the problem rather in their general opposition of 'charity', in more than one sense, to law, in more than one sense, and in the expression of a significant vitality apparently good in itself.

In both *The Comedy of Errors* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* we have in the first scene a law which the prince 'by no means may extenuate' or 'disannul', although in both plays he desires to do so, in the first to save Aegeon and in the second to save Hermia. In neither play is the law set aside, but in the words of Berowne, in *Love's Labour's Lost*, 'Charity itself fulfils the law'. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* it does so by the help of Oberon, who rearranges the love affairs so that Demetrius loves Helena, and therefore no longer strives to possess Hermia. In *The Comedy of Errors* charity is due to the revelation of events. Aegeon, a character and *motif* entirely of Shakespeare's invention (there is no counterpart or even clue for him in the *Menaechmi* of Plautus) excites not even interest in Antipholus of Syracuse at the beginning of the play. Yet Aegeon is revealed by time and event as the father he came to seek. One might well say, not entirely facetiously at the end of this not entirely facetious comedy, 'Who is my mother, and who are my brethren?' Aegeon's speech (V, i, 309-18) is not flippant, and reference and metre alike are occasionally reminiscent of the mysteries. Perhaps in creating Aegeon, Aemilia and Solinus (as well as Balthassar, Angelo, Luciana and the second Dromio), Shakespeare had more in mind than a Plautian farce.

In *Love's Labour's Lost* also, charity in at least two senses fulfils the law which the King had sought in mere legalisms. First, love—and 'who can sever love from charity'—sees humbly, in women's eyes, the books, the arts, the academies of life, and this was a study which the King's academy had foresworn. Secondly, from women's tongues the lovers themselves learn a good deal of moral and ascetical theology! For the Princess prescribes that the King's devotion should show itself in real penance instead of being stifled in the vanity of his merely theoretical asceticism, whose only aim was disentanglemerjt from what he described as the grosser manner. So he who had aspired to be the wonder of the world by inventing a little academy where

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'the mind shall banquet though the body pine', he who had 'died to love' only to 'live in philosophy' is abjured to abandon this double conceit and to

go with speed
To some forlorn and naked hermitage,
Remote from all the pleasures of the world; . . .
If this austere insociable life
Change not your offer made in heat of blood;
If frosts and fasts, hard lodging and thin weeds,
Nip not the gaudy blossoms of your love,
But that it bear this trial and last love;
Then at the expiration of the year,
Come challenge me.

And for Berowne, the twelve months' purging he must undergo, before the happy ending comes indeed, is to be spent visiting the speechless sick, and the task that Rosaline sets his gibing spirit is

With all the fierce endeavour of your wit
To enforce the pained impotent to smile.

No doubt if Berowne learnt more from the charity of normal love-making on the greensward than from the individualistic pseudo-asceticism of the King of Navarre, he would learn more still from his charitable intention to 'jest a twelvemonth in a hospital'. Exquisitely light as the play is, it is taut with aristocratic learning, and dances with the artifice of an amateur divinity school. It is a comedy as serious in its way as Jonson's, though 'the words of Mercury' have become 'the songs of Apollo'.

In *Much Ado* and *Twelfth Night*, distillations of the soul of goodness in things a little evil, it is the significant vitality which makes the strongest impression on the mind. Fools like Dogberry and Verges save not only themselves but others from disaster by the crude, innocent onset of their mere life. Moreover, it has been well noted by Algernon Blackwood, in a broadcast talk, that even the fairies of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are not the 'other people' of popular legend. They have lost all that makes them sinister; they are capricious but kind, so that even beyond the outposts of humanity 'whatever is, is

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good'. In *Twelfth Night* there is no character who does not see others, and who is not seen himself, in terms of Augustine's dictum *those things are good which yet are corrupted'.¹ The exposure of Malvolio's affectation makes the play more deeply akin than any other of Shakespeare's to the Renaissance comedy of castigation whether of knave or fool. Yet it is also the play impregnated even above the others of this early period with a spontaneous charity extending to Malvolio himself. To appreciate Shakespeare's world one has only to contrast *Twelfth Night* with *Epicoene*, to think not merely of the treatment meted out to the more harmless Morose, but of the attitude towards him, the whole atmosphere of 'enlightened' and pitiless self-interest in which events take place and judgements are made. Olivia, on the other hand, who recognizes that Malvolio is 'sick of self-love', 'would not lose him for more than I'll say':

Good Maria, let this fellow be looked to. ... Let some of my people have a special care of him. I would not have him miscarry for the half of my dowry.

The very conspirators who plot his downfall 'may rather pluck on laughter than revenge', and think of mercy in advance. 'We may carry it thus for our pleasure and his penance till our very pastime, tired out of breath, prompt us to have mercy on him', says the irrepressible Sir Toby, and Malvolio himself, in the height of his 'ecstasy', has no further design on his enemy than to persuade him to amend his drunkenness and forbear to waste the treasure of his time. Malvolio is indeed an exceptionally high type of steward; there is no misappropriation of funds, no favoured few, no incompetency, no cruelty. He suffers simply for inability to recognize the nature of his office, and for compounding for the sins of the intellect by damning those of the flesh. 'Art any more than a steward? Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?'

In *Muck Ado* there is one character, the shadowy bastard, Don John, who neither sees others, nor is seen himself, as good. But the stuff of natural life, the rude texture of Dogberry and Verges even more than of Beatrice and Benedict is too much for him, and we are left with the impression that 'evil is nothing in

¹ *Confessions*, VII, 18.

itself'.¹ Shakespeare lived in an age when the English—then, we are told often, in their finest and most typical hour—admired intelligence more than they have done since. The man whose heroines had high foreheads and tongues 'with a tang', whose heroes can destroy a world with their reason and create one with their imagination, showed none of the sentimental dislike of the intellect which we are told is a typically English trait. But he knew that in the hands of Dogberry, who may be written down only an ass, we are ultimately safe: life is a comedy. He will, like Polonius, 'by indirections find directions out', but, unlike Polonius, he will assist at no usurping *coup d'ttat*, and his tenacious stupidity, even his 'corrupt' but, compared with Malvolio's, his almost innocent aplomb will wreck the plans of wiser men. For the God, who is so powerful that he can even make good out of evil, 'hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise'.² So 'what your wisdoms could not discover these shallow fools have brought to light*. This, Borachio's unwilling testimonial, is borne out by Feste in *Twelfth Night*: 'God give them wisdom that have it, and those that are fools, let them use their talents'. Perhaps in *Twelfth Night* they 'abuse' them, and Malvolio's good is rather the good of a tragic character who learns wisdom from his suffering. Yet there is no suggestion that he loved Olivia. Only his pride is hurt. Therefore 'pursue him and entreat him to a peace'. Jonson's Morose is not entreated; he is only pursued.

As you Like It has in it more evil in event and character than any comedy before *Measure for Measure*. The Duke Senior's banishment by his usurping brother, the casting off of Rosalind, the unnatural, calculating cruelty of Oliver, might well be matter for a tragic theme. Moreover, here, as in the tragedies, events follow from character in a moral sequence, given opportunity by fortune but set in motion by man himself. As all the suffering of the play begins in the 'fault' of Duke Frederick and Oliver, so its turning point is forgiveness, Orlando's turning back to save his brother in the last scene of Act IV:

CELIA: *O! I have heard him speak of that same brother;
And he did render him the most unnatural
That liv'd Amongst men.*

¹ *Summa*, 1:48:1:0.

² i Corinthians i, 27.

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OLIVER: *And well he might so do,
For well I know he was unnatural.*

ROSALIND: *But, to Orlando: did he leave him there,
Food to the suck'd and hungry lioness?*

OLIVER: *Twice did he turn his back and purposed so;
But kindness, nobler ever than revenge,
And nature, stronger than his just occasion,
Made him give battle to the lioness,
Who quickly fell before him: in which hurtling
From miserable slumber I awaked.*

Oliver 'awakes' in more senses than one. Orlando gives no theological reasons for his action—perhaps because, as he tells us in the first scene, he has lacked the education of a gentleman! It is in him 'kindness' in Chaucer's sense, 'nature' and not explicitly 'grace'.

Here in *As You Like It* the word 'nature' itself follows to stress the meaning, but 'kind' and 'kindness' in Shakespeare always still carry the Chaucerian force of 'nature' or 'natural', and Shakespeare himself accelerates the transfer to the secondary sense (*our* sense), which is held in equilibrium with the other in his plays. This secondary sense has in him, however, none of that slightly flabby quality which it has acquired in an age where flaccid emotions are more valued than—or, by the *soi-disant* 'hard-boiled', confused with—the natural will to good, usually accompanied by, but not consisting in, emotion. To study further this curious transfer of good from the will to the emotions one has only to follow the history of the phrase 'good will' itself. 'Affect' and 'affection', too, still always imply in Shakespeare, as in Aquinas, a movement of the will—which may indeed be either good or bad. So Berowne, in *Love's Labour's Lost*, making a different emphasis from Oliver's, speaks not only of the good nature (*not* good-nature) which has been corrupted, but also of the evil will which corrupts it—original sin:

*For every man with his affects is born,
Not by might mastered but by special grace. . .*

In Shakespearian conversation 'corrupt' nature is usually contrasted with 'grace', while at the same time 'unnatural' is a

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very strong word of condemnation, reflecting the theological commonplace that since the fall only by supernatural means can man be even natural. Yet it is not until *Measure for Measure* that 'grace' and 'nature' are formally united in 'man new made'. The tragedies, which explore unsparingly the working of nature without grace, and *The Tempest*, which returns to the doctrine of Isabella, are both foreshadowed, as it were in dumb show, in *As You Like It*. Here is the world of nature only, which becomes unnatural, the pivotal forgiveness of Orlando (as opposed to the huddled *denouement* of Valentine's pardon in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*) miming the more articulate redemption of the last plays. In comedy as in history Shakespeare learnt from his plots, finding in them both problems and solutions of the concatenation of character and event. Duke Frederick's conversion in *As You Like It* by the casual encounter with 'an old religious man' is rather like Valentine's sudden theological sensitiveness in *The Two Gentlemen*, more appropriate to the event than credible in the character. Perhaps looking back at this arbitrary trick to pull the plot together Shakespeare compared it with Orlando's forgiveness and learnt from it his subsequent principle of moral consequence.

Two of these early plays, as I suggested, deal more explicitly with justice and mercy. It has been said with some excuse that *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* is a misnomer, and that there is in fact only one. Yet the most remarkable part of the action is that for which neither Troteus nor Providence is responsible but Valentine himself, the gentleman who indeed qualifies for his title but, it is frequently felt, at the cost of his humanity. Arriving in the last scene just in time to prevent his best friend from ravishing his future wife, he first indulges naturally enough in some cynical observations upon friendship:

VALENTINE: *Ruffian, let go that rude uncivil touch;*60
Thou friend of an ill fashion!

PROTEUS: *Valentine!*

VALENTINE: *Thou common friend, thafs without faith or love,*
For such is a friend now; treacherous man!
Thou hftot beguil'd my hopes; nought but mine eye
Could have persuaded me. Now I dare not say
I have one friend alive: thou would'st disprove me.

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*Who should be trusted now, when one's right hand
Is perjured to the bosom? Proteus,
I am sorry I must never trust thee more,
But count the world a stranger for thy sake.
The private wound is deepest. O, time most accurst!
'Mongst all foes that a friend should be the worst/* 72

PROTEUS: *My shame and guilt confounds me;
Forgive me, Valentine. If hearty sorrow
Be a sufficient ransom for offence,
I tender't here. I do as truly suffer
As e'er I did commit.*

VALENTINE: *Then I am paid;
And once again I do receive thee honest.
Who by repentance is not satisfied
Is nor of heaven nor earth; for these are pleas'd.
By penitence the Eternal's wrath's appeas'd:
And that my love may appear plain and free
All that was mine in Silvia I give thee.* 83

The Cambridge editors suggest that this scene may be divided into three parts, of which the middle one (lines 60-120) is claimed to be stylistically non-Shakespearian, but it seems more probable from the metrical evidence that what we have here is not the entrance of another hand, but a corrupt text. The un-Shakespearian movement of the verse surely begins not at line 60 but at line 58, and in spite of three weak endings between line 72 and line 80, this series of lines does not *strike* me, without metrical analysis, as in the least foreign—while lines 58 to 72 certainly do. The break-up of any sort of rhythm at line 83 adds to the general confusion. It seems to me that whoever wrote this part of the scene the text is corrupt, and that since it is corrupt the evidence against Shakespearian authorship is not strong.

The matter of Valentine's speech is at once like and unlike what one would expect from the author of *The Merchant of Venice* and *Measure for Measure*. Here appears for the first time a recurring Shakespearian *motif*, 'Forgive as you are forgiven'. But Valentine, forgiving in a gesture as he conceives God to forgive him, is very different from Isabella, who suffers both in pleading for forgiveness for Claudio and in forgiving Angelo

herself. Even Portia, who does not, like Isabella, cite any particular form of the doctrine of the Atonement, appears to conceive it much more objectively as something done and not merely granted by God. In so far as God appears actively in Valentine's version, the conception, like that of Warwick the Kingmaker in *2 Henry VI* seems Lutheran in contrast to Isabella's markedly Catholic interpretation. 'The Eternal's wrath', though not exclusively, is certainly typically Lutheran.¹

What is however most striking about Valentine's action—apart from his quite orthodox placing of friendship above both his love for Silvia and Silvia's love for him—is first, the fact that he claims a Christian motive at all, and secondly, the suddenness with which this motive is produced; for he has little enough character of any sort, let alone the kind of character from which such an action and such a motive might with probability proceed. The action, perhaps, should not amaze us in the context of the normal ending to an Elizabethan-Jacobean comedy outside Shakespeare, where there is a general tendency to forget rather than to forgive. Valentine assumes a motive if he has it not. The only reason for his assuming it, since neither his character nor the usage of the drama demands it, is that it was a motive significant to his creator, who returned to it long before *Measure for Measure* in a play whose main plot is devoted almost entirely to a discussion of the same theme.

The Merchant of Venice is more often acted than understood. The tragic or comic Shylock who is, according to taste, disentangled from the complexities of the text, turns the play into a light-hearted parody or solemn defence of Judaism, both equally distorting to character and event. For *The Merchant of Venice* is essentially, not a play about a Jew, but a play about human relationships. It is not after the pattern of Marlowe called *The Jew of Venice* but *The Merchant of Venice*. The title-page of the second quarto (1600) reads: 'The most excellent Historic of the *Merchant of Venice*. With the extreame crueltie of *Shylocke* the Jewe towards the sayd merchant, in cutting a just pound of his flesh.' This suggests that the merchant is conceived as the important person and Shylock important *in his relations to* Antonio, and if it still be objected that Shylock is its real hero,

¹ See Chapter VII. Compare with the contrasted versions given there, *2 Henry VI*, III, ii, 153-5, and *Measure for Measure*, II, ii, 73-9.

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as Brutus is the real hero of *Julius Caesar*, he is so, rather as a man who happens to be a Jew, than as a Jew who happens, unlike Marlowe's Barrabas, to be a man. This granted, Shylock's Judaism is very important indeed, since it makes peculiarly appropriate the double significance, personal and universal, which was in any work of art a commonplace to the Elizabethan but to which we, perhaps by too much 'psychological' criticism, were for some time made blind. What had been for several years my own rather groping approach to *The Merchant of Venice* I have found stated with such clarity and succinctness in an essay by Mr Nevill Coghill that I cannot but quote it here:

What I think may be the Shakespearian solution to this problem [of dramatic production] first came to me when I was attempting a study of *Piers Plowman*. In that poem, Truth (God) sends Piers a pardon, in two lines of Latin:

*Et qui bona egerunt, ibunt in vitam eternam,
Qui vero mala, in ignem eternum.*

In the first version of this poem (known as the A Text) this 'pardon' remains an unexplained enigma. In what sense is it a pardon? It may show Justice, but not Mercy; and where is pardon without that? The second version of the poem (the B Text) is immensely longer, and adds the whole story of the Incarnation and of Christ's descent into Hell. There He rescues from the tyranny of the Fiend all those faithful souls (those of Adam, the Patriarchs and the Prophets) that have languished there since the fall of man and before the Incarnation.

Now His right to do this is very closely argued beforehand by four allegorical characters, those daughters of God, Mercy and Truth, Righteousness and Peace. Righteousness and Truth deny the justice of Christ's invasion of Hell and release of the souls there. But Mercy and Peace plead the Incarnation. The argument, to be found in Passus XVIII of the B Text, lines 113 to 227, may be briefly stated thus: that under the Old Law, God ordained punishment for sin, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth; but under the New Law, God underwent and paid that punishment Himself on Calvary. And thus an absolute Justice and an absolute Mercy are combined and Christ is free to despoil Hell, in His mercy and without Injustice. Truth demands a payment which

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Love pays, for, as the poem says in an earlier passage, God is Truth and Love. The New Law does not contradict, but complements, the Old.

A like argument, also conducted by the Four Daughters of God, concludes *The Castle of Perseverance*, a play written early in the fifteenth century. In this, the protagonist, *Humanum Genus*, has died in sin, and his soul comes up for judgment. Righteousness and Truth demand his damnation; Mercy and Peace plead the merits of the Incarnation, and *Humanum Genus* is saved. The play ends with *Te Deum Laudamus*.

Now if we follow this Christian tradition into Shakespeare, and see in *The Merchant of Venice* a presentation, I had almost said an allegory, of the theme of Justice and Mercy, of the Old Law and the New, an entirely different complexion is put upon the opposition of Gentile and Jew. The two principles for which they stand are both inherently right, and they are only in conflict because, whereas God is absolutely just as He is absolutely merciful, a mortal finite man can only be relatively so, and must arrive at some compromise; in human affairs either justice must yield a little to mercy or mercy to justice. The conflict of Shylock and Antonio is thus an *exemplum* (to use a mediaeval phrase) in modern dress of a traditional theme, and supplies its resolution.

Just as the characters drawn in the Prologue of the *Canterbury Tales* are at the same time highly individual characters, full of personal idiosyncrasy, and also representatives of the several classes and professions of fourteenth-century society, that is, they are both individuals and types, so, in *The Merchant of Venice*, Antonio and his allies not only stand as representatives of the New Testament and Shylock of the Old (neither of which is rejected by Christianity) but also they are highly personal individuals, full of idiosyncrasy and even fault. A production can comprehend or include this aspect successfully only if it has the deeper spiritual basis I have tried to indicate, and which I shall presently analyse in greater detail. On the purely human plane (which is of course continually present on the stage) they are men, with the faults of their kind, moved by a variety of passions and peculiarities. Only in Portia are we shown no blemish. This is a circumstance not peculiar to this play; Shakespeare was wont to show womanhood and virginity as pearl-rounded and pearl-pure. But his men have their faults, and lest I should be thought to ignore them as "characters" in insisting

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on a deeper quasi-allegorical interpretation, let me delay that a little for some account of the human nature of the leading figures.

After a particularly interesting discussion of the relations between Antonio and Bassanio, Mr Coghill goes on:

Let us return to the Trial scene. Shylock stands for the Law, for the right notion that a man must be bound by his word and that things must be paid for. It is the Old Law.

As *Piers Plowman* has it:

. . . the olde lawe graunteth
That gylours be bigiled . and that is gode reasoun,
Dentem pro dente, & oculum pro oculo.

Before his uncompromising demand for justice, mercy is in the posture of a suppliant refused. Thrice his money is offered and repudiated. He is urged to supply a surgeon at his own cost; but no, it is not in the bond.

The scene is constructed, from a technical point of view, on a sudden reversal of situation which is one of the traditional weapons for dramatic surprise. The verbal trick by which Portia traps Shylock is not a part of her 'character', but a device to turn the tables and to show justice in the posture of a suppliant before mercy. The reversal is instantaneous and complete, as it is also unexpected to those who do not know the story in advance. Portia plants it firmly:

Downe therefore, and beg mercy of the Duke.

And, in a twinkling, mercy shows her quality. The Duke replies:

*That thou shalt see the difference of our spirit,
I pardon thee thy life before thou aske it:
For halfe thy wealth, it is Anthonio's,
The other halfe comes to the generall state,
Which humblenesse may driue vnto a fine.*

Out of this there comes a second reversal. Shylock, till then pursuing Antonio's life, now has to turn to him for favour; and this is Antonio's response:

*So please my Lord the Duke, and all the Court
To quit the fine for one halfe of his goods,
I am content: so he will let me haue*

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*The other halfe in vse, to render it
Vpon his death, unto the Gentleman
That lately stole his daughter.
Two things prouided more, that for this fauour
He presently become a Christian:
The other, that he doe record a gift
Heere in the Court of all he dies possest
Vnto his sonne Lorenzo, and his daughter.*

Evidently Antonio recognizes the validity of legal deeds, and his opinion on Jessica's relationship with Lorenzo is in agreement with Shakespeare's, namely that the bond between husband and wife over-rides the bond between father and daughter. Cordelia and Desdemona would have assented. This condition, even to a modern ear, does not seem unnaturally harsh. It is his second condition that has proved a stumbling-block; for in these days we are all good humanitarians and incline to the view that a man's religion is his own affair, that a religion imposed is tyranny, and that one religion is as good as another, provided it be sincerely followed.

All this would have seemed so much rubbish to an Elizabethan. Only perhaps in Utopia, where it was one of 'the auncientest lawes among them that no man shall be blamed for reasonynge in the mayntenaunce of his owne religion' (and Utopia was not in Christendom) would such views have seemed acceptable. Whether we dislike it or not, an unbaptised Jew had then no hope of entering into Christian eternity. 'No man cometh unto the Father but by me.' It would not have been his cruelty that excluded him (for cruelty can be repented) but his lack of baptism; he had no wedding-garment.

This is, as it is meant to be, an accurate summing up of the popular attitude, certainly reinforced by the Calvinist and Lutheran doctrine that heathen virtues 'non sunt'. The fathers and medieval theologians, however, were more chary of setting limits to God's 'uncovenanted mercies', and the *Summa* (3:68:2:c) rejects the notion that actual baptism is a necessity, discussing at some length 'the baptism of desire', which, like faith (cf. 2-2:1:7), might be implicit. Moreover, though St Thomas does not, like the modern Church, say that this baptism of desire is possible *through Christ* to all at any time who are 'in

good faith'—i.e. follow their consciences—he does point out that it applies to those who could not technically desire baptism, since they lived before its institution. Having been *objectively* redeemed by Christ (for to God all things are present), they were subjectively brought to this salvation, if pagans by their observance of 'natural law', if Jews, 'more securely' by the observance of 'the old law' (1-2:98:5:3).

This quite orthodox doctrine does not, however, appear to have been much *preached*, and Shylock, in any case, is hardly perhaps eligible to benefit under it. Mr Coghill continues his summing up of the opinions of the audience for which Shakespeare wrote:

Now Shylock had spent the play pursuing the life of Antonio (albeit for private motives) in the name of justice; now, at this reversal, when he is suppliant to the man whose life he had sought, his victim instantly offers him eternal life, his own best jewel.¹

No doubt it would be painful for Shylock to swallow his pride and abjure his race and faith in favour of the Christianity he hated:

(/ hate him for he is a Christian) . . .

But it has seldom been pretended that Christianity (the centre of which is crucifixion) is a pleasure, or that it is equally easy for every nature to embrace it. If our thoughts allow themselves to pursue Shylock after he had left the Court, we may well wonder whether his compulsory submission to baptism induced him to take up his cross and follow Christ. Even Antonio, backed by all the magnificoes of Venice, could not have enforced it. But at least from Antonio's point of view Shylock has his chance of eternal joy, and it is he that has given it him. Mercy has triumphed over justice, even if the way of mercy is a hard way.

Once this aspect of the Trial scene is perceived, the fifth Act becomes an intelligible extension of the allegory (if I may use so uncompromising a word). For we return to Belmont to find Lorenzo and Jessica, Jew and Christian,

¹ Mr Coghill wishes to emend this phrase to 'instantl/ offers him (so far as it is in the power of a human being to do so) the eternal life that is his own best jewel*.

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Old Law and New, united in love; and their talk is of music, Shakespeare's recurrent symbol of harmony:

*There's not the smallest orbe which thou beholdest
But in his motion like an Angell sings,
Still quiring to theyoung-eyed Cherubins;
Such harmonie is in immortall soules,
But whilst this muddy vesture of decay
Doth grosly close it in, we cannot heare it:*

Shylock may not have heard it, but the means to hear it had been offered him.¹

This pattern which Mr Coghill sees in *The Merchant of Venice* is not, as I have suggested, peculiar to it in Shakespeare. It is a pattern of which faint traces may be seen in every comedy, even in this first undisturbed period of his art. In *The Comedy of Errors* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as in *The Merchant of Venice*, a prince desires to set aside the law, making arithmetical justice geometrical, but feels that to do so would destroy the whole concept of law. In *As You Like It* //justice is taken out of the courts and left with private men like Orlando, so wild that it is actually called revenge. And always the solution to the problem, various in accidental features, is the same in substance: 'Charity fulfils the law'. So Orlando, fulfilling the law of natural affection, heals the 'breach in nature' which Oliver had made, already suggesting that men may, by the good of another, be redeemed. In *Twelfth Night* and *Much Ado*, however, the emphasis is not so much on redemption as on redeemability—if one may be permitted to coin such a monstrous word.

Yet in none of these plays, not even in *The Merchant of Venice*, is there yet any real application in action of the principle of the doctrine of the Atonement to which Portia in the famous plea for mercy appeals. Of this appeal the first fourteen lines, though they can be paralleled in St Matthew (v, 43-8), are not un-Senecan, but Portia goes on:

*Though justice be thy plea, consider this
That in the course of justice, none of us
Should see salvation; we do pray for mercy
And what same prayer doth teach us all to render
The deeds of mercy.*

¹ *Shakespearean Quarterly* No. i (Vienna, 1948), *The Governing Idea*.

Here the word 'salvation' stamps the appeal as theological, even if the whole context of the play with its contrast of Jew and Christian did not. Yet though the appeal is to theology, the action is not yet theological. Antonio suffers a little, and to that extent justly, not only in a legal but in a more widely moral sense; for Portia's speech throws no uncertain light upon the previous conduct of the Christians as upon that of the Jews. Yet he does not suffer *in forgiving*. He has no mental struggles like Isabella or Prospero. The motive is the motive of the Atonement, but in the action of the play there is little if any vicarious suffering: the crucifixion, as Mr Coghill suggests, will probably be Shylock's. Except faintly in dumb show in *As Thou Like It*, mercy is only the permission to be—in some other context—'made good'.

CHAPTER III

THE FIRST TESTING-CORRUPTION AND SALVATION

(*Troilus and Cressida*, *The Phoenix and the Turtle*, *Hamlet*,
Measure for Measure, *All's Well That Ends Well*)

Seems, Madam! nay it is; I know not 'seems'.

Hamlet I, ii, 74.

FROM *Hamlet* onwards Shakespeare knows not 'seems', and it is in *Troilus and Cressida*, the first play of the testing period that this choice is made. It initiates those two cycles of tragic testing and comic resolution in which the Christian hypothesis of the earlier plays is not only left to the comment of plot, but subjected ruthlessly to every assault and rigour of life as it is. Even if we did not come to it, as most of us do, after a longer and more deeply felt experience of the greater plays, we should be aware of standing on a threshold: 'Within doors house the shocks'.

By no stretch nor contraction of the imagination can *Troilus and Cressida* be called a play with a happy ending.¹ It is a more 'lamentable' tragedy than any other but *Macbeth*', for if it lacks the ultimate terror of damnation it has, for the hero, neither redemption nor the clean cut of death;

*Fell sorrow's tooth doth never rankle more
Than when it bites, but lanceth not the sore.*

¹ The First Folio editors' intention to print it after '*Romeo and Juliet*'—an intention recorded by unimpeachable bibliographical evidence (see Giles Dawson, *Bib. Soc.*, 1941, and F. P. Wilson, *Shakespeare and the New Bibliography*, in *Studies in Retrospect*) *Bib. Soc.*, Jubilee number)—indicates clearly that they considered it a tragedy. Even its actual position, at the end of the tragedies and the beginning of the histories, hardly encourages the strange subsequent error of adding it in classified indexes to the comedy list (in *Fi* it does not appear in the index, since this was apparently printed before the trouble over the copyright of *Troilus and Cressida* was resolved).

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Troilus, like Oedipus, must live with his revelation, which, in the eyes of the audience, spreads to every character in the play.

Neither Troilus *nor* Diomedes dies, perhaps because there is nothing to die for. 'If beauty have a soul, this is not she', and why should Diomedes die for playing with 'a daughter of the game'? Nor, most depressingly to the just, does Achilles die, or even suffer any reproach except the pitiless silhouetting against Hector that is accomplished by their own lines. The 'fair play' of Hector, the 'vice of mercy' in him, is Tool's play, by Heaven', and the world is parted among the infinite variations between such a fool and the complete knave. For there are no sound men:

TROILUS: *When many times the captive Grecian falls,
Even in the fan and wind of your fair sword
You bid them rise and live.*

HECTOR: *O! 'tis fair play.*

TROILUS: *FooVs play, by Heaven, Hector . . .
Lefs leave the hermit pity with our mothers.
And when we have our armours buckled on
The venom'd vengeance ride upon our swords,
Spur them to ruthless work, rein them from ruth.*

HECTOR: *Fie, savage fie.*

Yet even in its savagery, and this is the greatness of *Troilus and Cressida*, its world is the real world, of which Thersites, too often promoted by critics to be its creator, is only a part, as the chorus is only a part of the play. It is a world devoid of faith, hope and charity, except in the humorous toleration of Pandarus and the indestructible beauty of the lines themselves; but it is as blindingly actual as *The Waste Land*. It is nature without grace:

PANDARUS: Friend, know me better. I am the Lord Pandarus.

SERVANT: I hope I shall know your honour better.

PANDARUS: I do desire it.

SERVANT: You are in a state of grace?

PANDARUS: Grace! Not so, friend, honour and lordship are my titles.

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Troilus and Cressida is, as the clown has it, a 'music in parts'. Charles Williams, in *Reason and Beauty in the Poetic Mind*, rightly sees the schism between what the passion apprehends as beauty and what the reason seizes as truth as the central *motif*, not only of this play, but of Shakespeare's tragedies as a whole. Yet this is, I think, the surface edge of a deeper distinction, between the ideal perfection which love tends always to create, actually or mentally, in what is loved, and the corrupt fact. So Cordelia's creation is the actual Lear, but Troilus, too poor in love to create actually, too poor in goodness to suffer vicariously, accomplishes only a mental fiction, which is as much a fiction about himself as a fiction about Cressida. For Hamlet there are no fictions; that is his tragedy. He begins where Troilus ends. Othello's fiction about Desdemona is the creation of Iago's reason, not of his own love, but his fiction about Iago, in which the possibility of tragedy begins, is precisely the fiction of emotion divorced from reason. Macbeth, a combination of Richard of Gloucester and Richard of Bordeaux, both in their different ways trying to live in an unreal world of their own making, is damned because he knows that it is unreal. Richard of Gloucester knows this only subconsciously, and Richard of Bordeaux never knows it at all.

Both damnation and salvation are the results of knowledge; Shakespeare, therefore, attacked the intellectual problem first. The patterns of appearance and reality on the one hand, and of corruption and either salvation or damnation on the other, become in the tragedies one continuous pattern, in which reality and corruption are the same. So the revelation of Troilus, which Hamlet translates from the term reality into the term corruption, is a necessary prelude to the essays in redemption which constitute *Measure for Measure*, *A Winter's Tale* and *Lear*. For salvation begins precisely in this consciousness of reality as corruption, in Hamlet's perception in himself of the *corruptans*, in others of the thing corrupted. *Othello* and *Lear*, following the provisional resolution of *Measure for Measure*, intensify the evil, and work through the same problem in harder, more terrible manifestations. It would seem that Shakespeare determined that if the solution of *Measure for Measure* were to stand—and we feel as we read it that it is premature—it must face the utmost and inmost evil that the imagination could consistently

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devise. Consistently; for there are no monsters in Shakespeare's tragedies; he was concerned with men and women, who, it may be conceded, give scope enough within the limits of imaginative truth.

Troilus and Cressida is not yet on this later scale, nor of this later intensity. It is a preliminary study, its characteristic in line rather than mass, etched fine and hard with a dominant emotion blurring its crisp clarity, not of terror but of disgust:

*This chaos, when degree is suffocate,
Follows the choking.*

To describe the play as the exposure of the crude realities beneath the conventional chivalries of love and war is a commonplace. Yet its revelation falls into three, rather than two, separate *exposes*, each reinforcing the others in declaring, with *The Phoenix and the Turtle*, 'single nature's double name'. Romantic love is only lust, order is worldly wisdom, and honour, personal pride; not to the natural cynic terrifying or even remarkable conclusions. They disgust only the imaginative mind which could conceive their first names. Only such a mind could say of the single nature, 'This is, and is not, Cressid'.

The central tragedy is that of Troilus, and it is perhaps not without significance that in his first conversation with Pandarus he uses the odd words, 'the open ulcer of my heart'. To Pandarus alone apparently this ulcer is open; for it is he who, in the next scene, speaks of Troilus the *motif* sentence which only at the end of the play the disillusioned lover is to apply to Cressid:

PANDARUS: Well, I say Troilus is Troilus.

CRESSIDA: Then you say as I say; for I am sure he is not Hector.

PANDARUS: No, nor Hector is not Troilus in some degrees.

CRESSIDA: 'Tis just to each of them; he is himself.

PANDARUS: Alas, poor Troilus; I would he were . . . Himself! No, he's not himself. Would 'a were himself. . . .

You have no judgement niece. Heleil herself swore th'other day, that Troilus for a brown favour, for so I must confess 'tis not brown neither,—

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CRESSIDA: No, but brown.

PANDARUS: Faith to say truth, brown and not brown.

CRESSIDA: To say the truth, true and not true.

This is indeed precisely Troilus, 'true and not true'. To write, as Frederick Losey does in his introduction to Harrap's edition, that 'no-one who reads with attention the second scene of Act III can be for a moment deceived into thinking that Troilus is in love with Cressida' is to be not more, but less, sensitive than Troilus himself. For Troilus *is* deceived. He *believes* his own lines,

*/ am as true as truth's simplicity
And simpler than the infancy of truth.*

His misgivings are about Cressida, not about himself, and his mind may well misgive; for she has said already,

*I have a kind of self resides with you;
But an unkind self, that itself will leave,
To be another's fool.*

Since 'unkind' is 'unnatural', Cressida is already saying, 'I am, and am not, Cressid'.

Yet Troilus also has a kind of self which resides with him; for he idealizes not only Cressida but his relations with Cressida, and like the Shelleyan idealist finds, in his world only, the evil which he might, with Hamlet, have found also in himself. The disparity between the situation in Act III and Troilus's version of it in Act V is as startling—perhaps, to the reader who has listened more carefully than Troilus to Cressida's speeches, more startling—than the disparity between the two Cressids:

*This she? No; this is Diomed's Cressida.
If beauty have a soul, this is not she;
If souls guide vows, if vows be sanctimony.
If sanctimony be the gods' delight,
If there be rule in unity itself,
This is not she. O madness of discourse,
That cause sets up with and against thyself: . . .
 this is, and is not, Cressid.
Within my soul there doth conduce a fight*

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*Of this strange nature that a thing inseparate
Divides more wider than the sky and earth; . . .
Instance, O instance! strong as Pluto's gates;
Cressid is mine, tied with the bonds of heaven:
Instance, O instance! strong as heaven itself;
The bonds of heaven are slipped, dissolved, and loosed;
And with another knot, five-finger-tied,
The fractions of her faith, orts of her love,
The fragments, scraps, the bits and greasy reliques
Of her o'er-eaten faith, are bound to Diomed.*

Cressida was, quite simply, not tied with the bonds of heaven. *I do know', says Polonius in Shakespeare's next play, 'when the blood burns how prodigal the soul lends the tongue vows', and it is only of these 'broker' vows that Troilus makes his sanctimony. Nor can he be conceived, as Charles Williams appears to conceive him, as a lost innocent, really 'as true as truth's simplicity'. Paris's brother lived in a considerably more sophisticated society than, for example, Longus's Daphnis, who certainly makes the distinction between a liaison and a marriage. There is no suggestion here that a legal pre-contract has been signed or even planned. Pandarus, it is true, says,

Words pay no debts, give her deeds: but she'll bereave
you o' the deeds too if she call your activity in question.
What! billing again? Here's—'In witness whereof the parties
interchangeably'—Come in, come in: I'll go get a fire.

Yet before, after and during this equivocal speech, Pandarus's lines suggest, in the normal connotation of the term, a pandar. He 'gives his word' for both. Nor when Troilus asks that he 'may wallow in the lily-beds' are we reminded of a contract of marriage. Certainly Priam and Calchas had signed no marriage bond.

Yet still less for either Troilus or Cressida in Act III is their liaison 'merely a lust of the blood and a permission of the will'. Each to the other is sensuously beautiful, and the lust of the blood, which Iago argued could sate Desdemona with Othello's body, has neither eyes for images, nor ears for rhythms like theirs. Shakespeare does not in *Troilus and Cressida* deny romantic love, he only suggests what, left to itself, it becomes:

lust in Cressida, in Troilus an escape from the real world. In the fact itself is a disunity:

This is the monstrosity in love, lady, that the will is infinite and the execution confined; that the desire is boundless, and the act a slave to limit.

The lines have an obvious physiological meaning, but the texture of Troilus's speech is the Thomistic psychology of will and act, the same learning as he displays, not quite in character, in his earlier argument with Hector, a remarkable *tour de force* for one only as true as truth's simplicity. So here also perhaps, one may see, beneath Troilus, Shakespeare commenting upon his own play. His words illustrate precisely that deflection of the infinite desire and will from their rational object, God, to the object of sense, which the theologians had defined as concupiscence, the corruption of nature.¹ With this 'affect', Berowne had said in *Love's Labour's Lost*, every man is born, 'not by might mastered, but by special grace'. This affect not mastered, apparently romantic love becomes a lust or a fiction, as it does here. For 'grace' in *Troilus and Cressida* is not one of the 'titles' of the play.

'Honour' and 'lordship' are. For honour in war stand the champions Hector and Achilles, for 'lordship'⁵ or 'order' both Ulysses and Hector. In these spheres the dichotomy of ideal perfection and the corrupt fact is not so explicitly stated as in the story of Troilus and Cressida, and we may be deceived by Ulysses' magnificent rhetoric into thinking that he is a lord. Yet not even rhetoric could deceive us into thinking Achilles an honourable man. Hector's failure is more tragic and less easy to analyse; for it is the sacrifice of the ideal of order to the ideal of honour, for which he gets only the corruption of honour in return.

Ulysses' great order speech concludes with a prophecy of *Lear's* destruction of all objective value and of being itself, in the appetite for power. Yet Ulysses himself, who stands for 'order', works 'with windlasses and assays of bias' in the crooked manner of Polonius's worldly wisdom, setting Ajax against Achilles and Achilles against Ajax, to accomplish not harmony but emulation and excess. It is this worldly wisdom

¹ Cf. *Summa*, 1-2:82:3

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of Ulysses also which shows Troilus the corrupt Cressida; 'for the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light'. They know their own.

Hector too stands for order, and, more metaphysical than Ulysses, for the absolute value which sustains it:

TROILUS: *What is aught but as 'tis valued?*

HECTOR: *But value dwells not in particular will;*

It holds his estimate and dignity

As well wherein 'tis precious of itself

As in the primer. . . .

And the will dotes, that is inclinable

To what infectiously itself affects.

'Affect', 'affected', 'affection' in Shakespeare, as in Aquinas, always, as has been said, imply a movement of the will. So Hector fears 'bad success in a bad cause', and when Paris and Troilus cry for 'a theme of honour and renown' replies that 'right' is above 'honour'. They

Have gloz'd but superficially; not much

Unlike young men, whom Aristotle thought

Unfit to hear moral philosophy.

Their 'reasons', says Hector, conduce to passion rather than to a free determination between right and wrong. 'Nature craves all dues be rendered to their owners'; that is nature craves justice, and the law of nations reinforcing the law of nature, 'these *moral laws*' demand the return of Helen. But

pleasure and revenge

Have ears more deaf than adders to the voice

Of any true decision.

It is relevant to collate this last doctrine with *Hamlet*, Shakespeare's next play, as it is interesting to compare Hector's

thus to persist

In doing wrong extenuates not wrong,

But makes it much more heavy J

with *Macbeth*. In *Troilus and Cressida* lie the seeds of all the great tragedies.

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Hector's own tragedy lies in the complete and unexplained *volte-face* with which his long speech ends:

Hector's opinion
Is this in way of truth; yet nevertheless,
My sprightly brethren, I propend to you
In resolution to keep Helen still;
For 'tis a cause that hath no mean dependence
Upon our joint and several dignities.

So Hector now stands with Achilles as the champion of 'honour', the war for reputation not for right. Yet it is a reputation for Valiant and magnanimous deeds', and he plays fair in this war, by faith unfaithful kept so falsely true that he dies unarmed and ignominiously by the myrmidons of Achilles, whom his 'courtesy' has spared at disadvantage, and who cannot be true even to false gods.

The savage Achilles is, after all, 'honour' carried to its logical conclusion. For if honour is not concerned with right, then Achilles, acting for his reputation, his personal pride, is honourable as long as he is not found out—and the Greeks do not appear to find him out. This is, and is not, honour. 'Thou picture of what thou seemest', Thersites says of him. 'No more than what he thinks he is', says Agamemnon, and Ajax, with the wisdom of the fool, adds, 'Is he so much?'

Ajax himself goes up and down the field asking for himself, and Thersites' curse upon Patroclus is, 'thyself upon thyself. The whole play is a counterpoint of 'single nature's double name', a world in which 'is' and 'is not' are both true. 'Is he here, say you? 'tis more than I know.'

Yet the melody of the ideal runs unquenched throughout, not only in the exquisite lines of Troilus and Cressida. 'His crest that prouder than blue Iris bends' is written of the 'hero' who butchers and mutilates an unarmed enemy, with a gang of thugs.

A Grecian queen, whose youth and freshness
Wrinkles Apollo's and makes stale the morning

is the 'whore' of whom Diomed says,

For every false drop in her bawdy veins
A Grecian's life hath sunk; for every scruple
Of her contaminated carrion weight
A Trojan hath been slain.

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Helen (who is 'love's invisible soul')

*shall do more
Than all the island kings.*

*But something may be done that we will not,
And sometimes we are devils to ourselves.*

So St Paul said also of ideal perfection and the corrupt fact, 'The good that I would, I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do. ... I see another law, . . . warring against the law of my mind.'¹

*My mind is troubled like a fountain stirred;
And I myself see not the bottom of it,*

Achilles muses. 'Have you any discretion? Have you any eyes? Do you know what a man is?' says Pandarus to Cressida. Shakespeare has yet to discover how ideal perfection, so contrary to the corrupt fact, could be true. But already he suspects it:

*Shall I not lie in publishing a truth?
Sith yet there is a credence in my heart,
An esperance so obstinately strong,
That doth invert the attest of eyes and ears,
As if those organs had deceptive functions,
Created only to calumniate.
Was Cressid here?*

Add to this the verdict of Hector, the one serene character, beneath the calculating eyes of Achilles:

*But there's more in me than thou understand'st.
And in such indexes, although small pricks
To their subsequent volumes, there is seen
The baby figure of the giant mass
Of things to come at large.*

These are the 'things' not only of the tragedies but of the last plays.

One thing is certain; in *Troilus and Cressida* Shakespeare

¹ Romans vii, 19-23.

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turned from choosing those portions of life which seem to indicate justice, to an examination of the whole texture and structure of reality. He found there the underside of his comic pattern, the universal corruption with which the redemptive values of grace and mercy had claimed in theology to deal. Not only human nature but all nature, time itself, is corrupt and corrupting:

*For beauty, wit,
High birth, vigour of bone, desert in service,
Love, friendship, charity, are subjects all
To envious and calumniating time.
One touch of nature makes the whole world kin.*

This time is the exact opposite of the time which, in *The Winter's Tale*, 'unfolds error'. It does not reveal, but forgets:

*Time hath, my lord, a wallet at his back,
Wherein he puts alms for oblivion.*

One thing only, this time will remember, to be tortured by the ideal. 'When time is old and hath forgot itself, let them say still, 'as false as Cressid'.

In 1601, probably between *Troilus and Cressida* and *Hamlet*, there appeared in Robert Chester's elegiac miscellany the strange metaphysical symbolism of *The Phoenix and the Turtle*, another variation, almost Athanasian in its reiterative subtlety, upon single nature's double name. Since his phoenix and turtle are childless, Shakespeare seems to have had little interest in the personal significance of his allegory, and in this poem, it is not one which is seen as two (as in *Troilus*) but two which are seen as one, the Phoenix and the Turtle, constancy and love:

*So they lov'd, as love in twain
Had the essence but in one;
Two distincts, division none:
Number there in love was slain. . . .*

*Property was thus appall'd,
c That the self was not the same;
Single natures double name
Neither two nor one was caWd.*

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*Reason, in itself confounded,
Saw division grow together;
To themselves yet either neither,
Simple were so well compounded*

*That it cried, 'How true a twain
Seemeth this concordant one!
Love hath reason, reason none,
If what parts can so remain'.*

We may relate the *Threnos* to the *Troilus and Cressida* theme:

*Beauty, truth, and rarity,
Grace in all simplicity,
Here enclosed in cinders lie.*

*Death is now the phoenix' nest;
And the turtle's loyal breast
To eternity doth rest. . . .*

*Truth may seem, but cannot be;
Beauty brag, but 'tis not she;
Truth and beauty buried be.*

So the apparent beauty is not real beauty, *nor* is the apparent truth, real truth. Can it be that Shakespeare meant that when love is no longer one with constancy or eternity (when 'love and constancy are dead') being itself is disrupted? Valentine, the Gentleman of Verona, had cried,

*O heaven! were man
But constant, he were perfect; that one error
Fills him with faults; makes him run through all the sins:
Inconstancy falls off ere it begins.* ¹

So in theological language, the soul's turning away from God is the beginning and constitution of sin and death, of imperfection.¹

Yet *The Phoenix and the Turtle* has hope in its very title. 'Death is now the phoenix' nest', and Pericles, though still in 'the muddy vesture of decay', is to hear the music of the spheres.

¹ *Summa* 2-2:(162:6:0, 162:7:0, 163:1:0) and 1-2:84:2:0.

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The redemption of love becomes in the last plays the redemption of being. But not yet. The lyric may short-circuit the problem; the drama does not.

Hamlet begins almost where Troilus ends, his first words, the brooding aside, 'a little more than kin and less than kind', presenting to us immediately the problem of 'nature'. Then to the King's 'How is it that the clouds still hang on you?' he replies as his first public utterance:

Not so, my lord; I am too much V the sun.

• • • • •
Ay, Madam, it is common.

• • • • •
Seems, madam! nay it is; I know not 'seems'.

From here onwards Hamlet lives exposed constantly to a blinding vision of common corruption. Unlike Troilus he sees not only others but himself, and it is this sun of the living reason and imagination that 'breeds maggots' in everything on which its light falls. It is 'a god kissing carrion', where both the god and the carrion are himself.

Himself as part of the fabric of nature. In *Shakespeare's Imagery* Dr Caroline Spurgeon has noticed throughout this play the characteristic imagery of disease, and Sefior Salvador de Madariaga in his attempt to provide for us, in *On Hamlet*, a sensual and brutal, rather than a sensitive and magnanimous, man, suggests that the Prince of Denmark learnt his language in brothels. Upon the 'factual issue only a confirmed Bradleyite would speculate. Marina, who actually did spend a considerable period of time in a brothel, was not genteel, and sent her clients away saying their prayers.

As an hypothesis Seior de Madariaga's *tour de force* may perhaps be partly excused on the grounds of an initial misunderstanding both of Hamlet's 'English' ability to feel and think, and therefore pity and laugh, at the same time, and of his more complex Shakespearian ability to fear as well as pity while he laughs. For Horace Walpole's Gallic *sententia*, 'Life is a comedy to the man who thinks and a tragedy to the man who feels', explains, by denying it, precisely what is peculiar and essential in Hamlet. To him life is a tragi-comedy. His brutalization, however, does not proceed entirely from a misunderstanding-

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ing of his humour, and is not confined to Senor de Madariaga. It arises frequently in that *hysterico-passionizing* of Shakespeare's lines to which actors from Burbage to Mr Wolfitt have been prone, and which, as it transforms the brooding semicolons of the Second Quarto into Folio exclamations and stage sobs, delivers speeches of a different emotional calibre like, 'Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell', with a single-minded animosity foreign to Hamlet's character and contradicted by the complexity and rhythm of the lines themselves. In the later comments on Polonius, as in the gravediggers' scene, Hamlet exhibits exactly that self-torturing disgust at physical corruption which a brutal man would not feel. The same may be said of his alleged sensuality: the lines both to Ophelia and to Gertrude are inconceivable in the mouth of even *Vhomme moyen sensuel*.

Mr Eliot, on the other hand, is bewildered by a too sensitive Hamlet:

Hamlet the man is dominated by an emotion which is inexpressible because it is in *excess* of the facts as they appear, and the supposed identity of Hamlet with his author is genuine to this point; that Hamlet's bafflement at the absence of objective equivalent to his feelings is a prolongation of the bafflement of his creator in the face of his artistic problem. Hamlet is up against the difficulty that his disgust is occasioned by his mother but that his mother is not an adequate equivalent for it; his disgust envelops and exceeds her. It is thus a feeling which he cannot understand; he cannot objectify it, and it therefore remains to poison life and obstruct action.¹

Yet Hamlet's emotion is not in excess of the facts as they appear, and Michael Innes's more recent, dramatic attempt to psycho-analyse the prince, in *The Hawk and the Handsaw*, could provide only a much less adequate and more fanciful excuse for his preoccupation with sexual relationships and death. Apart from any more personal characteristics, Hamlet is a young,² handsome, Renaissance courtier, scholar and soldier, well

¹ *The Sacred Wood*, pp. 92-3.

² I do not enter seriously into the controversy about Hamlet's age, though it seems likely that the gravedigger's '30 years' are round numbers. Essex, who died at 35, was regarded as a young man.

versed in theology and moral philosophy, with a critical devotion to the stage; loved almost to the thither side of idolatry by court and country, with a devoted admiration for his father, a devoted tenderness for his mother, a romantic love for Ophelia and a genius for friendship. The charm of manner which replies to 'Our duty to your honour' with 'Your loves, as mine to you' appears again in the player scenes and in Act V, Scene ii, and bears out Ophelia's and Claudius's tributes. He is apparently not the sort of young man to make mountains out of molehills. He has spent some years at the University, at no time a school of the kind of innocence which consists in ignorance, and must of necessity have heard a good deal of bawdy talk. Yet though he knows academically all about the corruption of nature, and is familiar, quite possibly only in conversation, with the less savoury forms of the sexual relationship, his dominant emotions in the face of life are surely those he is to recall nostalgically in his first conversation with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. In 'the goodly frame' of his own happy personal relationships he sees man with wonder and admiration:

What a piece of work is a man, how noble in reason, how infinite in faculty, in form and moving, how express and admirable in action, how like an angel in apprehension, how like a god: the beauty of the world; the paragon of animals.¹

It is this young man, instinct with the Renaissance joy and wonder in the sensuous, but endowed as we are to discover with more sheer seriousness allied to imaginative penetration than any other character in literature, who comes home to find, not subjectively but objectively, a complex of physical and moral horror accepted with intellectual apathy, which might shock the most phlegmatic. The 'smooth body' of his dead father, his ideal of masculine strength and splendour, has been 'barked about most lazar-like with vile and loathsome crust'; his mother, to the normal young man a criterion of chastity, is incestuously married in less than a month to his uncle; the

¹ Q, 2 punctuation of II, ii, 323-7. This is preferred not only on the general grounds which suggest the superiority of this text, but because in this particular passage the exclamatory Folio punctuation is not in accord with either Hamlet's speech or Shakespeare's Hamlet. It suggests Burbage (cf. the 'O! O! O!' of the Folio insertion after 'The rest is silence', which all our texts drop).

court is hypnotically obedient to the *coup d'etat* which has deprived him of his throne. That this last impresses him least—so that he remembers it only at intervals, usually to give it as an excuse—is not because he has a morbid interest in sex and death, but because to anyone of normal human reactions personal evils impinge more strongly than political. It is the fabric of human life itself, the texture of physical and moral corruption which, in the dissolution of all that was strongest and purest in both Hamlet's personal and his political relationships, is revealed to him as a fact of nature. So the images of bawdry and theology, both in their different ways concerned with this dissolution, jostle as they crowd over the inner walls which had once separated them from each other, and from normal life. Above them, the sun of reason and imagination penetrates to every corner of the undivided world.

When we turn in this world from the specific to the universal facts, it is not so much that Hamlet's emotion is in excess of them, as that we, securely buffered by custom, or insecurely distanced by evasion, can hardly be said to feel about reality at all. Far from Hamlet's emotion being excessive, our reason and imagination are deficient. There is, as I shall suggest, a flaw in Hamlet's attitude to life and events, but it is not excess of emotion; it is control by it—and inability of choice.

All this is true *before* the ghost or the duty of revenge appear. For it is when left alone in the second scene that Hamlet begins

*Oh that this too, too sullied¹ flesh would melt. . . .
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter O God; God! . . .
O fie! 'tis an unweeded garden,
That grows to seed; things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely.*

Hamlet's religion, here and throughout until Act III, Sc. iv deters from, or comments on serious action but never initiates it. As a deterrent to suicide it is decisive. Hamlet never 'dares damnation' with Laertes, whose lines might have been written as a foil to the great soliloquies. Nor does he—as revenge—dare the salvation of Claudius. The comment of religion is constant,

¹ Dover Wilson's amendment in *The Manuscript of Shakespeare's 'Hamlet'*, pp. 307-15; accepted for the reasons given there.

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not only in imagery but more explicitly. Confronted by the ghost the Prince prays automatically for grace, and when, desiring to follow it, he is hindered by Horatio and Marcellus, he brushes aside their protests with the irritation of a man pointing out the obvious, the immortality of the soul. The oath he administers to his friends is more solemn than that which Richard II had administered to his enemies. They are surprised by his insistence that they should swear on the cross-hilt of his sword, and the wording, 'So grace and mercy at your most need help you', is extreme and explicit beside Richard's, 'So help you God and truth', which might be called little more than a pious formula. Again, in the most arresting of his religious images, oddly understanding the material in terms of the intellectual instead of *vice versa*, he speaks of

*wings as swift
As meditation or the thoughts of love,*

where 'meditation' has a specific religious meaning as contrasted with the specific 'thoughts of love'. Yet all this time, perhaps, Hamlet's religion was something he accepted as he had accepted the corruption it claimed to redeem, and up to the point at which the corruption but not the redemption became suddenly actual to him, 'the natural man' had been enough for life, and for death the belief that he believed. Both these assumptions he finds incorrect.

His consciousness[^]of corruption within the individual is made more explicit in the 'dram of eale' speech addressed to Horatio while they wait on the platform for the ghost. The speech is difficult enough without the queries set in motion by the corrupt text of the last few lines. To what, if anything, in the play, does Hamlet refer? It is of something 'particular' he speaks, not merely of original sin, though this conception obviously lies behind the particular instance. It may be that already he sees his romantic love for Ophelia as not only irrational but 'vicious', derived from the 'mole of nature' in his birth from such a mother ('And—would it were not so—you are my mother'), and that he is aware that in 'the general censure⁵ of Laertes and Polonius, his intentions are suspect. Certainly after his conversation with the ghost, the love of women becomes for him only lust. The one human relationship

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which remains unsullied throughout the play is his friendship with Horatio.

The ghost indeed at once heightens and complicates a world which would have been tragic enough without him. He sets a supernatural seal upon the 'prophetic' reality of reason and imagination. 'My fate *cries out* the fate to see and know. But the ghost also introduces into this new, real world a value from the world that only seems, the duty of revenge. Hamlet thereafter devotes himself to the solution of a real and an assumed difficulty, the assumed to stave off the real.

The assumed difficulty is whether the new real world is as real as he thinks, whether the ghost is 'an honest ghost'. It is for this that Hamlet defers action until he can catch the conscience of the king, and he has an acceptable alternative to his father's spirit in the form of a devil tempting him in disguise. Yet his subsequent suspicion is in marked contrast to the mood in which he first cries, 'O my prophetic soul! my uncle!' It may suggest that the reason Hamlet gives later for not killing Claudius when he has ample proof of his guilt, also a 'religious' reason, is also an evasion of what really troubles him.¹ The idea of universal corruption caused him to contemplate suicide before the ghost ever imposed on him the duty of revenge, but it is at once intensified by the context of this imposition and causes revenge to appear useless and ridiculous. 'Use every man after his desert, and who should 'scape whipping.'

This remark, casually provoked by Polonius, seems in succinct prose the key sentence of the play, illuminating not only events as they appear to Hamlet, but events as they are in themselves. Hamlet himself is so interesting that we are inclined to forget the other characters, who, together, constitute the event upon which Hamlet thinks 'too precisely'. Shakespeare does not forget them: he studies situation, action, the process of corruption, in Gertrude, in Claudius, in Polonius, in Ophelia, in Laertes, even in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern,

¹ The fact that Hamlet's 'excuse' is given by the hero in the *Ur-Hamlet*, who has not the mental peculiarities of Shakespeare's Hamlet, does *not* prove, as Schiicking suggests, that Shakespeare adopted it thoughtlessly and had no further ambitions than the old play (*Character Problems in Shakespeare's Plays*, p. 217). The very fact that Shakespeare's Hamlet indifferent proves that he had further ambitions.

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whom opportunity and ambition convert from time-servers to knaves. 'Something is rotten in the *state* of Denmark', and Denmark 'is the world'. Horatio alone escapes it, 'the man that is not passion's slave'. For the rest, Hamlet may say in at least three senses, 'I am most dreadfully attended'.

Yet he is not so dreadfully attended as is Othello, Lear or Macbeth. Gertrude, Polonius, Ophelia, Laertes, are all weak rather than actively vicious. They suffer rather than initiate corruption, and are therefore to Hamlet the more paralysing a spectacle. Claudius himself, upon whom Hamlet must perform the ghost's vengeance, is a study not for Iago but for Macbeth. Unlike the later play, however, *Hamlet* is much more a study in salvation than in damnation, and—more than in either of these—it is a study in corruption. It is this perhaps, among many other things, which makes it Shakespeare's most popular tragedy. Unencumbered by too much eschatology, we perceive in blinding revelation the world we know.

Gertrude does not *in* the play become worse, but she is conceived as having already accomplished the partial unconsciousness produced by mere sensuality, as having so debased her relationship with her first husband as 'to lose distinction in her joys'. It is indeed ominous that this phrase of Troilus can be applied so easily to Gertrude, who also perhaps began in romantic love, and that Hamlet is to use of her soul the 'ulcer' image which Troilus had used of his own heart.

*So lústy though to a radiant angel link'd,
Will sate itself in a celestial bed.
And prey on garbage.*

Gertrude, therefore, cannot see the ghost, although everyone else before whom it appears can, the conventional guards officers, the rational, unsuperstitious Horatio, as well as Hamlet.

Hamlet, 'cruel only to be kind', makes her at least and at last see herself, but as the ghost departs, she replies to his, 'Do you see nothing there?'

Nothing at all; yet all that is, I see;

and calls his 'father in his habit as he lived' 'the very coinage of your brain'. He offers her his steady pulse, and speaks the

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pitying, slow-moving lines which are certainly not those of hysteria, still less of madness:

*Mother, for love of grace,
Lay not that flattering unction to your soul,
That not your trespass, but my madness speaks;
It will but skin and jilm the ulcerous place,
Whiles rank corruption, mining all within,
Infects unseen. Confess yourself to heaven;
Repent whafs past; avoid what is to come;
And do not spread the compost on the weeds
To make them ranker.*

Hamlet indeed talks rather like a confessor, and like a confessor equipped not only with the Aristotelian and Thomist ethics of the habit of virtue, but also with a modern psycho-analytic technique. His speech, as it continues, is a tissue of references to theology, ecclesiastical practice and moral philosophy, with at least one reference to the Gospels. He abjures Gertrude to throw away the worse part of her heart 'and live the purer with the other half in language as well as spirit reminiscent of St Matthew (v, 29-30, and xviii, 8-9), and he ends his admonition in lines which are a sterner version of Cordelia's reconciliation with Lear:

*And when you are desirous to be blessed,
Til blessing beg of you.*

Both these and Lear's

*When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down
And ask of thee forgiveness.*

use the language of the confessional: 'Give me your blessing, father, for I have sinned . . . humbly ask forgiveness.'

This scene in *Hamlet* is, within my knowledge, alone in literature as the merciful arraignment of a mother by a son. It is not a neurotic, nor a man whose mind is 'as foul as Vulcan's stithy', who stands here, but, for forty lines, a man calm, pitiful and absolutely controlled, a man who convinces Gertrude of the truth of what she cannot see. She conceals his secret, and the lines in Act IV, Scene v, beginning, 'O Gertrude, Gertrude—', can be and have been so played as to suggest very strongly that she assumed the virtue Hamlet had directed. When the gentle-

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man announces the distracted Ophelia, she is at once pre-occupied and fearful, like one who has as strange things to stare at in her own soul:

*To my sick soul, as sin's true nature is,
Each toy seems prologue to some great amiss.*

She holds Laertes off Claudius, and dies trying to save Hamlet from the poisoned cup; and between these two actions she speaks the lovely lines about and to Ophelia. There is no doubt that Gertrude, indolently benevolent even in her sensuality, reacts to knowledge with an objective sweetness and unselfishness comparable in kind to the redemption of Gloucester in *King Lear*.

Laertes and Ophelia, much thinner characters than Claudius and Gertrude, bear a faint relation to Achilles and Cressida. Laertes, typically of the school of 'honour' and bombast

*(Nay, an' thou'lt mouth,
I'll rant as well as thou)*

is easily entrained to betray 'honour' to revenge, but he is seduced to this by Claudius; he does not invent villainy as Achilles did. He repents, forgives and is forgiven, acknowledging the justice of his death.

Ophelia fascinates by her very inconclusiveness. She begins as a graceful and gracious coquette, with a facile enough wit for small talk, but with neither stamina nor imagination. 'Nay, 'tis twice two months, my lord', she says literally, and holds her own rather doubtfully in the *double entendre*. Pathetic and irresponsible, she allows her father to use her as a tool and decoy without any attempt to warn Hamlet, and if, as Sefior de Madariaga and Dr Sitwell suggest, he did ravish her, it was after he had warned her and because, in spite of it, she 'came to his bed'. She doubted that the stars were fire, and burnt her brain out, playing with love. So her corruption is that she has less and less a hold on reality, and becomes weaker and weaker in will. But in her madness the essential sweetness of her character comes back. She lacks the frail dignity of the Ophelia for whom 'rich gifts wax poor, when givers prove unkind'⁵, but she is humble, patient, courteous and loving. Her gracious formulas, 'Goodnight, sweet ladies' . . . 'And of all Christian

souls I pray God' are really so. They do formulate her behaviour when she has no conscious control of it, and she dies, perhaps not without significance, singing 'snatches of old lauds',¹ the first of the day-hours of the Church. Indeed her ironic words, immediately after the 'baker's daughter' phrase which we are told is the first subconscious effort at the confession of her song, have in their double context a double meaning, bitter and consolatory. 'Lord we know what we are but we know not what we may be' is a verbal echo of 'Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be'. The verse goes on, 'but we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is'.² St John's and St Augustine's doctrine of salvation, like Shakespeare's, connects being and knowledge; and if Ophelia in her madness is, like Lear, closer to the Christian virtues of charity and humility than in her seeming sanity, it may be that Shakespeare holds out for her St Matthew's inversion of the Johannine beatitude: 'Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.'

Polonius is not remarkable for pureness of heart, and sees little either of God or man. We are so used to him as an incarnation of the pompous that we forget sometimes that he is none the less sinister for being ridiculous. He is perhaps a parody of Ulysses, who similarly represents 'worldly wisdom', and 'by indirections finds directions out'. The phrase is reminiscent of another, spoken by a character whose dilemma was, as I suggested, an earlier version of Claudius's:

*God knows,, my son,
By what by-paths and indirect crook'd ways
I met this crown.*³

Polonius, though not an accomplice in murder, is certainly a conniver at a *coup d'état*. Claudius perhaps smiled meaningfully as he said to Laertes,

*The hand is not more instrumental to the mouth
Than is the throne of Denmark to thy father.*

¹ Q2 reading of IV, vii, 178. It is easy to see how a forgotten and an old-fashioned word like 'lauds' or 'Grants' (V, i, 254) might be changed to 'tunes' or 'rites'. It is not easy to see how the reverse might occur.

² i John iii, 2.

³ 2 Henry IV, IV, v, 182-4.

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Indeed Polonius is sufficiently necessary to the throne for the King to put up with the convolutions of his councillor's mind as it goes to and fro upon matters of state; while Polonius himself is at the same time playing for a match between his daughter and Hamlet, and ingratiating himself by discovering and disapproving of their love-affair before the King. Gertrude accepts the probability and hope of this match, and Polonius's methods with Laertes suggest an habitual disingenuousness. Yet it is Hamlet and not Gertrude, with her '*unseen* good old man', who sees Polonius clearly, not only a fisher in troubled waters but a fishmonger, prepared to sell what he has caught.

POLONIUS: Do you know me my lord?

HAMLET: Excellent well, you are a fishmonger.

POLONIUS: Not I, my lord.

HAMLET: Then I would you were so honest a man.

POLONIUS: Honest my lord!

HAMLET: Ay, sir. To be honest as this world goes is to be one man picked out of ten thousand.

Polonius, who sees the 'pregnancy' of Hamlet's later replies, is not honest enough to take the first, with its slang reference to brothel-keeping. 'Yet he knew me not at first. He said I was a fishmonger. He is far gone, far gone.'

Hamlet, indeed, is far gone. But Polonius never emerges from the world of appearance, and Hamlet's condemnation of him therefore is only half condemnation, mixed with a humorous, almost affectionate, semi-preoccupied pity:

*Thou wretched, rash, intruding fool, farewell!
I took thee for thy better; take thy fortune;
Thou find'st to be too busy is some danger.*

The Prince turns aside immediately to the issue which is important to him, but when, as he leaves the room, his eyes fall again on Polonius's body, he adds,

*For this same lord,
I do repent: but heaven hath pleas'd it so,
To punish me with this, and this with me.*

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Heaven pleased to punish ignorance with knowledge, and knowledge with ignorance; Polonius dies unsaved, and undamned, fumbling still at appearances.

Heaven pleased also that to others than Polonius Hamlet should be their scourge and minister'. It has been said in his condemnation that, instead of destroying Claudius, he destroys his whole world. But Hamlet destroys only equivocation and ignorance, by which his world is sustained. If he cannot, in the greater complexity of his vision, choose himself, he at least thrusts choice on others, on everyone in fact except Polonius, who is indeed killed behind a curtain, shut off from the tragic world.

It is to avoiding this world that Hamlet himself—whom we left at the end of Act I to look through his eyes at his corrupt surroundings—devotes Act II and the first two scenes of Act III. He solves what I called his assumed difficulty; he proves the ghost is 'an honest ghost'—and all is as it is. For while he was proving this, he constantly felt it to be true. His appearance to Ophelia with a look 'as if he had been loosed out of hell to speak of horrors' may have a tincture of simulation, but his conversation with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is a flippant ^simulation through which his serious intuitions break.

It is here that he throws out the much quoted and much misunderstood *sententia*, 'There's nothing either good or bad but thinking makes it so'. This has been taken both as a general statement of the subjectivity of ethics, and a specific statement that Hamlet doubts his own conclusions about the facts in Claudius's case. Its context suggests that it is neither:

HAMLET: What news?

ROSENCRANTZ: None, my lord, but that the world's grown honest.

HAMLET: Then is doomsday near; but your news is not true
Let me question more in particular: what have you, my
good friends, deserved at the hands of Fortune, that she
sends you to prison hither?

GUILDENSTERN: Prison, my lord!

HAMLET: Denmark's a prison.

ROSENCRANTZ: Then is the world one.

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HAMLET: A goodly one: in which there are many confines, wards and dungeons, Denmark being one o' the worst.

ROSENCRANTZ: We think not so, my lord.

HAMLET: Why, then 'tis none *to you* for there is nothing either good or bad but *thinking* makes it so: to me it is a prison.

The italics are mine, underlining the implication that to Hamlet, who thinks, Denmark is a prison; Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who are incapable of thinking and live in a world of appearances, cannot perceive either good or bad. The dialogue continues with an intensely subtle manipulation of the overtones of shadow and substance:

ROSENCRANTZ: Why then your ambition makes it one [a prison]; 'tis too narrow for your mind.

HAMLET: O God! I could be bounded in a nutshell, and account myself a king of infinite space, were it not that I have bad dreams.

GUILDENSTERN: Which dreams indeed are ambition, for the very substance of the ambitious is but the shadow of a dream.

HAMLET: A dream itself is but a shadow.

ROSENCRANTZ: Truly, and I hold ambition of so light and airy a quality that it is but a shadow's shadow.

HAMLET: Then are our beggars bodies, and our monarchs and outstretched heroes the beggar's shadows. Shall we to the court, for, by my fay, I cannot reason.

'A dream is but a shadow.' Here as in *The Tempest* critics go astray because they have lost the full meaning of the word shadow, and equate it simply with illusion. A shadow is nothing in itself, but it is, both Platonically and actually, an image cast by something. Where there is no reality there is no shadow. So though the bad dreams which make Denmark a prison are not things in themselves, as the ghost with its insistence on personal revenge would make them, they are shadows of something real, something more 'substantial' in beggars ('then are our beggars *bodies*') than in monarchs like Claudius or 'outstretched heroes' like Hamlet, who are yet only shadows cast at further remove by the universal corruption of man.

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'Body' is an Elizabethan variant for the Aristotelian 'substance' in its concrete sense. For in Aristotle 'substance' sometimes means the same as 'essence' or as 'form', the formative principle which makes an individual thing what it is—'primary substance', and sometimes the unity to which, in material things, 'form' moulds matter, 'the thing itself—concrete substance'.¹ In non-material substances this distinction naturally disappears, and in both senses substance is 'real', and contrasted with 'accidents', which most appearances are. It is the 'primary being' of a thing, and not its being possessed of some quality or quantity or place, such as whiteness or extension or royalty or charm (iO28a).

Aristotle insists against Plato that 'forms' exist not separately (like the Platonic ideas which only throw 'shadows' in the material world), but 'embodied in objects'; that the individual objects are real, are 'substance'; and that it is the form, in man the soul, which gives them this reality (iO35a, iO37a). So Spenser, in *An Hymne of Beautie* repeats, 'For soul is form and doth the body make'.

The counterpoint of Aristotle with Plato is typical in Shakespeare and in Elizabethan literature generally, giving it that flickering conception of the physical universe as at once substance and shadow:

*What is your substance, whereof are you made,
That millions of strange shadows on you tend?*²

Shakespeare's imaginative world is neither the dichotomy of Plato, nor merely the unity of Aristotle, but rather a series of regressions in which each individual reality, each substance, may be seen as shadow in relation to something else.

Hamlet's phrase, 'the quintessence of dust', is no loose paraphrase of the burial service, nor, on the other hand, does it imply that man is nothing but dust. 'Quintessence' in Shakespeare's time is used not merely in its medieval and ancient connotation—a fifth substance apart from the four elements, of which the heavenly bodies were entirely composed and which came to be regarded as latent in all things, but also in the sense of essence that by virtue of which a thing is, itself. Hamlet may mean simply that choked with dust he cannot feel anything

¹ *Metaphysics*, 1032b, iO37a-b.

² Sonnet LIII

about the quintessence (i.e. soul), or he may, in the context of its supposed existence, be expressing an intellectual doubt that it does exist—in spite of his behaviour on the battlements where he takes its immortality for granted. Behaviour following automatically from premises which one either has ceased to believe, or was unaware one believed, is a psychological commonplace, and though it is likely, it is not necessary that Hamlet's ruminations should have carried him further towards the doubting side between these two scenes. What he certainly never loses is his sense of man's responsibility for what he does. Yet neither *qua* man nor *qua* himself can he 'pluck out the heart' of his mystery. He does not *know* why, having normal and, as events prove, more than normal physical courage, he fails to kill Claudius. So from this insoluble and real problem he switches over to the unreal, and soluble; he plans the play.

Before the play, he soliloquizes on suicide, and has two conversations with Ophelia. As in the soliloquy he reverts at the end to one side of his real problem, why he does not kill Claudius, so in his words to Ophelia he reverts to the other, his obsession with the corruption of nature. Hamlet never *says*, except by implication in this soliloquy, that the reason he cannot kill Claudius is that he spends his time thinking about universal corruption instead, but this is what actually happens, and when left alone he speaks always of evil in himself. 'So conscience does make cowards of us all' is spoken of suicide, but he goes on with a more general application:

*And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pith and moment
With this regard their currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action. . . .
Nymph, in thy orisons,
Be all my sins remembered.*

That the evil with which Hamlet is obsessed should be indissolubly related to the sexual act is not perhaps as remarkable as many critics appear to think, requiring for it a special explanation in terms of Hamlet's or Shakespeare's character. Quite apart from Hamlet's personal experiences, where it is, as it were, the *milieu* of all the particular evil of infidelity which

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heaps murder and usurpation upon adultery and 'incest', it is, as every religion has recognized, integral and fundamental to human life, so that if human nature *has* been corrupted its corruption is integrally present and transmitted in the sexual act. Hence the theological logic which calls for an Immaculate Conception if the human nature taken from Mary is to be uncorrupt. Hence the lightning rapidity with which Adam and Eve acquired fig-leaves. Moreover, that men generally have—in a variety of forms—seen a relation between 'sex' and sin one does not need to be reminded by the distortions of Victorian prudery or Freudian obsession. One may see this obsession in the semantic history of the word 'concupiscence' itself, which only in theology retains its original meaning of the corruption of nature as such (i.e. the turning of the will away from God to *any* worldly object). And in those religions like Puritanism, where celibacy is *not* the counsel of perfection, there is a greater not less sense of sin attached to the sexual act, which tends to be thought of as evil in itself instead of merely corrupted, as in the orthodox view. But whether the Catholic or Calvinist deduction were drawn, it would be difficult for an Elizabethan to forget that in Christianity, by definition, God is incarnate in a Virgin's Son. Hamlet perhaps had not forgotten the Prayer of Humble Access, 'that our sinful bodies may be made clean by his body', but 'virtue cannot so inoculate (i.e. graft on) our old stock, but we shall relish of it' (i.e. of the old stock). Therefore

Get thee to a nunnery: why would'st thou be a breeder of sinners? I am myself indifferent honest; but yet I could accuse myself of such things that it were better my mother had not borne me. I am very proud, revengeful, ambitious; with more offences at my beck than I have thoughts to put them in, imagination to give them shape, or time to act them in. What should such fellows as I do crawling between earth and heaven? We are arrant knaves all; believe none of us. Go thy ways to a nunnery. . . . Or, if thou wilt needs marry, marry a fool; for wise men know well enough what monsters you make of them.

It is ironic and perhaps significant that Hamlet should accuse himself of exactly those vices which would drive any man less obsessed by the universal to kill Claudius.

Later, he speaks of putting the king 'to his purgation', perhaps

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in a treble sense, and he greets his mother in Scene IV with a consciousness that his own blood is more impure than most:

QUEEN: *Have you forgot me?*

HAMLET: *No, by the rood, not so:
You are the queen, your husband's brother's wife;
And—would it were not so—you are my mother.*

She has done

*such an act
That blurs the grace and blush of modesty,
Calls virtue hypocrite, takes off the rose
From the fair forehead of an innocent love
And sets a blister there, makes marriage vows
As false as dicers' oaths; O, such a deed
As from the body of contraction plucks
The very soul, and sweet religion makes
A rhapsody of words.*

The poor insensitive Queen replies, 'What act?'. What horrifies Hamlet is the mere lust of his mother's relation, without the excuse of adolescence or romantic love, which at least demands apparent beauty:

*You cannot call it love, for at your age
The hey-day in the blood is tame, it's humble,
And waits upon the judgement; and what judgement
Would step from this to this? . . .*

*Rebellious hell,
If thou can'st mutine in a matron's bones,
To flaming youth let virtue be as wax,
And melt in her own jire.*

For 'reason panders will'.

'You cannot call it love.' But Hamlet's earlier words to Ophelia suggest that what we call love is only this. The speech, with its Thomistic terminology of reason and judgement, choice and will, is as little mad as the one which follows the ghost's reappearance, but, unlike the later speech, it is compact of torture and disgust, in rhythm as in content. This torture and disgust, the emotional impact of sexual sin upon Hamlet, is due

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partly to his temperament—partly to his situation. Yet at the ghost's entrance, the rhythm changes. The lines,

*Save me, and hover o'er me with your wings,
You heavenly guards!*

have, after the strident 'A king of shreds and patches', an extraordinary hush and sinking movement, and the speech after the ghost's departure, already referred to, has a new serenity of rhythm which marks, as the stern tenderness of the words themselves do, the turning point in the play. Here, for the first time, Hamlet is at peace. He has forgotten for the moment his own evil, except perhaps for the rather wry smile that 'Forgive me this my virtue' suggests. He is concerned entirely 'to do good', and the speech ends with that acceptance of life and death which marks in its completeness the words with which he goes later to 'play' with Laertes:

Not a whit, we defy augury: there's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow. If it be now, 'tis not to come; if it be not to come, it will be now; if it be not now, yet it will come: the readiness is all. Since no man knows aught of what he leaves, what is't to leave betimes? Let be.

Between this speech and the earlier one to his mother, Hamlet relapses into the brave self-torture of the discussion of Polonius's whereabouts and the grave-diggers' scene, brave because he follows with zest the movements of his imaginative intellect, as he had followed the ghost itself. It is indeed his intense combination of imagination and logic which makes life more painful to him than to the majority of men, who, if they possess either of these powers at all strongly, possess only one of them so. The syllogistic horror of his leave-taking of Claudius, 'Farewell, dear mother', is, perhaps fortunately, beyond the normal range.

His just but ruthless treatment of his treacherous friends deserves perhaps the meditative comment of Horatio, 'So Guildenstern and Rosencrantz go to it'. Hamlet's answer seizes the implied criticism so immediately as to suggest that he had, since acting, made it himself:

*Why man, they did make love to this employment;
They are not near my conscience; their defeat
Does by their own insinuation grow.*

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This has surely the ring, not of a heartless man, but of a man attempting to convince himself. Hamlet accused himself of being revengeful, and this incident, with its 'not shriving time allowed', has been compared with the calculating cruelty of the reason given for not killing Claudius 'in the purging of his soul'. Yet I think that Hamlet is conceived not as naturally revengeful but as endued, as I suggested, with a passionate rationality, which, when told to be revengeful, could not help considering the matter in logical terms. What strikes him first is not the necessity of sending Claudius to hell, but the ridiculousness—as revenge—of sending him to heaven. With Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, the 'not shriving time allowed' was partly self-defence, since had it been allowed they would have confessed the whole story, but partly also perhaps a memory again of his father,

UnhomeVd, disappointed, unanel'd.

It is this passionate logic that is Hamlet's constant difficulty, as well as source of suffering; for it proves to him alike that certain occasions of revenge are useless, and that revenge itself is an irrelevance, since we are all 'arrant knaves'. 'He thinks too much: such men are dangerous.'

Yet, especially after his adventure with the pirates, his calm moments have an increasing steadiness and serenity, as if he acquiesced in his own bewilderment, leaving the impossible choice of action to, the divinity which shapes our ends:

Rashly,—

*And praised be rashness for it, let us know
Our indiscretion sometimes serves us well
When our deep plots do pall; and that should teach us
There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will.*

As Hamlet left to this divinity the choice of action which the destruction of his world of appearance had thrust on him, so he left to it also, without denying them, the doubts engendered by the real world of physical and moral corruption to which he came. 'Since no man knows aught of what he leaves, what is't to leave betimes?' The words are strange; not the conventional 'Naked we came into the world and naked we shall go out', or

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the 'We know not what we shall be' of Ophelia, but the verdict of *The Tempest*, we know not even what we are. The preceding sentiment in the speech has been claimed as a piece of Senecan stoicism. If so, it forms a remarkable piece, tied as it is by a specific reference to the words of Christ about the fall of a sparrow.¹ The Hamlet who said, 'Confess yourself to heaven; repent what's past; avoid what is to come', is perhaps more likely to derive his notion of 'readiness' from other sources, and to include in it not only courage but humility and obedience.

Yet can Hamlet, accomplishing in his humility and acceptance a choice corresponding to the salvation of Lear, be said to accomplish thus the choice he has for five acts been setting himself, the choice to kill or not kill Claudius? Are we to assume that his stabbing the king with the poisoned rapier and forcing down his throat the poisoned wine is an instance for which we should praise rashness, attributing it to the 'divinity that shapes our ends'? Are we therefore to believe that the

scruple

*Of thinking too precisely on the event.,
A thought, which, quartered, hath but one part wisdom
And ever three parts coward*

is indeed a 'craven scruple', an evasion of responsibility to be corrected only by acceptance of events as they come? It may be that the one part wisdom in Hamlet's thinking was never clearly defined in Shakespeare's mind. Perhaps he is himself unaware to what he is struggling, still learning from his own plots, learning here that the conception of revenge is inadequate to deal with a corruption extending outside the person. In this sense, but not in Mr Eliot's, Hamlet's bafflement may be that of his creator. Yet I do not believe that it is. I believe that the Shakespeare of *Troilus and Cressida* and *The Phoenix and the Turtle* saw already the antithesis between the world of appearance, a world of black and white, and the world of reality, a world of grey, that in *Hamlet* he saw that in its very horror the world of reality can be destructive both of action and of faith, that he knew this paralysis to be bewildering—even to the point of producing a conviction of cowardice in a brave man—and that, at this stage, he believed it soluble only in terms of

¹ St Matthew x, 29; St Luke xii, 6.

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accepting it (which Hamlet for nearly four acts refuses to do), and then, 'inoculated' but not complete with virtue, acting 'rashly' as the dispensation of event suggests.

This deference to the event is far from opportunism, from making 'the wheels of the mind concentric and voluble with the wheels of fortune', after the manner of Bacon, Ulysses or Polonius. Hamlet, 'most generous and free from all contriving' is 'the same when the same is unbecoming', so unbecoming as to cost him his life. His 'character' does not alter in the play, as Lear's does; for he has from the beginning a character much nobler than Lear's. It is rather the conscious attitude of intellect and will which alters, so that the humility which always admitted his own evil ends by accepting his own ignorance, the ignorance of a man who knows too much for the world he lives in but not enough for the real world:

HAMLET: *'// be your foil, Laertes; in mine ignorance
Your skill shall, like a star f the darkest night,
Stick fiery off indeed.*

LAERTES: *You mock me, sir.*

HAMLET: *No, by this hand.*

As Richard III, Claudius and Macbeth are distinguished by the refusal of the truth which they all consciously or subconsciously perceive about themselves, so Hamlet, Othello, Lear and Antony are all distinguished by the acceptance of this truth. With Hamlet there is also this curious acceptance of event, and the impulse from event, and it is certainly in impulses of this sort that Hamlet's intrinsic courage shows itself, in the boarding of the pirate ship, for instance, or the pursuit of the ghost. He relies in the end, as we are told it is distinctive in Englishmen to do, on 'character', on the subconscious intellect rather than on a conscious act of will for each choice.

The definition given some years ago in *The Times Literary Supplement* (leading article, 19.3.49), 'a man's character is the sum of sub-rational impulses which determine his actions when he is off his guard, or in other words when his will and intelligence are dormant', is unfortunately phrased. Character is subconscious, but a great deal of it is post- rather than sub-rational, the result of previous and forgotten acts of intellect

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and will. In *Hamlet*, however, there is perhaps more to the matter. The final reliance on unreflective action fits in well, though anachronistically, with modern psychology, and is not incompatible with the Aristotelian view that virtue is 'a state of character'¹; it fits in also with the whole theory of supernatural grace which lies behind the play's reiterated references to sacraments and the markedly Catholic conception of the Atonement, which 'inoculate' in '*inoculate* our old stock' suggests.

For this traditional grafting image phrases precisely the Catholic doctrine of 'infused grace', by which Christ's merit is *imparted* and not merely, as in Luther, *imputed* to men. Of the sacraments which mediate this grace, though it is not confined to them, Hamlet and his father mention four, the Eucharist, Penance, Unction and Matrimony, Unction and Matrimony twice, Penance three times. Hamlet the elder seems to rate as his worst injury at Claudius's hands that he died 'unhousel'd, disappointed, unanel'd', and Hamlet his son urges Gertrude to confess herself and amend her life. If the 'readiness' which he says 'is all' as he goes to the bout with Laertes is as technical as his other speeches would lead one to expect, he himself does not die without the sacraments, and he may well have decided that he has reasoned to his capacity and must leave the unsolved dilemma to the God he can at the same time doubt and take for granted. Whether we are really to attribute to Heaven the action which he in fact takes is another matter. That he acts in good faith is obvious, and in the very act of killing the king the choice which event thrusts upon him ('Envenom'd too! Then, venom, to thy work') becomes conscious in a terrible but not merely savage pun:

*Here thou incestuous, murderous, damned Dane,
Drink off this potion;—is thy union here?
Follow my mother.*

Ultimately Hamlet thinks he sees where in the scheme of things Claudius *belongs*, returning to his verdict on Polonius:

*Heaven hath pleased it so,
To punish me with this, and this with me.
That I must be their scourge and minister.*

¹*Ethics*, 1106b-1107a.

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'*Their* scourge'; not a personal avenger, but an instrument, conscious, in a way alien to the smug or savage ignorance of the history plays, of its own frailty and its own use. 'Our thoughts are ours, their ends none of our own.'

All criticism of *Measure for Measure* owes an incalculable debt to R. W. Chambers, who first, in the British Academy lecture of 1937, murmured to the now discredited school of *cynical Shakespearians*, 'Good frend, for Jesus' sake, forbear'. It is precisely for Jesus' sake that the play asks us to forbear. A Christmas play, close to *Hamlet*, it is, whatever view we may take of the technique which presents it to us, an analysis and solution of the problem of *Hamlet* in terms even more explicitly Christian than those of *Hamlet* itself. It is a *commedia*, staged not in heaven but on earth, where the plot is as entirely in the hands of the Duke of Vienna as the plot of Dante's and Aquinas's universe is in the hands of God. Of everything that happens in it, except of 'the evil of fault', his 'grace like power divine' is the cause.¹ Yet though to this duke God has lent not only his office but in discernible outline his nature, the play is not in any simple sense of the word an allegory. It is throughout a *double entendre*, in which the metaphysical and allegorical meaning alternates with the ethical and personal, which is after all the more explicit. Isabella may be perceived by consideration as mercy marrying God's—as opposed to Angelo's—justice: she strikes us immediately as a Christian, and although some have objected that she is an imperfect Christian, this is perhaps only a proof of the humanity on occasion denied her. The crucial point is that Angelo, who has shown no mercy, does *not* get the 'measure for measure' which a play metaphysically interpreted would demand. He gets the mercy of those who know in how great need of it they stand themselves. The divine forgiveness is transferred to earth from heaven, not merely by an allegorical sleight of hand, focussing in time the processes of eternity, but by a woman neither faultless nor omniscient, who merely indulges in the startling innovation of judging—or not judging—according to her creed. This decision is left by the Duke with Isabella, for it is not, as in the later tragedies, divine but human conduct upon which our attention is most surely fixed. 'Judge not that ye be not judged.'

¹ Cf. *Summa*, 1:49:2:0, 1-2:(79:2:0 and 87:7:0).

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For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again' is still at the end of the play, as in the gospels, a *sententia* not of present reward or condemnation but of advice. The relation of this world to the other is that not of analogy but of coherence.

This world in *Measure for Measure* is the real world of *Hamlet*, saturated with a sexual corruption which is to 'boil and bubble till it o'er-run the stew', and of which no one could dispute the objectivity. We may feel that we could with equanimity see less of Pompey and Mistress Overdone, but it is our feeling which is subjective, not Shakespeare's facts. The ducal 'looker-on' sees

*laws for all faults,
But faults so countenanced that the strong statutes
Stand like the forfeits in a barber's shop,
As much in mock as mark:*

and as the Friar observes

There is so great a fever on goodness that the dissolution of it must cure it ____ There is scarce truth enough alive to make societies secure, but security enough to make fellowships accursed.. .. This news is old enough but it is everyday news.

'There is scarce truth enough alive.' *Measure for Measure* has been called, more wisely than some of its critics conceived, a play of disillusionment. It is; but it is not a cynical play. In its world of universal corruption where even goodness is feverish, it is not Claudio, not Pompey nor Mistress Overdone who is ultimately arraigned, but Angelo, who says that he has no sin. 'If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves', said St John, and in *Measure for Measure* we are undeceived. 'Which is the wiser here,' asks Escalus, 'Justice or Iniquity?' 'Courage', says Pompey to his mistress, who has kept Lucio's and his drab's child for a year and a quarter at her own expense, 'Courage, there will be pity taken on you; you that have worn your eyes out almost in the service, you will be considered.' He and she have no illusions, they see the real world well enough, and they know that, 'if your worship will take order for the drabs and the knaves, you need not fear the bawds'.

The Duke takes order, not only for the drabs and the knaves but for the 'saints' (as Angelo describes both himself and

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Isabella), for the whole world of seeming, the comfortable world of black and white. He leaves Vienna to accomplish two revelations, which are in a sense one. First, the city, having through his mercy forgotten what justice is, fails to recognize mercy as such and regards it as mere licence to sin. So Angelo, whose natural character the Duke apparently knows to be different from his own, is to reveal justice. He himself subsequently returns and reveals mercy, but it is important to remember that the speech which tells us all this is spoken in confidence to the Friar. Angelo is not told to be rigorous:

*Tour scope is as mine own.
So to enforce or qualify the laws
As to your soul seems good.*

This 'scope'⁵ is indeed the matter of the second revelation:

*More reasons for this action
At our more leisure shall I render you;
Only this one: Lord Angelo is precise; . . .
scarce confesses
That his blood flows, or that his appetite
Is more to bread than stone: hence shall we see,
If power change purpose, what our seemers be.¹*

Isabella takes up this attack of the Duke's, like Hamlet's an attack upon ignofance and equivocation. But even before Isabella's magnificent scene, Escalus, the chorus of the play, has uttered to Angelo concerning the man condemned, the first version of the *motif*, 'Well, heaven forgive him, and forgive us all'.

Isabella herself is more theologically precise. For her, Heaven has forgiven us all:

ISABELLA: *I have a brother is condemned to die;
I do beseech you, let it be his fault,
And not my brother. . . .*

ANGELO: *Tour brother is a forfeit of the law,
And you but waste your words.*

¹ Cf. *Gorgias*, 526a.

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ISABELLA:

Alas, alas;

*Why all the souls that were, were forfeit once;
And He that might the vantage best have took,
Found out the remedy. How would you be,
If He, which is the top of judgment,¹ should
But judge you as you are? O, think on that,
And mercy then will breathe within your lips,
Like man new-made.*

Angelo uses the usual argument for legal justice, deterrence, and Isabella answers by going behind the deterrence of action to the nature of man himself:

*Man, proud man,
Drest in a little brief authority,
Most ignorant of what he's most assured,
His glassy essence, like an angry ape,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
As make the angels weep.*

Magnificently compressed in these two speeches is the antithesis between seeming and being, and the solution in 'man new made', which haunted Shakespeare to the end of his last play. The word 'essence' implies 'absolute being, reality underlying phenomena',² and in all the Elizabethan-Jacobean usages recorded (except where Hester once uses it for 'quintessence' in the restricted sense of that word) it indicates that by virtue of which a thing is itself and nothing else. In 'glassy' appears the image of refraction and recession, the flickering of shadow and substance consummated in *The Tempesfs* unforgettable speech. Angelo, with proud man generally, is 'most ignorant of what he's most assur'd, his glassy essence'. He takes the glassiness for the essence itself, and, like an angry ape, reacts to appearances not reality, to actions not

¹ Cf. *Purgatorio*, VI, 37-39.

*Chi cima di giudizio non s'avvalla,
perche foco d'atnor compia in un punto
cio che dee satisfar chi qui s'astalla.*

² *N.E.D.* The philosophical restriction of essence to 'that by which a thing is necessarily and primarily *as intelligible*', i.e. 'a being of reason as distinct from a being of nature*' (Aquinas, *De Ente et Essentia*), does not seem to have any significant effect in literature.

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intents. For in Shakespeare 'essence' is always contrasted to appearances. Desdemona's honour, says Iago, 'is an essence that's not seen'. Hal, says Falstaff, is 'essentially mad without seeming so'. But in the 'man new made' of Isabella's plea for mercy, the man saved by having imparted to him the perfect reality of Christ's Manhood, the division between corrupt fact and ideal perfection, the seeming-goodness, is *atoned*. As he is himself made 'real' by this 'inoculation'—for corruption is by definition a diminution of being and therefore of reality—so he *sees* reality, and knowing that (but for the Pauline 'Christ liveth in me') he stands in like condemnation, he has mercy.

Angelo has no mercy. He is the servant in the parable, who was forgiven a great debt by his master but who exacted the small debt of his fellow-servant. He is a study of man deputising for God's power, as opposed to Isabella who deputizes for God's mercy. Moreover, though he has been forgiven he cannot be saved against his will. 'Look, what I will not, that I cannot do.' So Isabella tries to destroy directly the equivocal world of appearances in which he lives and from which he wills:

*Go to your bosom,
Knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know
That's like my brother's fault; if it confess
A natural guiltiness such as is his,
Let it not sound a thought upon your tongue
Against my brother's life.*

This verdict, that 'he that looketh upon a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her in his heart already',¹ is not answered by Angelo's previous reply to Escalus's similar, but less precise, suggestion:

*'Tis one thing to be tempted, Escalus,
Another thing to fall.*

Isabella must refer to 'will', not merely 'desire', for only acts of will are guilty according to the theological psychology of which Shakespeare both here and elsewhere shows a thorough knowledge.² She speaks 'such sense that my sense breeds with it', says

¹ St Matthew v, 28.

² *Summa*, 1-2: (1:2 and 13:2) and throughout this treatise on voluntary acts. *Of Ethics*, 111ib-1112a.

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Angelo, and, *consenting* to his passion, is guilty.¹ Isabella has stripped from him the armour of fastidiousness which he thought was moral strength.

*Seeming, seeming!—
/ will proclaim thee, Angelo,*

she says. To the audience and to himself Angelo is already proclaimed. For in a speech analysing choice of the act to come as subtly as King Claudius had analysed choice of the act past, Angelo, whose character and temptation are at once more complex and more damnable than those of Claudius, sees himself quite clearly:

*When I would pray and think, I think and pray
To several subjects: heaven hath my empty words,
Whilst my invention, hearing not my tongue,
Anchors on Isabel; heaven in my mouth,
As if I did but only chew his name,
And in my heart the strong and swelling evil
Of my conception. . . .*

*O place, O form,
How often doest thou with thy case, thy habit,
Wrench awe from fools, and tie the wiser souls
To thy false seeming/ Blood, thou art blood:*

This is the man who—as neither Hamlet nor King Claudius did—judges others, the man whose great and typical sin is pride. Moreover, the dichotomy into seeming and being appears not only in relation to Angelo, or to personal sin (as in the Duke's generalization,

*That we were all, as some would seem to be,
From our faults, as faults from seeming free)*

but also in the Duke's assertion to Claudio of the very texture of life:

*Thou art not thyself. . .
Yet death we fear
That makes these odds all even.*

In *A Notebook on William Shakespeare*, Dr Sitwell objects of this 'supposed man of God', that he 'speaks of Death only as if it

¹ *Summa*, 1-2:15:4.

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were a matter of the cold earth'. Yet to Claudio, an avowed Christian, 'prepar'd to die*' (and 'prepar'd' spoken to a friar is technical enough)¹, surely the terror of death should be precisely this terror of the cold earth. He fears the process of dying and the loss of the familiar world of appearance. So the Duke-Friar attempts only to make him 'absolute for death', as a life more real than this life. Claudio at least understands him:

*I humbly thank you.
To sue to live, I find I seek to die,
And, seeking death, find life.*

So to Isabella's so far quite unwarrantable suspicions, he answers as he would no doubt answer those who desire from the Friar a sentimental sermon:

*Why give you me this shame?
Think you I can a resolution fetch
From flowery tenderness? If I must die,
I will encounter darkness as a bride,
And hug it in mine arms.*

Though this is the image used by St Thomas More of the Carthusians and Brigittine drawn in agony past his window on their way to Tyburn, Claudio is surely not conceived as a mystical or devout young man—to whom the Friar might suitably have talked about the complete reality of life in heaven instead of the unreality of life on earth. But he is conceived as essentially a normal young man of Shakespeare's day. As such he believed in redemption and immortality though he did not think much about them, any more than the normal twentieth-century young man thinks about evolution and space-time. Men tend to think in a framework, not about it. When Claudio does begin to think he has a poetic advantage not possessed by the normal young man today, an untrammelled imagination, and it is these 'lawless and incertain thoughts' which write for him his magnificent surrender to fear. It is not a Christian sur-

¹ Cf. Angelo's words in Act II:

*See that Claudio
Be executed by nine tomorrow morning:
Bring him his confessor, let him be prepared.*

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render, but it is the surrender of a Christian. The very control of rhythm and language stamps it as the speech of a man who will pull himself together, and take the warrant for his own death without other comment than the half-humorous, half-admiring remark about Barnardine. He takes up the Provost's phrase, 'Thou must be made immortal' in the word 'traveller', seeing Barnardine as a traveller who sleeps as if guiltless on his way. So he is to the Provost 'the gentle Claudio', a phrase which implied to the Elizabethan the qualities of a gentleman, courage, control, with—perhaps strangely to us—the Christian virtues and imagination.

Angelo is never called gentle, and unlike the Duke is not, even when he knows himself, 'bound by charity'. His decision to execute Claudio in spite of his bargain is at once a tribute to Claudio as a 'man of honour' and an indictment of himself. It is exactly the same sort of decision as that of Claudius to kill Hamlet; for it is in defence of the self he has seen and accepted as only a pretence. He shows, indeed, a little regret, but no repentance, until he is suddenly, by the stripping off of the last disguise from the apparently objective universe, thrown not merely into his own presence but into the presence of the Duke himself. Yet he gives himself up to reality like a man glad enough to give over the battle with his own conscience: 'I should be guiltier than my guiltiness' to try to pretend still. Then with a touch of that authentic nobility which distinguishes him, ripe for damnation as he is proved by the terrible 'Look, what I will not, that I cannot do', he is true to his promise in Act II, Scene i. All the grace he begs is justice. He does not get it.

The dealings of the Duke with Angelo are in astonishing detail like the dealings of the Christian Providence with men. He is apparently absent, yet present, he leaves with Angelo 'mortality and mercy in Vienna' to 'live in thy tongue and heart', and he works up to the last scene entirely by suggestions to others. It is sometimes felt that he adds little to his reputation as a divinity by being an irresponsible Duke, but we cannot in fairness expect to have this part of the play both ways. A real duke is, according to Elizabethan theory, *j*, deputy—like Angelo; but when a character is allegorically God, and personally the deputy of God, few will blame him for appointing

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someone else. In his only personal characteristic the Duke repeats the *motif* of the play, in that he is 'one that above all other strifes, contended specially to know himself. Even this attribute he might plausibly be supposed to share with the Trinity.

It was suggested earlier that in forcing Isabella to make a decision on Angelo before he makes one himself, the Duke focusses our attention, as the comedies generally do, not on metaphysics but on ethics, and the testing of Isabella is perhaps one of those 'more reasons' for his action which he had promised to give later to the Friar. Indeed, if in his dealings with Angelo, the protagonist of justice, he is like a Christian Providence, he is even more strikingly so in his dealings with Isabella, the champion of mercy, who never knows more than is necessary for immediate action, and is forced to make the last and greatest of her decisions in the hardest possible context of ignorance and pain. The apparent justice of the Duke himself, and of every critic from Coleridge to Professor Dover Wilson pleads against her creed and Mariana's request:

*Against all sense do you importune her:
Should she kneel down in mercy of this fact,
Her brother's ghost his paved bed would break,
And take her hence in horror.*

But Isabella, the 'cold, self-righteous Isabella' of more self-righteous critics, does kneel, after listening in silence for fifteen lines. This is no hurried or huddled catastrophe, no slap-scene of unthinking reconciliation. At the very moment she is about to kneel, the Duke, determined on a last twist of the knife, reminds her, 'He dks for Claudio's death', and on this line she kneels. To complain that Shakespeare is cynical because he does not in the end give human justice in a comedy devoted to an attack upon it, is surely an ironically subjective form of criticism. To suggest that the red-eyed Isabella of '*O, I will to him and pluck out his eyes', who cries for 'justice, justice, justice, justice' at the beginning of this very scene, does not care for Claudio in spite of her offer of her life, is to ignore the text. Those who dislike her conduct should at least re-read the reason for it in Act II, Scene ii. That we are meant to remember

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this scene at the end of the play is suggested by her own ignorant prophecy there,

*I would to heaven I had your potency,
And you were Isabel! Should it then be thus?
No; I would tell what 'twere to be a judge.
And what a prisoner.*

So, when the positions *are* reversed, she merely practises what she had preached. Shakespeare would be the last to claim that it is, in the modern sense of the word, 'natural'.

*But grace being the soul of your complexion
Shall make the body of it ever fair.*

'What likelihood is in that?' we may say with the Provost when the Friar suggests the Duke will ratify his mercy. The reply is the reply of a Christmas play:

Look, the unfolding star calls up the shepherd. Put not yourself into amazement how these things should be: all difficulties are but easy when they are known.

The star of St Matthew's wise men has, as traditionally, joined the shepherds of St Luke, and it is from St Luke that the verbal echo comes: 'then said Mary to the Angel, How shall this be?'

It is, perhaps, unfortunate that Isabella does not in the last scene simply kneel; for her final speech, is, to say the least of it, disconcerting:

*Most bounteous sir,
Look, if it please you, on this man condemned,
As if my brother liv'd. I partly think
A due sincerity governed his deeds,
Till he did look on me: since it is so,
Let him not die. My brother had but justice,
In that he did the thing for which he died:
For Angelo,
His act did not overtake his bad intent;
And must be buried but as an intent
That perish'd by the way. Thoughts are no subjects,
Intent but merely thoughts.*

Angelo was asked to pardon Claudio because Claudio's deed was no worse than Angelo's intentions: the Duke is asked to

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pardon Angelo because his intentions are so much worse than his deeds. Yet if his intentions may be exculpated on the legal ground that civil law does not punish them, what Angelo *did* was what Claudio did. If Angelo is Mariana's husband on a pre-contract, Claudio can say:

*Thus stands it with me: upon a true-contract
I got possession of Julietta's bed:
You know the lady; she is fast my wife,
Save that we do the denunciation lack
Of outward order: this we came not to,
Only for procuration of a dower
Remaining in the coffer of her friends,
From whom we thought it meet to hide our love
Till time had made them for us.*

It may be that Julietta's marriage bond, lacking the signature of her 'friends', is not legal. It may be that Angelo is to escape on the Aristotelian grounds that his action was not intended, and his much worse intention not acted, and that Isabella, having tried theology unsuccessfully in the early scene, has decided to plead in Rome as the Romans do. The last four, the offending, lines of her speech, are in a sense off the point, since the Duke has told us that it is for Claudio's death, not the intended rape of Isabel, that Angelo is to die. The Duke's reply to Isabel is notable:

Tour suit's unprofitable: stand up.

Then before pardoning Angelo, he turns to the murderer Barnardine, who is condemned not for intentions but for actions, and renounces the whole system of law-courts and comedies in one astounding speech:

*Sirrah, tkou art said to have a stubborn soul,
That apprehends no further than this world,
And squafst thy life according. Thou'rt condemned:
But, for those earthly faults, I quit them all,
And pray thee, take this mercy to provide
For better times to come. Friar, advise him:
I leave him to your hand.*

Isabella may have in this scene the human frailty of incompetent pleading, and is indeed perhaps a study for Cordelia,

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who was also called cold and also suffered from conversational *malaise*. What is important is that she asks mercy for the man who, she believes, has done her one irreparable injury, and wished and believed himself to have done her two. It is to this test that the whole play tends. If, like Cordelia's, her love is not only 'as strong as death' but 'as hard as hell'⁵,¹ it is because it has to be; for no easy emotional benevolence will survive, let alone signify, in this context. It is Shakespeare himself who makes her, for his own reasons, a 'votaress of St Clare', of the Order founded on a devotion, at once practical and contemplative, to the sufferings of Christ. She is throughout a highly personal, as opposed to a merely allegorical, figure, carefully conceived as alternating 'a prone and speechless dialect' with the power 'to reason and persuade', at once impulsive and easily embarrassed. Of her abuse of her brother, R. W. Chambers's explanation seems adequate, and the lines which close Act II, surrounded in the Folio by the inverted commas which indicate a current *sententia*, are surely spoken to convince herself. The critics who would have her show more indulgence to Claudio and less charity to Angelo are asking for a play, not by Shakespeare or even Dekker, but by themselves. They are like the children in the market-place, and Isabella is always being either too hard or too soft for their tunes. It is at least arguable that such 'love talks with a better knowledge', and such 'knowledge with a dearer love'.

All's Well that Ends Well may be described as an unpleasant, it can scarcely be described as a bitter, play. The light is focussed here, not on the incognito Duke, but on Providence's *weakest minister', Helena, who, like Isabella, fluctuates between the personal and the allegorical genre.

Bertram and Helena between them make the plot:

The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together: our virtues would be proud if our faults whipped them not; and our crimes would despair if they were not cherished by our virtues.

It is the cherishing and preventing love of Helena's whipped virtue which converts Bertram's every step against ultimate happiness into a step towards it, and such remedies of love are

¹ Richard Rolle of Hampole, *Luf is Lif*.

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at once ascribed to heaven and lie *in* ourselves. This, the traditional doctrine of infused grace, is borne out by the plot, and the Countess's as well as Helena's lines provide significant comment on the contemporary controversies about faith and works, and predestination and free will. Thus the play, which is apt to pall—if not offend—at its surface level, becomes more interesting when one looks beneath.

The unpleasant but somehow pathetic youth, Bertram, is only vaguely imagined as an individual, and indeed all the characters suffer from that lack of personal subtlety which oppresses the Duke and Angelo in *Measure for Measure*, and which is a sure sign in Shakespeare that allegory is getting the upper hand. Those who object to the substitution ruse in *Measure for Measure* on quasi-moral grounds usually confine themselves here to shocked horror at Helena's lack of dignity. Yet if we are apt to find her impossible as a 'person', as allegory she is significant enough. Redeeming love is prepared to sacrifice dignity, and if Helena lacks the pride which we feel we should have exhibited in her place, the advantage in value is perhaps not entirely with us. As she herself remarks:

*It is not so with him that all things knows
As 'tis with us, who square our guess by shows.*

In this play, as in the contemporary tragedies and *Measure for Measure*, the being-seeming *motif* appears throughout. It is of Bertram's defection from Helena to 'the unchaste composition' that the First Lord says,

Now God delay our rebellion! As we are ourselves, what things are we?

and to this the Second Lord replies:

Merely our own traitors: and as in the common course of all treasons we still see them reveal themselves till they attain to their abhorred ends, so he that in this action contrives against his own nobility, in his proper stream o'erflows himself.

This conception of sin as treachery to one's real, one's essential self is paralleled by the notion that what might be

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called the 'existential' self must not be camouflaged, but faced and accepted as a way of return to the other:

*Captain, Fll be no more; . . .
Simply the thing I am
Shall make me live . . .
Safest in shame, beingfool'd, byfoolery thrive.*

To press the parallel would be disastrous, but one cannot help being faintly reminded of the phraseology of 'the little poor man', *le jongleur de Dieu* for whose friars Shakespeare had so marked a predilection and whose Second Order was that of Isabella, St Clare. More things perhaps jostle in the brain of a poet than are dreamt of in philosophy.

It is not only themselves but things and actions, the texture of existence, which men mistake in *All's Well* as in *Measure for Measure*. Diana provides more comment than is normal on the mere disguises of conventional comedy:

*This lord,
Who hath abus'd me, as he knows himself,
Though yet he never harm'd me, here I quit him:
He knows himself my bed he hath defl'd,
And at that time he got his wife with child:
Dead though she be, she feels her young one kick:
So here's my riddle: one that's dead is quick.*

When the king recovers, 'the greatest grace lending grace', Lafeu comments:

They say miracles are past; and we have our philosophical persons to make modern and familiar things supernatural and causeless. Hence it is that we make trifles of terrors, ensconcing ourselves into seeming knowledge, when we should submit ourselves to an unknown fear.

All's Well, like *Measure for Measure*, does not make trifles of terrors, and it is so far a disillusioning play, in which we are not allowed to ensconce ourselves even in the minor illusion that men must woo and women only weep. 'He that loseth his life shall save it', and Helena, wife and no wife, who first buys a 'traitor' Bertram at the cost of her pride, leaves France to

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redeem him at the risk of her security. Elizabethan audiences were perhaps not depressed; they may even have been, with an uprush of sentiment rather than cynicism, amused.

*Ours be your patience then and yours our parts,
Your gentle hands lend us, and take our hearts.*

CHAPTER IV

THE SECOND TESTING—CORRUPTION AND SALVATION

(*Othello*, *King Lear*, *Timon of Athens*, *Coriolanus*,
Antony and Cleopatra]

*But I will tarry; the fool will stay,
And let the wise man fly:
The knave turns fool who runs away;
The fool no knave, perdy.*

Lear, II, iv, 83-6.

Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.
i Corinthians iii, 18.

SHAKESPEARE, who had begun already in *Much Ado* to play O with the paradox of folly, turns to it after *Hamlet* with insistent and incisive power. It is understandable that none of his tragic heroes at any time should be men 'wise in this world'—or presumably with Octavius they would have stepped delicately to their niche in history, eluding those emissaries of the tragic muse who scour the highways and byways of the heart. But while up to, and including, *Hamlet* they disdain the wisdom of this world, after *Hamlet*, at least until *Antony*, they think they have it, and, plunged in this delusion as in others, begin their plays noticeably lacking—or, as in *Macbeth*, refusing—any wisdom at all. For the natural intellectual power of *Hamlet* and his ruthless temperamental pursuit of the real is never repeated, and those who come to wisdom in this second and deeper testing come to it by harder roads and more radically changed. They are indeed 'compelled to come in'—all, that is, except the agents of their redemption, Cordelia and the archetypal Fool himself.

In *Othello* we are back in the world of *Troilus and Cressida*, but more conscious of the issues and more deeply involved. The play, like *Lear*, has two distinct, though interrelated themes,

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corruption and revelation in Othello, and damnation in Iago. While both the text itself and subsequent criticism of it suggest that the most insistent moral problem is Iago, Othello is himself the more interesting a study of salvation for not falling quite into the spiritual pattern of Hamlet and Gloucester and Lear. All these end recognizably more 'fulfilled' with the moral and theological virtues than they began; what Othello shares with them is only their acquisition of intellectual virtues, an increase in knowledge and sensitiveness, in awareness of reality. His very deception and its effect on his emotions accomplish for him this revelation; for 'knavery's plain face is never seen till us'd'. It is important to remember that at the beginning of the play neither Othello's nor Iago's world is the real world.

Othello's character is consistent with the peculiarly mental quality of his redemption. He is not a naturally passionate man like Lear. Lodovico praises him in the same terms as Hamlet does Horatio:

*Is this the noble nature
Whom passion could not shake? Whose solid virtue
The shot of accident, nor dart of chance
Could neither graze nor pierce?*

Yet he is a man who controls his emotions rather than examines their accuracy:

*The Moor is of a free and open nature,
That thinks men honest that but seem to be so,
And will as tenderly be led by the nose
As asses are.*

Though adamant to opposition, he yields easily to persuasion, to Desdemona's suggestion that he should, rashly by all standards, woo her, as well as to Iago's insinuations, which while more absurd in content are more subtle in technique. Indeed, he is described throughout, both by himself and by Iago, as Hamlet's opposite, uncritical, 'unbookish', 'rude in speech'—the last a characteristic hardly sustained, but valuable as a stage direction for ignorance. For Othello is ignorant even of what constitutes his ignorance: he thinks himself a man of action, wise in the ways of the world.

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Yet if Othello is ignorant, he still embodies the ideal of *The Phoenix and the Turtle*:

*The Moor, howbeit that I endure him not
Is of a constant, loving, noble nature.*

He is the Phoenix of *The Phoenix and the Turtle*, and Shakespeare is still enquiring how the Phoenix is destroyed. He concludes here apparently that constancy is betrayed by ignorance, and destroyed by apparent knowledge. For Iago, from whom this apparent knowledge proceeds, imparts not what he knows, which is more than Othello knows, but what he thinks credible to the ignorance of his victim, who, since he takes men as good at their face value, needs only the loss of their face value to take them as bad. If, as Bradley rightly remarked, the spectacle of outstanding perspicacity allied to evil in Iago is terrible, it has in Othello a parallel no less terrible, that of virtue allied to an outstanding absence of penetrative power. For the greater part of the play Othello becomes, to borrow Angelo's syntax, 'more ignorant than his ignorance', so that the imprecations which Emilia hurls at him are quite different from the moral criticisms with which she assails her husband:

*O gull! O dolt!
As ignorant as dirt! . . .*

O thou dull Moor! . . .

Thou art rash as fire. ...

'My lord, you know I love you', Iago had said mockingly, to follow it soon with, 'Men should be what they seem', and when once 'the strong conception' that 'heaven mocks itself has replaced in Othello one set of illusions by another, Desdemona repeats the phraseology with which previous plays make us familiar, 'My lord is not my lord'. The quality of his knowledge affects the quality of his being, and evinces itself in the very phrases, borrowed from Iago, which he uses,

Yet all this time his sensitiveness and imagination, the wisdom of the fool, are developing under torture as they began to

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develop under love, so that when the revelation comes, the phrases of revelation drop from his lips:

LODOVICO: *Where is this rash and most unfortunate man?*

OTHELLO: *That's he that was Othello; here I am.*

It has been remarked that Othello and Romeo are the only Christian heroes who kill themselves in Shakespeare, and Othello's immediate predecessor in tragedy is Hamlet, explicitly conscious of the sin of suicide. Othello must obviously die. 'Where should Othello go?' Neither justice nor mercy can provide for him any other end. Yet, as a personal issue, it is not at all clear why he should kill himself—and why there should be an inevitability about the 'bloody period' not felt in the death of Brutus or Romeo:

*Here is my journey's end, here is my butt
And very sea-mark of my utmost sail.*

His suicide may be claimed as Senecan, useful dramatically, or simply in character, natural to one

*not easily jealous, but, being wrought,
Perplex't in the extreme.*

But Othello speaks in the past tense and gives no indication of perplexity, but rather of decision, in this final speech. Shakespeare is in general the least Senecan of the great Elizabethan dramatists, and the catastrophe is not slavishly followed nor suddenly conceived. We were warned of it in Act II:

*If after every tempest come such calms,
Let the winds blow till they have wakerfd death.*

'Waken'd death' is a *double entendre*, pointing like Lear's last words to later plays. It is also a refrain which stretches backwards as well as forwards in Shakespeare's work:

Death is now the phoenix nest.*

*Even through the hollow eyes of death
I spy life peering.*

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In *Othello* this theme is gathering force. Perhaps in the way that conceptions coalesced and split again in his mind, love and constancy appear two again for Shakespeare, so that Desdemona is the ideal love which Othello through ignorance lost, and must now regain, somehow by an act of his own will. 'Look, what I will not, that I cannot do.' So

*No way but this,
Killing myself.*

Perhaps we call a suicide what he 'thought a sacrifice'.

Desdemona, though not entirely faultless, hastening perhaps the catastrophe by her weak as opposed to her strong lie, obviously speaks the truth in

A guiltless death I die.

Othello, thinking her false, had still found that she almost persuaded 'justice to break her sword', and she twice points out a certain lack of logic in his praying heaven to have mercy on her and having none himself. His revelation comes not through her love for him—that is part of what is revealed—but through Emilia's love for her. By neither is Othello saved quite in the sense in which Hamlet or Lear is saved, perhaps because he has not time. It is his immediate symbolic business to die. If this symbolic interpretation is rejected, the play represents in its treatment of Othello an aberration from the main line of Shakespeare's development from *Hamlet* to *Macbeth*. For in these plays, as in *Lear*, it is men's reaction to knowledge which is explicit and important.

Lear, *Macbeth* and *The Tempest* are in a special sense culminations and universalizations of the recurring *motifs* of earlier plays. The most lucid of them is *The Tempest*, perhaps because it is the nature of solutions to seem simple, whereas problems appear complex, bewildering and vast. *Macbeth* is a restricted and diminishing problem, for it analyses a progressive—or should one say regressive?—defection of being, a shrinking of the world, consequent upon a single but reiterative choice. But in *Lear*, the entire fabric of human experience, the *matter* of choice, is caught, as it were, in the act of question, its meaning gathered up and wrested into an impregnable coherence. So

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the clown in *Othello* appears silhouetted in a brief interlude to define for Shakespeare his next play:

CLOWN: I know not where he lodges, and for me to devise a lodging, and say he lies here or he lies there, were to lie in mine own throat.

DESDEMONA: Can you enquire him out, and be edified by report?

CLOWN: I will catechize the world for him; that is, make questions, and by them answer.

'Make questions and by them answer.' Shakespeare is done with 'devising', and 'will catechize the world'.

The questions, as Hardy said of his own, concern evil and responsibility, but they concern also good: What is evil? What is the relation between sin and suffering? How, if at all, do men become good? This is indeed the whole problem of divine justice as it presented itself to Socrates and Plato; for the play is set in pagan times, and 'man has only himself'.¹ Yet if the problem is pagan, the solution is Christian; it is that of St Augustine and St Thomas, translated, by Shakespeare's supreme capacity to imagine, into a pagan analogue, an analogue easily read back into Christian theology, for the code itself is strewn throughout, but an analogue consistent and living in itself. Indeed, so perfect is the aesthetic fusion of question and answer, and the destruction of the difference between the implicit and the explicit which every work of art strives to achieve, that it is as impossible to say that the play's meaning is the result of character and event as to say that character and event are the result of its meaning. On the one hand, the significance arises not from the play but in it; on the other it starts from no premises. As men h'we always claimed for the Christian revelation of which it is the analogue, it is not a theory about life but life itself.

Perhaps more explicitly, it is the operation of life. Lear, Gloucester, Kent, Edmund, Albany, Edgar, even Cornwall's servants and the obscure Gentleman, all speculate both upon the nature of man and upon the nature of the power which controls his being and destiny. Only the characters almost wholly good or wholly evil do not speculate, for theirs from the

¹ F. P. Wilson, *Elizabethan and Jacobean*, p. 121.

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beginning are the eschatological determinants, knowledge and choice. Implicitly, 'they are judged already', and neither develop nor doubt.

For the rest, it is important both to correlate their development and their speculations, and to correlate their speculations and life as it operates in the play. It is the failure to do this which has made critics from Swinburne to Theodore Spencer quote as Shakespeare's ultimate verdict lines which are not even Gloucester's ultimate verdict, and which are contradicted by the two parallel *motifs* of punishment and salvation which embrace every character and event in the play.

It is, however, not only about man's destiny that *Lear* interrogates the world; it questions also his origin and nature, and, logically, it is this problem which appears first. The opening conversation concerns the antecedents of a bastard, one, we are told later, who took his composition 'in the lusty stealth of nature'. The first speculative verdict of the play is Lear's quotation to Cordelia, 'Nothing will come of nothing', and indeed this verdict is necessary to any speculation at all. On it rest all the subsequent and various assignments of causes to effects, both present and to come, in which the play abounds.

The philosophical tag itself, from which Lear's adaptation comes, the '*ex nihilo nihil fit*', was an assertion of *material* cause, which the Christian doctrine of creation explicitly denied ('*ex*' denoting always a material, never a formal or final or efficient cause). Yet the fathers and schoolmen, while denying that out of nothing nothing was made, in this materialist sense, retained by a different emphasis a *nuance* of its meaning, so that, for them, man whom 'God made of nothing' was *nothing in himself*, and the whole universe would have fallen back into the void of nonentity were it not held in existence by the absolute being of God, loving what he had created, 'lifting never his hands off his work'. These are the contrary associations which the phrase might evoke in an Elizabethan audience. It is in this sense, one assumes, that Dr Sitwell suggests that the echo of the word 'nothing' in *Lear* is fundamental; for to know that he is nothing as Lear comes to know it is to be wide open to the re-creative life of grace. But to suggest that man is ultimately nothing would be to miss the Shakespearian antitheses of to seem and to be, and of to be corrupt and to be redeemed. It is of the seeming

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Lear, the king who was told he was everything, that the Fool says, 'Now thou art an O without a figure. I am better than thou art; I am a fool, thou art nothing.' The 'Sibylline utterance'¹ of Gloucester, 'the quality of nothing hath not much need to hide itself, is spoken of an object which is, which is hidden, which is hidden hypocritically and which, when revealed, is a corruption of the truth:

LEAR: *Who is it that can tell me who I am?*

FOOL: Lear's shadow.

LEAR: I would learn that.

This is the old verdict of *Hamlet*, that it is only our beggars who are bodies and that our kings and outstretched heroes are the beggars' shadows. To 'the thing itself', Lear is yet to come.

Meanwhile, parallel with the speculations upon being and seeming are speculations upon 'nature', the consistency of the being or seeming creature with itself. There are two words which reverberate throughout the play even more constantly than the words 'nothing' and 'patience' which Dr Sitwell points out; those words are 'nature' and 'unnatural' or its equivalent. The verdict of the play is the paradox of Christian doctrine, that nature without grace is unnatural.

So Edmund, Gloucester's 'natural' son, begins Scene ii with the invocation,

*Thou, Nature, art my goddess; to thy law
My services are bound;*

and indulges in a course of conduct which Gloucester describes (supposing it to be Edgar's) as 'unnatural' . . . 'worse than brutish'. When, later, he addresses Edmund, 'Loyal and natural boy', the phrase has all the more dramatic irony for being a *double entendre*, as is the plea to 'enkindle all the sparks of nature to quit this horrid act'. The act is Edmund's own. In the end, it is 'despite of mine own nature' that he means to do some good.

In the main plot, as in the underplot, interwoven to form an inextricable texture both dramatically and metaphysically, 'nature' is the dominant theme. 'The king falls from bias of nature' in casting off Cordelia. Yet it is to nature that he prays to curse Goneril for being unnatural. Of Regan the Fool says,

¹ *A Notebook on William Shakespeare*, p. 53.

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'She will use thee *kindly*', i.e. according to her nature. To nature Lear prays at last to destroy itself:

*Blow winds, and crack your cheeks. . . .
Crack nature's moulds', all germens spill at once
That make ingrateful man.*

The Bedlam's non-existent daughters must, like Lear's own, be '*unkind*'. He is himself, says Kent, still retaining as everywhere the Chaucerian sense, 'the old, *kind* king', and 'Gloucester's bastard son', says Lear, 'was *kinder* to his father than my daughters'. In the treachery of Edmund and the deformity of Goneril and Regan, we are reminded of an earlier question and answer: 'As we are ourselves what things are we,—Merely our own traitors'.

Upon the cause of the unnaturalness of nature, men also speculate:

Then let them anatomize Regan, see what breeds about her heart. Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts?

*It is the stars,
The stars above us, govern our conditions;
Else one self mate and mate could not beget
Such different issues.*

Gloucester is of Kent's opinion, but Edmund calls this 'an admirable evasion of whoremaster man', and the children of this world are perhaps wiser in their generation than the children of light. Lear, attaining at last to a vision of corruption as universal as Hamlet's, concludes that 'none'—because all—'offend':

See how yond justice rails upon yond simple thief. Hark in thine ear: change places; and handy-dandy, which is the justice, which is the thief? . . .

*Thou rascal beadle, hold thy bloody hand!
Why dost thou lash that whore? Strip thine own back;
Thou hotly lusts to use her in that kind
For which thou whipp'st her. The usurer hangs the cozener.
Through tatter'd clothes small vices do appear;
Robes and fun'd gowns hide all. Plate sin with gold,
And the strong lance of justice hurtless breaks;
Arm it in rags, a pigmy's straw doth pierce it.*

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Lear, like Hamlet, is oppressed not only by the corruption of goodness but by the corruption of being, by stench, consumption and mortality, the uncovered body of unaccommodated man:

Is man no more than this? . . . Ha! here's three on's are sophisticated; thou art the thing itself; unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art. Off, off, you tendings! Come; unbutton here.

So, when he has 'found 'em, smelt 'em out', found 'they are not men o' their words' who told him he was ague-proof, his 'noble philosopher' is to be 'the thing itself. But the 'poor, bare, forked animal' is indeed a noble philosopher, so noble that men will go on quoting till the end of time, 'Ripeness is all'. The mad beggar is a banished prince. If man is less than he seems, he is also more than he seems. The uncovered body is only a disguise.

The speculation in *Lear* upon men's destiny and the powers which control it arises in the assumption (made even by the 'sectaries astronomical', Kent and Gloucester) that men are responsible for what they do. It is because the consequences appear unjust that Gloucester makes his famous remark:

*As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods;
They kill us for their sport.*

He is contradicted by Albany, by Edgar, by Edmund, by two subsequent speeches of his own and by the plot:

ALBANY: *This shows you are above,
Thou justicers . . .*

EDGAR: *The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices
Make instruments to plague us:
The dark and vicious place where thee he got
Cost him his eyes.*

EDMUND: *Thou hast spoken right, 'tis true.
The wheel is come full circle; I am here.*

Kent, like Edmund, also sees Providence above Fortune, as in earlier plays:

< *Nothing almost sees miracles
But misery: . . .
Fortune, good night; smile once more; turn thy wheel.*

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Gloucester's own attitude changes *first* to a partial, and then to a complete, acceptance of his suffering as the will of gods very different from wanton boys:

*O you mighty gods,
This world I do renounce, and in your sights
Shake patiently my great affliction off;
If I could bear it longer, and not fall
To quarrel with your great opposeless wills,
My snuff and loathed part of nature should
Burn itself out.*

*You ever gentle gods, take my breath from me:
Let not my worser spirit tempt me again
To die before you please.*

Between these two speeches Gloucester thinks he has been saved miraculously from death. In Kent's sense of miracle he has. Edgar, who, notably, is not content merely to save his father's life, but wishes also to redeem his will, plays, it is true, upon his superstitious character, but in order 'to cure it'. 'The clearest gods' are as yet dark, but Edgar, who can hardly be said to be deceived by his own trick, believes in them.

In the play itself there is nothing wanton. There is justice, mercy, sacrifice and redemption. The simple people themselves 'judge righteously' and pointedly; and their judgements are fulfilled.

*I'll never care what wickedness I do
If this man come to good,*

says the Second Servant, and Cornwall dies forthwith.

*If she live long,
And in the end meet the old course of death,
Women will all turn monsters,*

says the Third Servant of Regan. At his next sight of her the woman Goneril appears to Albany 'be-monstered', and in another Act Regan and Goneril are both dead.

Bradley pointed out long ago that the world of *Lear* is a world where evil lives only by virtue of good and in destroying good destroys itself. But the power which controls destiny in the

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play is more subtle and individual in its working than even this brilliant general statement implies. Suffering is always the result of sin though not necessarily the sin of the person concerned. Where suffering, like Lear's and Gloucester's, is purgative, it is sharply differentiated to fit the fault. Every sufferer except Cordelia has committed an initiatory sin, with which, as in Macbeth, exterior evil co-operates.

Of Lear and Gloucester, Edgar's statement is severely and strikingly true. Pride and lust have here their own punishments though their redemption is the same. The sensual man loses his eyes, the proud man the light of the mind. The man who sinned physically, as he suffers physical deprivation, suffers physical agony, but the man who sinned only with the will and intellect scarcely feels the storm:

*The tempest in my mind
Doth from my senses take all feeling else.*

So his injuries are 'heart-struck'. They 'cut to the brains' not through the flesh but through the spirit, through erroneous assumptions and ungovernable emotions and the broken imperium of a rebellious will. As both Lear's mind and his sin are greater, so his ultimate redemption is more amazing and more profound; but the underplot of Gloucester is not merely a reinforcement, it is an extension, suggesting that the whole of life, even the sensual and the foolish, may be brought to humility and peace.

Lear begins as a man whose values lie in his 'particular will'. He has a trick of remembering his classical education, not only in general philosophical tags like the 'ex nihilo nihil fit', but in odd echoes of the *Phaedo*, perhaps the most striking, 'If you have poison for me, I will drink it', not mentioned by Dr Sitwell, who notes other interesting parallels and verbal reminiscences.¹ Yet in spite of these Lear is as radically unphilosophical as one might imagine Plato's tyrannical patron to have been. Like Richard II, he is pleased to plan a pretty scene, but there is in him an element of ostentation foreign to Richard's self-conscious nuances. He is a stronger, perhaps more vulgar, essentially prouder character, yielding less easily to the event. He is indeed, as Kent tells us, 'power', and 'when

¹ A Notebook on William Shakespeare, pp. 58, 63, 64, 73-9.

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power to flattery bows', mistaking seeming for being, 'majesty falls to folly'. Like Othello's, his vice is essentially intellectual, but to Othello's intellectual incapacity he adds intellectual pride. What infuriates him in both Kent and Cordelia is a truth which will not sacrifice its values to his will, a will subject entirely to emotions uncritically derived from mere appearances. 'Power corrupts',¹ and it corrupts because its very nature is a form of flattery. Over the mind of Cordelia and the mind of Kent, Lear, as a king, has no power. To this, the beginning of his knowledge of reality, he reacts only with wilful pride, accusing Kent of his own vice:

*Since thou hast sought to make us break our vow,
Which we durst never yet, and with strain'd pride
To come betwixt our sentence and our power,
Which nor our nature, nor our place can bear,
Our potency made good, take thy reward.*

Regan and Goneril are no mean witnesses; for, like Marlowe's Mephistopheles, they are already wise with the wisdom of the damned. They know that their father

hath ever but slenderly known himself. . . . The best and soundest of his time hath been but rash.

Revelation, as distinct from redemption, proceeds apace in Lear, and its mouthpiece is the Fool, who says himself that he stands for truth, the truth which Lear tried to banish, which returns in Kent to serve him against his will, and appears in the Fool as, we are told, the wisdom of God always appears to the world. Already, in Act II, there is an anticipation of the play's ultimate judgement between the two versions of wisdom and folly:

*That sir which serves and seeks for gain,
And follows but for form,
Will pack when it begins to rain,
And leave thee in the storm.
But I will tarry; the fool will stay,
And let the wise man fly:
The knave turns fool that runs away ;
The fool no knave, perdy.*

¹ Cf. *Gorgias*, 525E-526A.

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Perdy' indeed:

For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.¹

For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. . . . Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.²

So the wise knave who runs away from knowledge and suffering is, after all, a fool. In this true sense, apparently, all men are born fools like Lear, and become wise only by grace as opposed to nature, and by suffering, like Kent, whose misery 'sees miracles'. Lear, increasingly subject to the revelation of event and the comment of the Fool, learns to connect love and knowledge, realizing that when Cordelia's small fault drew from his heart all love and wrenched his 'frame of nature', then he 'let folly in'. After this revelation, and after the 'Down climbing sorrow' which so few actors give force to, he prays for the first time for self-control:

*O let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven;
Keep me in temper; I would not be mad.*

In *Character Problems in Shakespeare's Plays*, Dr Levin Schucking affirms that when Lear exhibits patience, humility, charity or pity, he is merely physically and psychologically exhausted. Lear may be; yet there is no diminution of intellectual vigour in the most passionate attack upon human justice ever made, and with only the break of Edgar's aside, Lear goes on:

*If thou wilt weep my fortunes, take my eyes. . . .
Thou must be patient, we came crying hither. . . .
I will preach to thee: mark.*

Nor, when immediately afterwards his madness comes on him again and he forgets his own counsels, is it anything so simple as energy that he lacks. When he sleeps at last it is as much his own efforts at patience as his passion that have exhausted him. It is not easy, even when the heart is broken, for the proud to pray; and Lear has to pray for his patience, remember his pity ('I have one part in my heart/That's sorry yet for thee'), and

¹ i Corinthians iii, 19.

² Ibid, i, 19-25.

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find charity and humility in the knowledge of universal corruption and undeserved love.

His first prayer, in the fifth scene of Act I, is at least partially answered; for in the following act, in the midst of his passion at Regan's refusal to speak to him, he 'forbears'. She and her husband may be ill, and not be themselves. The sight of Kent in the stocks and the subsequent conversation with Goneril and Regan soon shatter the excuses he has made for her, but after his dreadful curse and speeches of denunciation, he turns to Goneril quietly:

*I prithee, daughter, do not make me mad:
I will not trouble thee, my child; farewell.
We'll no more meet, no more see one another;
But yet thou art my flesh, my blood, my daughter;*

For a moment bitterness, if not passion, grips him as he thinks of his daughter rather as a disease in his flesh, a 'plague-sore' in his 'corrupted blood'. But again he forbears:

*But Til not chide thee;
Let shame come when it will, I do not call it:
I do not bid the thunder-bearer shoot,
Nor tell tales of thee to high-judging Jove.
Mend when thou canst; be better at thy leisure: '
I can be patient.*

More torture, however, is to come, and he prays again, this time explicitly for patience:

*But for true need,—
You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need.*

Again his prayer is answered, and when, in the next scene, he has again been moved to uncontrolled outbursts of passion, he breaks off:

*No, I will be the pattern of all patience;
I will say nothing.*

Even had we not the Authorised Version's summary of St Luke ix in the traditional phrase, [Christ] 'proposeth to all the pattern of his patience', the reference here would not be hard to take; for all four evangelists record the silence at which

Pilate 'marvelled'. The 'gods' of *Lear*, seeing perhaps the old king's humility, give also what, as a pagan, he does not ask, charity and pity,¹ both for the Fool, and for the 'poor naked wretches' for whose 'houseless heads and unfed sides', whose 'loop'd and window'd raggedness', he prays before he sleeps. Commenting on this speech, Dr Schiicking is of the opinion that Shakespeare did not 'associate compassion with the poor and naked with a higher moral standpoint' (p. 186). It is difficult to see how an Elizabethan, whatever his religion, could have survived his quota of epistles and gospels without such association, whether or not he approved of it, and it seems odd to separate pity for undeserved suffering from mercy for suffering deserved, which is intrinsic in Shakespeare and much harder to achieve. Lear himself, however, contradicts Dr Schiicking:

*O! I have to?en
Too little care of this. Take physic pomp;
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou may'st shake the superflux to them,
And show the heavens more just.*

Like Lear, Gloucester is partially saved through his own suffering, though partially through Edgar's love. Like Lear he thinks of those of whom he has not thought before. Like Lear he sees that he has lived in a world of appearances, that he 'stumbled' when he 'saw'.

I have no way, and therefore want no eyes

with its insistent reminiscence of the gospels² is, in its terrible hopelessness, worthy to set beside the five times repeated 'never' of Lear. But in the play Gloucester is wrong. Just as his suffering leads him to charity, so Edgar is to lead him to humility, resignation and joy, so that his 'flaw'd heart . . . twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief, burst smilingly'.

¹ I do not mean that pagan tragedy does not show or induce pity. Pagan philosophy, however, does not demand it, and pagan speakers may pray to be shown it, but not to show it themselves.

² Cf. St John xfv, 5 and 6 . . . St Luke viii, 10, and St Mark iv, 12. Dr Sitwell points an interesting parallel between Gloucester's lines and Socrates' speech in the *Phaedo* (79C-D). Cf. also *Phaedo*, 65E-66A.

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Lear also died not in grief but in joy, and the redemption which precedes it is at once more explicit and more daring than Gloucester's:

*Thou hast one daughter,
Who redeems nature from the general curse
Which twain have brought her to.*

*Restoration, hang
Thy medicine on my lips, and let this kiss
Repair those violent harms.*

*Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia,
The gods themselves throw incense.*

Mr S. L. Bethel, in *Shakespeare and the Popular Dramatic Tradition*, was, I believe, the first to draw attention to the number of phrases which connect Cordelia with Christ. He quotes, for instance,

*Fairest Cordelia that art most rich, being poor;
Most choice, forsaken; and most lov'd, despised;*

and one might substantiate these and similar phrases from the evidence of plot. Cordelia's is the true love—and love of truth—from which Lear turns to folly, disillusionment and bewilderment; to his pride she has nothing to say, but to his suffering and his need, she comes, a queen from her own country, to fight for him, forgive him and die with him. Lear sees her first as one with whom he can no longer have any connection:

*Thou art a soul in bliss; but I am bound
Upon a wheel of fire, that mine own tears
Do scald like molten lead.*

As he realizes her actuality he offers her a penitence complete and practical, and having experienced her love and forgiveness he has no other desires:

LEAR: *When thou dost ask me blessing, Pll kneel down,
And ask of thee forgiveness: so we'll live,
And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh. . . .
And take upon's the mystery of things,
As if we were God's spies. . . .*

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We miss the double force of the first image unless we see here, superimposed on the natural relationship, the dramatic reversal of the roles of the confessional by which at Cordelia's 'Give me your blessing, father', it is Lear who will kneel down, become the penitent, and 'humbly ask forgiveness'. So

*He that parts us shall bring a brand from heaven,
And fire us hence like foxes.*

The brand is brought; the gods accept the sacrifice; Cordelia is hanged.

Cordelia, though much more attractive than Isabella, is, like her, a fallible woman. Her arithmetical calculation upon the theme of love is not happy. Yet she is, in her few but highly individual appearances, the most nearly perfect woman (as opposed to symbol) in literature. It has been said that she has in her a touch of her fathers obstinacy and pride—and so also do at least two of our contemporaries tax Christ with arrogance and unkindness to the Pharisees, now, it would appear, whited anew:

*We are not the first
Who, with best meaning, have incurred the worst.*

*I know you what you are;
And like a sister am most loath to call
Your faults as they are narrid.*

These do not seem to me the words of pride, but of courage and truth. Christianity alone among religions dared to add courage to the virtues of its God, and if Cordelia is to be, as I believe, his analogue, she cannot confine herself to being merely meek and mild. Yet I do not suggest either that Shakespeare meant her to be in any normal sense of the word a symbol, or that in her or in her shadow Edgar he registered any disagreement with the dictum of St Thomas that the word 'redeemer' may be used only of Christ. Cordelia is consistent in herself and with the pagan world in which she lives and dies. She is allowed merely to die there, because she is an analogue and not a symbol; for there is a sense, other than that which Swinburne meant, in which *Lear* is indeed 'the darkness of revelation', a Calvary without a resurrection. "These same crosses spoil me...

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mine eyes are not o' the best', says the old king, but he knows that if Cordelia lives,

*It is a chance which does redeem all sorrows
That ever I have felt.*

He dies believing that, after all, she does live. He is wrong, maybe, and dies in error, the last tragedy of man. Yet his whole redemption has been a redemption from error, a redemption from the pride of the eyes and the intellect, the delusions of sense and will, to the knowledge that substance is shadow, and shadow substance. So Cordelia who said of herself, 'so young—and true', but who was to him 'that little seeming-substance*' becomes both substance and sacrifice. In the play Lear is dead and cannot be interrogated, and the fool who stayed is hanged too.¹ Shakespeare, who rejected the easy happy ending of his sources to write not only a tragedy but the tragedy of man, did not disdain to leave it to the abandonment with which, as his tradition asserted, incarnation must be content. But the foolish joy of the dying Lear is the wisdom of Leontes and Pericles, of Cymbeline and Alonzo. It is, if one may adapt Burgundy's strangely phrased lines in Act I, a 'faith that reason without miracle could never plant'.

It is arguable, but unlikely, that *Timon of Athens* was written before *Lear*. Like Lear, Timon has lived foolishly in a world of appearances and is disillusioned; like Lear he curses human nature, but unlike Lear, he is not saved. He dies in his pride and misanthropy, a misanthropy more complete and virulent than Lear's, for his curse upon man is not merely destruction, but the corruption which Lear only sees but which Timon incites:

*O thou wall)
That girdlest in those wolves, dive in the earth,
And fence not Athens! Matrons, turn incontinent!
Obedience fail in children! Slaves and fools,
Pluck the grave wrinkled senate from the bench
And minister in their steads! To general filths
Convert O' the instant, green virginity!
Do't in your parents' eyes. . . .*

¹ 'And my poor fool is hanged' is perhaps a conscious *double entendre*. Cordelia's is precisely 'the foolishness of God'.

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Yet Shakespeare has not forgotten his redemptive theme, and among the passages curiously reminiscent of the greater play is Timon's exception of Flavius from his general execration:

*Had I a steward
So true, so just, and now so comfortable?
It almost turns my dangerous nature mild.
Let me behold thy face. Surely this man
Was born of woman.
Forgive my general and exceptless rashness,
You perpetual-sober gods! I do proclaim
One honest man, mistake me not, but one;
No more, I pray, and he's a steward.
How fain would I have hated all mankind!
And thou redeem'st thyself: but all save thee
I fell with curses.*

Flavius indeed redeems himself; he is powerless to redeem Timon. After the limitless promise of

*My long sickness
Of health and living now begins to mend,
And nothing brings me all things*

Timon's misanthropy returns full-flood, and instead of Lear's resolution to live in charity and humility, Timon can only suggest hanging oneself as the answer to life. Yet he retains to the end in the mouth of Alcibiades, himself no mean moralist of the school of Isabella and Lear, the epithet 'noble', and he is forgiven, if not redeemed:

*Though thru abhorr'dst in us our human griefs,
Scorn'dst our brain's flow and those our droplets which
From niggard nature fall, yet rich conceit
Taught thee to make vast Neptune weep for aye
On thy low grave, on faults forgiven.*

This last speech of *Timon* is more purely charitable than the last speech of any other tragedy, and the play is perhaps Shakespeare's comment on the habit of rashly condemning those who take their sufferings merely ill:

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*To be in anger is impiety;
But who is man that is not angry?*

These, like the last speech itself, are the words of Alcibiades, a young man who—unlike Dr Schucking's Lear—shows no signs of exhaustion of any sort, except a temporary exhaustion of funds. He is an exponent not only of charity, but of the mercy which St Thomas had said is its effect, and like Isabella and Portia practises towards his defeated enemies what he had preached to them in vain as an advocate for others. Pleading for the life of a fellow-soldier who, 'in hot blood', had killed the man who insulted him, he turns against the First Senator his own argument, that to bear, not to revenge, is valour:

*If there be
Such valour in the bearing, what make we
Abroad? Why women are more valiant . . .
 thefelon
Loaden with irons wiser than the judge
If wisdom be in suffering. O my lords,
As you are great, be pitifully good.*

But the First Senator, far from believing with Alcibiades that 'pity is the virtue of the law, and none but tyrants use it cruelly', remains convinced that 'nothing emboldens sin so much as mercy', and Alcibiades, who will not take this for his answer, is, like Kent, banished for his pains. When, like Coriolanus, he has brought the government of his city to its knees, he pardons it freely at the request of the two senators who had refused his own plea for his friend. Throughout, *Timon* seems a play of echoes which Shakespeare never conceived as a dramatic whole. It shares with *Lear* and *Coriolanus* not only its doctrine of mercy, but its indissoluble connection of hatred and pride.

Coriolanus hates only his kin. His, like Lear's, is the tragedy of apparent self-sufficiency, in this case the double irony of a 'mother's son' who thinks he can stand alone, not knowing that in both his dependency and his pride he is as she has made and marred him. So, says Menenius,

He wants nothing of a god but eternity and a heaven to throne in,

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and to this pride it seems at first that though the Volsces may
'plough Rome and harrow Italy', he'll never

*Be such a gosling to obey instinct, but stand
As if a man were author of himself
And knew no other kin.*

Yet as he develops through the long conversion scene, he knows
that

*Not of a woman's tenderness to be
Requires nor child nor woman's face to see.*

He rises, self-warned, to flight, but it is too late. After standing
silent through Volumnia's fifty lines he gives in to compassion:

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

'Unnatural' because mother is suppliant to son. Shakespeare's
mental processes are fraught with overtones and react typically
to his own phrases, which he writes in one sense and reads and
writes *from* in another. So perhaps from '*the heavens do open*' he
goes on, image-provoked and image-provoking:

*You have won a happy victory to Rome;
But, for your son, believe it, O believe it,
Most dangerously you have with him prevailed,
If not most mortal to him.*

So it is with Coriolanus,

*As with a man by his own alms poisoned
And by his charity slain. . . .*

*To this end,
He bowed his nature, never known before
But to be rough, unswayable and free.*

Yet like Timon, after a suggestion of grace, he dies his old
self, seeing himself 'an eagle in a dove-cote', fluttering the lesser
breeds. Coriolanus has indeed a naive

*Which assaults
Mercy itself, and frees all faults.*

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In him and in Timon, Shakespeare, the least doctrinaire of dramatists, shows, incomplete as it is sometimes found in men, the process which is perfect in Lear.

After the profound disturbance of the non-historical tragedies *Coriolanus* seems clear and statuesque, a play of the reasoning intellect, where even the pity and humour are cool. *Antony and Cleopatra*, which precedes it, is neither cool, nor, in the main action, disturbing. It is as if, after the *De profundis* of *Lear* and the deep damnation of *Macbeth*, Shakespeare turned to the mingled yarn with a new purpose, to see what happens to those, the majority, whose suffering is not unbearable and whose sin is not great. Yet Antony and Cleopatra *are* saved, both in the way and to the degree that many are, through a surrender to love as they know it, frankly sexual, but not entirely selfish. It is not here a question of whether Antony was right or wrong to prefer love to honour or love to expediency, according as one interprets the Roman claim—and Shakespeare himself presents both interpretations in the first scene; it is rather that in a choice not wholly evil (and how many choices are in motive wholly good?) the good that he chose became better, both in Cleopatra and in himself. Had he chosen otherwise, he might have been saved in that way as in this, but with that the critic is not concerned. Shakespeare could not treat the 'facts' of *Antony and Cleopatra* as he treated the 'facts' of *Lear*. This was not an isolated piece of near-legend, but the attested prologue to the Augustan peace, which his tradition had taught him was the stage for the drama of Christ:

*The time of universal peace is near:
Prove this a prosperous day, the three-nook'd world
Shall bear the olive freely.*

Yet what, he may have thought, was the by-product of history? Even with good things, was it a case of 'Woe unto him by whom they come'?

Few good men perhaps, as a matter of personal happiness, would prefer to live with Caesar rather than die with Antony. His end is merciful as well as just. Prodigal to the last of the stuff of his huge spirit, he is a mine, not merely»of the material bounty by which he crowns Enobarbus's turpitude with gold, but also of a natural generosity, not far from the charity of the

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kingdom of God. His wing plucked of vassal kings and seasoned soldiers, he does not, like Timon, rail at men's bad faith, but writes 'gentle adieus and greetings', and regrets that his 'fortunes have corrupted honest men'. Only against love's treachery is he enraged—and is easily convinced that it is only apparent. He changes little, but he survives, more fully himself, not shrunk like Macbeth, nor dessicate like Iago, but whole and human in the face of death:

Come then, for with a wound I must be cur'd.

Cleopatra is more explicitly improved *in* the play, so much so that her change of character has earned the protests of Dr Schiicking, who registers, apparently, his belief that women are not ennobled nor made dignified by love. So Iago also quotes sceptically, 'they say base men being in love have then a nobility in their natures more than is native to them'. Like Antony, but less even than Antony, Cleopatra suffers; yet her suffering is pathetic rather than tragic. The other tragic character is indeed Enobarbus, he who was entirely Shakespeare's invention, who borrows his language from Christian conceptions and who achieves a repentance which would grace a saint:

*That life, a very rebel to my will,
May hang no longer on me; throw my heart
Against the flint and hardness of my fault,
Which, being dried with grief, will break to powder,
And finish all foul thoughts. O Antony!
Nobler than my revolt is infamous,
Forgive me in thine own particular;
But let the world rank me in register
A master-leaver and a fugitive.*

Enobarbus betrayed with open eyes the virtues of loyalty and gratitude, high in the hierarchy of Shakespeare's values, and given to men who know neither charity nor grace. He is the 'wise man' who runs away, but becomes a fool again that he may be wise. He who is not pleased by his penitence is surely 'nor of heaven nor earth*.

CHAPTER V

CORRUPTION AND DAMNATION

(Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth)

*Oh God, man, the things that are going to happen
Have already happened.*

The Family Reunion, p. 74.

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world,
and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds
were evil. St John iii, 19.

IN Shakespeare's mature tragedies he has learnt for his villains, as for his heroes, the terror of light. His candidates for damnation are brought out of the twilight of Richard III's subconscious guiltiness into the open revelation of mind and event.

Moreover, they share with Richard, not only this process, much heightened, of illumination, but also the same exact and theologically rooted sin, by which, as Wolsey remarked, albeit in Fletcherian cadences, the angels fell:

*Cromwell, I charge thee, fling away ambition:
By that sin fell the angels: how can man then,
The image of his Maker, hope to win by't.*¹

So Raleigh also remarked in *The History of the World* (II, xiii, 7):

ambition which begetteth every vice . . . looketh only to the ends by it self set down. . . . It was the first sin that the world had and began in Angels, for which they were cast into hell, without hope of redemption.

It is in this sinister tradition that Claudius, Iago, Goneril, Regan, Macbeth, all perish, consumed, as Shakespeare had foreseen in *Troilus and Cressida*, by their own proud appetite for power:

*Then everything includes itself in power,
Power into will, will into appetite;*

¹ Henry VIII, III, ii, 441-3.

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*And appetite, an universal wolf,
So doubly seconded with will and power,
Must make perforce an universal prey;
And last eat up himself.*

One is reminded of Dante's vision of the furies among the fallen angels in the ninth canto of the *Inferno*, 'each with her claws tearing her breast'.

By Shakespeare as by St Thomas,¹ the lust for power is rooted in pride. The 'I am myself alone' of Richard, the poetic and Senecan heightening of the more prosaic theological 'I am something', rises in insistence through the terrible and pathetic wavering of Claudius and the philosophic egoism of Iago to the immediate choice of Regan and Goneril, who neither struggle nor rationalize. In *Macbeth* the process is recapitulated with Iago's self-deceptive utilitarianism left out. Macbeth is too imaginative, too sensitive, too wise for this. He is a hero, not a villain, knowing from the beginning what he hazards. More splendid at first than Claudius, darker at last than Goneril, he is endued with retrospective light: 'Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell.'

Claudius, Shakespeare's first study in damnation since Richard III, has Macbeth's conscience without Macbeth's imagination, Macbeth's physical courage with much more than Macbeth's physical and mental control. For though he is, in a sense, the 'king of shreds and patches' which Hamlet sees every man to be, he is no Aegisthus, as Hamlet also recognizes in his dismissal of Rosengrantz and Guildenstern as of a 'baser nature' come 'between the pass and fell-incensed points of mighty opposites'. The last phrase suggests Milton, but it is no Miltonic Satan who bows his 'stubborn knees' in perhaps the most amazing stage-villain's soliloquy ever put upon the boards. Yet the very opening lifts Claudius into the archetypal, and the speech proceeds to a profound and subtle analysis of choice, the choice of the past act which constitutes damnation:

*Pray can I not,
Though inclination be as sharp as will:
My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent.*

¹ *Summa*, 1-2:84:2:0 and 2-2:162:5-7.

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'Will', in this sense of the corrupt will, the consent to desire, is 'guilt' even before action, but Claudius's terrible and specific dilemma, like that of Macbeth, is that he consents to what he has already done. So his *knowledge* of mercy and redemption is useless to him:

For beatitude does not consist in the knowledge of divine things, but in a divine life: for the devils know them better than men.¹

Of the divine life Claudius does not speak. Unlike Hamlet, who uses the word constantly, he never mentions 'grace'. He stands, as it were, outside his salvation, viewing what might be:

*What if this cursed hand
Were thicker than itself with brother's blood,
Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens
To wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy
But to confront the visage of offence?*

So he sees the two-fold force of prayer, prevention and pardon. Then lucid, close-textured and desperately logical, his speech condemns him:

*Then I'll look up;
My fault is past. But, O! what form of prayer
Can serve my turn? 'Forgive me my foul murder'?
That cannot be; since I am still possessed
Of those effects for which I did the murder.
My crown, mine own ambition and my queen.
May one be pardoned and retain the offence?*

On this crucial line all hinges. Like Faustus, who does not offer to burn his books till his last, and too late, line, Claudius will not give up the effects for which he sinned. So he keeps the ultimate effects. In this world 'the wicked prize' may 'buy out the law' but above, where there is no shuffling, 'the action lies in his true nature'—cause and effect.

*What then? What rests?
Try what repentance can: what can it not?
Yet what can it, when one cannot repeat?*

¹ *History of the World*, Preface.

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Then unlike Macbeth, who never even makes the attempt, Claudius prays. Perhaps Shakespeare felt, as he read what he had written, that the last despairing plea of the king of Denmark would have wrested from heaven the grace to repent. There are no lines like these for Scotland's king:

*O wretched state! O bosom black as death!
O limed soul, that struggling to be free
Art more engaged. Help angels! make assay;
Bow stubborn knees; and heart with strings of steel,
Be soft as sinews of the new-born babe.
All may be well.*

But all is not well:

*My words fly up, my thoughts remain below:
Words without thoughts never to heaven go.*

Claudius, who begins as an ambitious sensualist, a type with which every Renaissance court appears to have been plentifully provided, becomes first a fratricide and then, finding that 'things bad begun make strong themselves by ill', chooses like Macbeth to go on rather than back. His 'damnation' is in this conscious choice; for since the uneasy, muddled hope of Bolingbroke, and the groping, crepuscular revelations of Richard III, Shakespeare's psychology of guilt and evil has become mature and precise. Claudius's struggle is not sudden, nor is it isolated. Like Macbeth he is, up to the turning-point, a 'man to double business bound', lamenting before the long soliloquy his 'heavy burden', knowing that 'above' there is no shuffling porter to say, 'Come in equivoçator'.

After the soliloquy, like Macbeth, he hopes to regain his peace of mind by removing the instrument of divine justice:

*Do it, England;
For like the hectic in my blood he rages,
And thou must cure me. Till I know 'tis done,
However my haps, my joys were ne'er begun.*

Like Macbeth's, the edge of his resolution hardens; like Macbeth's, his sheer physical courage remains, even a mental courage, the isolated and therefore increasingly obvious virtue of the damned. Up to the end also he retains what Macbeth,

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more thoroughly selfish, does not retain, his affection for his wife. It should not be forgotten that worldly power was not Claudius's only temptation. 'My crown, mine own ambition and my queen' were the effects for which he did the murder. Whether he places them in ascending or descending order, we can only speculate, but Hamlet, true to his own set of values rather than Claudius's, puts the queen first:

*Here, thou incestuous, murderous damned Dane . . .
Follow my mother.*

If Hamlet is indeed the minister of heaven, Claudius gets and does not get what he asked. It is as if God retorted to him, as more terribly to Macbeth, 'Thy will be done'.

*He is justly served;
It is a poison tempered by himself.*

It is ironic that Iago's should ever have been described as a 'motiveless malignity',¹ since he adduces for himself the motives for which men habitually commit murders—gain, revenge and jealousy; while indeed he did not originally intend to commit any murders at all. Yet it may plausibly be said, with such opposite critics as Bradley and Schucking, that Iago protests too much, and Bradley, like Coleridge, interprets this as *motive-hunting*. Iago's 'jealousy' rests upon an assumption which he himself suspects to be untrue

*(It is thought abroad that twixt my sheets
He has done my office: I know not ift be true),*

and his 'revenge' is not for a personal injury but for the mere failure of a suit. That this latter should be as painful as his first speeches indicate is partly perhaps due to some financial embarrassment which it has increased instead of curing (no doubt the 'three great ones' required presents), but Scene i is full more typically of hurt pride and frustrated lust for power:

*We cannot all be masters, nor all masters
Cannot be truly followed.*

¹ Coleridge, *Lectures and Notes on Shakespeare, Othello*.

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So he is of those who

Keep yet their hearts attending on themselves,

who when they have, as a means not an end, 'lin'd their coats',
'do themselves homage':

In following him, I follow but myself;

Heaven is my judge, not I for love or duty,

But seeming so, for my peculiar end: . . .

I am not what I am.

It may be that Iago is neither motiveless nor motive-hunting, but that all his motives are comprehended in the consuming appetite for possession and power. For 'mere suspicion' that what he has he does not hold, he 'will do as if for surety', and Othello whom he suspects of damaging his pride as a husband has certainly hurt his self-esteem as a soldier. His plot is to revenge what's past and get what is to come—money, prestige, and above all the power which, as the working out of his plot shows, intoxicates him more than the physical lusts with which he contemptuously hopes to play. That a lust for power needs neither a kingdom for its object nor a noble nature for its subject will be obvious to anyone with even a passing acquaintance with the life which constitutes Iago's world. Indeed, men of all calibres and professions play the game of the fallen angels for remarkably tawdry stakes.

To Iago it is precisely a game, for which he is soon to issue the card of rules. In the meantime he has decided on the dress in which he personally will perform. His cue is not, like Edmund's, 'Villainous melancholy'. Like Kent's it is his occupation to be plain—'honest, honest Iago'. With this assumed bluff soldier the coarseness of the phrases with which he wakes Brabantio is obviously in tune, but this coarseness is surely intended also to infect Brabantio's wound with a hectic which will rage till he has seized his daughter and disgraced Othello as far as lies in his power. Desdemona may then fall 'at fortune's alms' into the lap of Roderigo, and Iago rise through influence with a senator's son-in-law. The first part of this consequence is obviously Roderigo's expectation, and it is in order to refloat the pricked bubble of Roderigo's hope at least and at last to enjoy Desdemona's body, that Iago devotes himself to the

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rationalization of egotism into egoism at the end of Act I. He also proceeds to change his own plan to meet the new situation.

Two things emerge from this famous analysis of action. First an absolute and Nietzschean egoism is recommended, which postulates a psychology in which a rational will may for this end control, and at the same time use, sensual lusts:

I never found a man that knew how to love himself. Ere I would say I would drown myself for the love of a guinea-hen I would change my humanity with a baboon. . . . Virtue! a fig! 'tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus. Our bodies are our gardens, to the which our wills are gardeners. . . . If the balance of our lives had not one scale of reason to poise another of sensuality, the blood and baseness of our natures would conduct us to most preposterous conclusions; but we have reason to cool our . . . unbitted lusts, whereof I take this that you call love to be a sect or scion.

Secondly Iago records his belief that while the ideal is to be rationally selfish, all men are in practice either rational or irrational egotists:

It cannot be that Desdemona should long continue her love for the Moor—put money in thy purse—nor he his to her. . . . These Moors are changeable in their wills;—fill thy purse with money: . . . She must change for youth: when she is sated with his body, she will find the error of her choice. She must have change, she must.

The fact that this speech is persuasive does not mean that its tenets are assumed. The play suggests that Iago recognizes a certain natural benevolence in Desdemona and in Cassio:

*For 'tis most easy
The inclining Desdemona to subdue
In any honest suit; she's framed as fruitful
As the free elements.*

*He hath a daily beauty in his life
That makes me ugly.*

But Iago believes that if a man be forced to choose between his own and another's good, he invariably chooses his own. It is

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Emilia's exhibition of selfless love for her mistress—her *stupid* unselfishness—which amazes him and which destroys him.

For vice perverts us and causes us to err about the principles of action. So it is plain that it is impossible to be wise in practice without being morally good.¹

To make Iago completely insensitive to good is to ignore the lines already quoted about Desdemona and Cassio, and indeed others:

*So I will turn her virtue into pitch,
And out of her own goodness make the net
That shall enmesh them all.*

*And many worthy and chaste dames even thus,
All guiltless meet reproach.*

Yet to make him desire evil as such and for its own sake is to ignore his momentary doubt whether he *need* kill Cassio. Iago has throughout the play sufficient knowledge for immediate and relative choices, and sufficient humanity to choose what he conceives to be *a* good, for himself. His damnation is to have before him in the end the complete revelation, and yet to be compelled by some inner reiteration, the *habit* of his own acts of will. Without this double allowance, of a knowledge sufficient for moral choice, but insufficient in itself for expedient choice, it is impossible to have Iago—or anyone else—at once condemnable and condemned.

Iago's own statement of his motive in Act I, Scene iii, is worth noting, giving as it does also the main outline of his original plot. Roderigo is used for 'sport and profit'; he, it would appear, is merely accidental to the main scheme, which is to get Cassio's 'place' and 'to plume up my will'; that is to arrive at the material and psychological rewards of power. Othello, in one of his moments of vision, reacts in retrospect to this same image of waving plumes, seeing the legitimate splendour of the soldier as making him peculiarly vulnerable to the temptations of power:

*Farewell, the plumed troop and the big wars
That make ambition virtue.*

¹ *Ethics*, II44a.

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Iago himself never perhaps conceives ambition to be virtue, and the plume image in his speech is bereft of its splendour though not of its intoxication. The adaptations and modifications of his plot, in so far as they are necessitated, and not due merely to an intoxication of power, are the result of a failure to allow for emotion and action outside the ambit of his own imaginative life. The decision to kill Desdemona comes from Othello. Iago even perfunctorily pleads for her, though this may be only in order to sustain his own reputation and whet Othello's fury at the same time. After Act III, Scene iii, Iago's actions appear to be directed almost as much to the present exercise, as to the future obtaining, of power. He sounds what stop he pleases with a gloating or airy zest, which the lines to Othello, though not to Desdemona, betray. Yet after the miscarriage—perhaps due to Roderigo's half-heartedness—of his scheme for the removal of Cassio, Iago sees that his plot has potential dangers for himself.

There follows the long scene where his increasingly incredulous and increasingly intimidating ejaculations interrupt Emilia's disclosures. At the complete revelation her husband turns on her with what Bradley called his 'melancholy exhibition of human inconsistency':

Villainous whore!

After the 'Tilth, thou liest', which precedes his killing of her, he leaves the stage, and on his return speaks only three lines, the first a cool comment on Othello's attempt to kill him. It is, however, more than a cool comment. Othello has been, since Act III, obsessed with damnation, Iago's, Desdemona's and his own:

*If thou dost slander her and torture me,
Never pray more: abandon all remorse;
On horror's head, horrors accumulate;
Do deeds to make heaven weep, all earth amaz'd;
For nothing can'st thou to damnation add
Greater than that.*

*Come, swear it, damn thyself;
Lest being like one of heaven, the devils themselves
Should fear to seize thee; therefore be double damn'd;
Swear thou art honest. . . .*

(Yet

0, ill-starred wench,

whip me, ye devils,

*From the possession of this heavenly sight!
Blow me about in winds! roast me in sulphur!
Wash me in steep-down gulfs of liquid fire!*¹

*/ look down towards his feet; but that's a fable:
If that thou be'st a devil, I cannot kill thee.*

/ bleed, sir; but not kiWd.

OTHELLO: *Will you, I pray, demand that demi-devil
Why he has thus ensnar'd my soul and body?*

IAGO: *Demand me nothing: what you know, you know:
From this time forth I never will speak word.*

He does not. Here at the end of the play, Iago has something of the greatness of Milton's Satan, 'the unconquerable will and courage never to submit or yield'. He has also knowledge, and lives at last in the real world. The devils and the damned, says Aquinas, perceive God in his effects. 'Their intellect is not darkened by the privation of all truth'.² Yet like Marlowe's Mephistopheles, Iago will not discuss his hell.

¹ Add to these V, ii, 137, and the sinister comment on Emilia's revelation, 'Are there no stones in heaven but what serve for the thunder?' Cf. St Luke **xx**, 18: 'Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder.'

² *Summa*, Supplement: 98:8:0 and 1:64:1:0.

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As Hamlet is Troilus's heir, so in a sense Goneril and Regan are the heirs of Iago; they spring fully armed from his desire, grasping power with more prudence and more ruthlessness. There is indeed a terrible logic in both their theory and their practice, a cold calculation, worse than any fury or brutality:

REGAN: *I pray you, father, being weak, seem so . . .*

LEAR: *I gave you all—*

REGAN: *And in good time you gave it.*

They need 'anatomizing'⁵ like the logic of history. Compared with theirs, the machinations of the Machiavellian Edmund are gay and thin, so that we are shocked to find him actually consigning his father to the revenges of Regan and Cornwall, and, wooed by a certain fine *insouciance* in his villainy, are not surprised when he repents. Edmund's is, indeed, a character difficult to focus, though his affiliations with Richard III are obvious, and he has an authentic touch of the debonair Mercutio. As Lear himself is corrupted by the power he possesses, Edmund, Goneril, Regan and Cornwall are corrupted by the appetite for power. Only those who serve, or, like Albany, wish to serve, have *kind* hearts: the three servants of Cornwall, Gloucester's old tenant, Kent, whose master shall find him 'full of labours', a Gentleman and a Fool; Edgar, who nurses the miseries of his father in the disguise of poverty and madness, and Cordelia, who asks blessing of an 'oppressed king'. Albany, the ultimate victor, has had enough of power:

*For us, we will resign,
During the life of this old majesty,
To him our absolute power.*

When Lear is dead, Albany turns to Kent and Edgar:

*Friends of my soul, you twain,
Rule in this realm, and the gor'd state sustain.*

Kent will have none of it:

*I have a journey, sir, shortly to go;
My master calls me, I must not say no.*

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So Albany accepts his power, with heavy heart but dutiful hands, apologizing for his weakness in trying to avoid it:

*The weight of this sad time, we must obey;
Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.*

'Nolo episcopari'. The *sententia* that only those who do not want power should have it is indeed one which Shakespeare himself might have written.

Albany, stiff and colourless as mouthpieces are apt to be, serves in the play to fill the gap left by the absenteeism of a truly Aristotelian God. He distributes praise and blame and moral analysis like a *deus ex machina*, since for these as for other functions in the 'darkness of revelation', 'man has only himself. As with the Duke in *Measure for Measure*, his importance is in inverse proportion to his vitality, and when he anatomizes Goneril, we should listen very carefully indeed:

O Goneril!

*You are not worth the dust which the rude wind
Blows in your face. I fear your disposition:
That nature which contemns its origin,
Cannot be bordered certain in itself;
She that herself will sliver and disbranch
From her material sap, perforce must wither
And come to deadly use.*

Albany renders here, at once more precisely and more complexly, the First Lord's metaphor in *All's Well*. The treachery to itself of the nature which 'in its proper stream o'erflows itself is defined now as treachery to its origin. So in Marlowe the deadliest of the seven deadly sins announces to Dr Faustus, 'I am Pride, I disdain to have any parents', and in Shakespeare Goneril's treachery to her earthly father is a type of her treachery to God. Albany's speech begins indeed in a biblical dust image which is, curiously, that of the Latin Psalter, retained by Douai but obscured by the Prayer Book and all Protestant translations after Taverner's in 1539; for all these from the Great Bible onwards render 'pulvis' as 'chaff'.¹ In

¹ Wyclif, Coverdale's first version (1535), Matthews (1537), Taverner (1539) and Douai (1582-1610) have 'dust'; the Great Bible (1539)—from which the Prayer Book Psalter comes—the Geneva (1560), the Bishops' (1568) and the Authorized Version have 'chaff'.

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Psalm i the condemnation of the wicked ('non sic impii, non sic: sed tamquam pulvis, quern projicit ventus a facie terrae') follows the likening of the blessed man to 'a tree which is planted by the running waters, which shall bring forth its fruit in due season', and it is into a tree image that Shakespeare's thought passes, but a very different image, reminiscent of the terrible warning of damnation in St Luke, 'If they do these things in a green tree, what shall be done in the dry?' In the Gospel (xxiii, 31) this verse is immediately preceded by the warning, 'Then shall they say to the mountains, Fall on us; and to the hills, Cover us', which is echoed later in 'the image of that horror', Albany's 'Fall and cease'. Goneril perhaps takes the tree reference, for her reply is notable:

No more, the *text* is foolish.

Like Milton's Satan ('Evil, be thou my good'), she admits the charge but rejects the standard of values. Albany replies with a judgement representing the consequences of the Satanic choice:

*Wisdom and goodness to the vile seem vile;
Filths savour but themselves. . . .*

*It will come,
Humanity must perforce prey on itself
Like monsters of the deep.*

From the dialogue which follows emerge clearly two archetypal conceptions. On the one hand there is the suffering servant of Isaiah and the Sermon on the Mount, 'who bears a cheek for blows', and who seems to Goneril a 'milk-liver'd' and 'vain fool', and, on the other, the 'changed and self-cover'd thing' who appears 'bemonstered' to Albany, as Milton's Satan in the hour of triumph ['punished in the shape he sinned'] appeared to himself:

*See thyself, devil!
Proper deformity seems not in the fiend
So horrid as in woman.*

In the penetrating epithet 'self-cover'd' is the climax to the long Shakespearian counterpoint of the double self. Neither merely a charge of egotism, nor, still less, a compliment of

individuality, this is a verdict. Already in Act I, Shakespeare had passed on from the doubt of, 'This is, and is not, Cressid', to the query, 'Your name, fair gentlewoman', a line which records with double irony the loss of the once real Goneril and the birth of Albany's 'devil' in 'woman's shape', that shape now itself 'self-cover'd' by the likeness of the inner fiend. So Cordelia had said also in Act I:

*Time shall unfold what plighted cunning hides;
Who cover faults, at last them shame derides.*

Time, as often in the later Shakespeare, is allowed to unfold what in life is left to eternity:

Thou changed and self-cover'd thing for shame.

That a thing should be changed by being self-covered is a dark paradox to all studies except theology. Christianity is not the only religion to proclaim the doctrine that egotism is not merely a sin, but ultimately a metamorphosis, an overlaying of the divine image with a new image conceived by the corrupt will. So in Goneril the tension between the real-ideal and the corrupt no longer exists. She is essentially 'separated from God', 'self-covered' against the impinging of any inner revelation, left like the damned in Aquinas to the knowledge of God only in effect.¹ 'I know his heart', she said of Lear. She knew and she chose, and Regan took her 'by the hand'.

If ye were blind ye should have no sin;² but now ye say,
We see; and therefore your sin remaineth.

To adapt the previous verse of the same chapter which leads up to this verdict, it is 'for judgement' that the play of *Lear* came into the Shakespearian world, that they in it 'which see not, might see; and that they which see might be made blind'. In Goneril and Regan, the choice of blindness is implied rather than explicit. In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare's full-length study of damnation, choice is the main theme.

Macbeth has more strongly and inalienably than any other play its peculiar, sensible atmosphere, that of the traditional hell. Most intense in the lurid, visual imagery, it emerges also

¹ *Summa*, Supplement: 98:8:0.

* St John ix, 41.

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to ear and touch in 'lamentings heard i' the air; strange screams of death', and in an agglutinative corruption—as of secret murders sticking on the hands—suggestive of the *Inferno* or of the sermon on damnation in *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. 'Your spirits shine through you'⁵, says Macbeth to his assassins, and wherever we move in the play we are aware of an enveloping and engrossing evil, attendant upon and evoked by Macbeth himself. However 'nimble and sweetly' the air of nature may recommend itself in one brief interlude, we know that at his coming 'this is hell'; nor can we out of it, until Malcolm at last invokes 'the grace of Grace'.

In the initial invocation of Lady Macbeth the imagery is not only implicitly but explicitly infernal:

*Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts! . . .
You murdering ministers,
Wherever in your sightless substances
You wait on nature's mischief! Come thick night,
And pall thee in the dunnest smoke of hell. . . .
jVbr heaven peep through the blanket of the dark.*

Macbeth, less explicit, is more horrible:

*Light thickens. . . .
Whiles nighfs black agents to their preys do rouse.
Thou marveWst at my words: but hold thee still;
Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill.*

This is more than a counsel of expediency; it is the paean of evil itself, gathering self-conscious intensity and power, the paean of choice. For Macbeth, like Faustus, is not damned by one choice, but by many, by the same choice, over and over again. So eternity would appear in time as a reiteration.

The play abounds in analogies between Macbeth and Satan. 'Angels are bright still, though the brightest fell'⁵, says Malcolm of Macduff and Macbeth, and Macduff in the same scene adds of 'this fiend of Scotland':

*Not in the legions
Of horrid hell can come a devil more damrfd
In evils to top Macbeth.*

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Macbeth himself says ominously,

O! full of scorpions is my mind,

and in the last scene of the play calls Young Siward's bluff:

YOUNG SIWARD: *What is thy name?*

MACBETH: *Thou'lt be afraid to hear it.*

YOUNG SIWARD: *jVb, though thou call thyself a hotter name
Than any is in hell.*

Yet though Young Siward replies,

*The devil himself could not pronounce a title
More hateful to mine ear,*

Malcolm is retrospectively right when he distinguishes between 'this dead butcher and his fiend-like queen'. Macbeth is, at the outset, a man and very much a man, while Lady Macbeth has only the weakness of a woman; her strength is demoniac, subdued only to the metal it works in, the fastidiousness of the flesh. But as he becomes less human, she becomes more so, as if the very life of the senses were a good which she could not eradicate, an organ of the humane. She is fiend-like but not, like Goneril, a fiend.

Macbeth himself is fiend-like only by the analogy of his absolute choice. He hears always, even when it has become meaningless, 'the still, sad music of humanity', the 'troops of friends' he 'must not look to have'. He shrinks; he does not become demoniacal; he is only damned.

Knowledge, the first requisite of damnation, comes to him early in the play. The 'is and is not' theme of doubt appears only briefly.

Fair is foul and foul is fair. . . .

So fair and foul a day I have not seen,

say the witches and Macbeth, *before* they meet. After their meeting the division is closed, and for Macbeth 'nothing is but what is not'. Henceforward, with a dreadful inversion of the Pauline sense, he 'looks not at the things which are seen but at the tilings which are not seen: for the things which are seen are

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temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal'.¹ The witches, 'the air-drawn dagger', the 'Amen' which will not come, the ghost of Banquo, these apprehensions of the mind are the terrors of which the play refuses to make trifles, before which it disdains to ensconce us in a seeming knowledge and submits us, who do not see them, to an unknown fear. For these are the symbols of temptation, choice and judgement, which occur in and to the mind, and which Lady Macbeth refuses to discuss, as Marlowe's Mephistopheles refuses to discuss his hell. But for Macbeth these symbols are realities, which he does not fully understand, but which are themselves the knowledge he fears, the Eumenides. Like Harry in *The Family Reunion*, he moves 'in an overcrowded desert, jostled by ghosts'.

To Banquo also, the inner realities appear, but Banquo is defended by an integrity which 'neither begs nor fears' their favour nor their hate. Moreover, Banquo prays. Macbeth does not, and though he, unlike Lady Macbeth, does not initially invoke exterior evil, he gives it instant entertainment, a proof that it co-operates with evil in himself, the 'vaulting ambition which o'er-leaps itself and *falls on the other*'. To supply here 'ambition' (understood), instead of the weak emendation 'side', would not, in the context of the witch scenes, be unwarrantably sinister. But whatever is supplied after 'other', the metaphor of 'o'er-leaping itself remains essentially the same as that of *All's Well*, and anticipates Macbeth's later retort in its temporary refusal to do more than 'becomes a man'.

In this early scene there is, in what the witches say, no evil, only truth, and in a curious attempt at rationalization, Macbeth, after the fulfilment of their first prophecy, tries to equate at a relative, not an absolute level, the true and the good:

*This supernatural soliciting
Cannot be ill, cannot be good; if ill,
Why hath it given me earnest of success,
Commencing in a truth? . . .
If good, why do I yield to that suggestion. . . .
Against the use of nature?*

Banquo's previous, and his own subsequent, speech resolve this difficulty. Banquo affirms that the truth may be told with bad

¹ 2 Corinthians iv, 18.

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intentions (so that it can, as action, be ill), and Macbeth that knowledge is not moral nor immoral in itself (so that it can, as knowledge, be good).

Yet, as Macbeth sees also, this knowledge is the matter of choice, is itself temptation:

*My thought, whose murder yet is but fantastical,
Shakes so my single state of man, that function
Is smothered in surmise.*

'Function', the operation of nature, is smothered in surmise, in what *might* be done. Macbeth has not yet chosen, as his next speech shows. Indeed the sub-title of the play might be, 'What is choice?'

*And what is being done to us?
And what are we, and what are we doing?¹*

To know my deed 'twere best not know myself.

*I dare do all that does become a man,
Who dares do more is none.*

The verb which resounds throughout is this verb 'do', and above all its past participle 'done':

If it were done when 'tis done. . . .

What's done is done—

What's done cannot be undone.

When is a thing done?

Shakespeare, it would appear, answers that it is done when the mind has lost the power to deviate from it, when it is accomplished *in the mind*. Though the play echoes, in its reiterative cycle of decisions, the choice that, as it appears in time, can never be absolute, there is a point at which, in the explored relation between the will and the deed, 'the great doom's image*' assumes consistency and shape. For *Macbeth* closes not only the Platonic rift between being and seeming, so that to Macbeth, what is, also seems; it closes too the Aristotelian rift between intention and action, for Macbeth trans-

¹ *The Family Reunion*, p. 133.

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lates into action the corruption of the will. By this I do not mean only that Macbeth commits several murders. A man might do this and be no worse than before. I mean rather that he is conscious as he acts, not merely of expediency, but of some inner necessity to ratify what he has done before. He knows that his fears are morally consequential, and therefore his choice of action is morally cumulative. His fate reconciles dramatically the two contentions of scripture, that God judges the heart, and that he will render to all men according to their works. Four times during the play the infernal images are broken by trumpets. They sound first only to Macbeth's mind in Duncan's virtues; then at 'the great doom's image' itself, the discovery of his death, 'the hideous trumpet calls to parley'; Malcolm's army assaults the castle to 'those clamorous harbingers of blood and death'; at the end of Macduff's last speech, as he brandishes 'the cursed head', the stage direction calls for a flourish, suggested by, though not explicit in, the text.

After his first vivid entertainment of the conception of murder, Macbeth sends to Inverness the non-committal letter which opens, in almost Greek portentousness, 'They met me in the day of success'. Lady Macbeth seizes immediately on the implications of the prophecy and discusses Macbeth's character. We have already learnt of his physical courage when he and Banquo are described, perhaps with a *double entendre* of dramatic irony, as memorizing another Golgotha. The phrase is startling—and sinister—as if prophetic of the blood-bath of the play. It has, moreover, other overtones. The conception 'reprobate' is common in Elizabethan literature, dramatic and other:

For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened . . . and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again to repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh.

To this ominous suggestion of a Satanic courage, Lady Macbeth adds her 'too full o' the milk of human kindness [human nature'] to catch the nearest way'. Her diagnosis of the equivocation of Macbeth, who, like Claudius, 'would not play false, and yet would wrongly win', is transferred later by the Porter to the

¹ Hebrews vi, 4-6.

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world in general, the apparently innocent Lennox and Macduff. Thus the Porter's is an earlier statement, in the enigma of comic ambivalence, of the doctor's inalienably Shakespearian 'God, God forgive us all'.

Macbeth himself greets his wife with a face openly evil and the equivocal answer to her enquiries about Duncan's departure:

*Tomorrow, as he purposes . . .
We will speak further.*

Before he speaks further, he thinks, the long, lucid soliloquy rising to its trumpet-tongued conclusion, which is to condemn him. He is conscious here of four deterrents, punishment in the next world, punishment in this, honour and pity. The first, he says, he is willing 'to jump', but he deceives himself; for he cannot hereafter think of anyone's death without being pre-occupied with the notions of heaven and hell:

*Hear it not, Duncan; for it is a knell
That summons thee to heaven, or to hell.*

*Banquo, thy soul's flight,
If it find heaven, must find it out tonight.*

So when he meditates on his 'fruitless crown', his cry is for his 'eternal jewel':

*For Banquo's issue have I fil'd my mind; . . .
Put rancours in the vessel of my peace
Only for them; and mine eternal jewel
Given to the common enemy of man.*

Shakespeare is not given like Marlowe to jewel imagery, and here it is perhaps suggested by 'crown' and 'sceptre' and by the 'pearl of great price'.¹ This is the price that Macbeth knew from the first he must pay ultimately, whether or not he had 'justice here'. He did not know that in this world also it must be paid. What actually deterred him was not even the fear of his own 'bloody instructions' in a material sense, but his pathetic craving for human praise and honour and love, the 'golden opinions from all sorts of people', which he cites to Lady

¹ St Matthew xiii, 45-6.

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Macbeth as his excuse for withdrawing from the deed. He rises from this to the height of human nobility and wisdom:

*I dare do all that does become a man;
Who dares do more is none.*

After this no one could say that he knows not what he does. He is of 'those who were once enlightened', and he 'Tails away'.

After a moment of cowardice about merely material risks ('if we should fail') he is 'settled', and the dagger of his choice leads him to Duncan. He returns almost trance-like, staring at his hands as if they were another's, obsessed by the fact that he could not say Amen. Already the wheel of temptation, choice and judgement has come full circle for the first time. He perceives that the immediate consequence of evil is not in circumstance or the behaviour of others but in himself. He perceives also that his penalty is to live with this knowledge, to 'sleep no more'. He is, at once, not repentant but remorseful:

I am afraid to think what I have done. . . .

To know my deed 'twere best not know myself.

As the horror grows, he hovers on the verge of repentance, but is inhibited by his very knowledge of himself:

*Had I but died an hour before this chance
I had litfd a blessed time.*

Already there is, in premonition, the meaninglessness of the 'Tomorrow' speech:

*From this instant
There's nothing serious in mortality,
All is but toys; renown and grace is dead. . . .*

Tor such there is no repentance', only the attempt 'to be safely thus', and blunt the feelings in blood. So, as from this temporary meaninglessness the old terror arises, Macbeth chooses again:

*But let the frame of things disjoint, both the worlds suffer,
Ere we will eat our meal in fear, and sleep
In the affliction of these terrible dreams.*

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What he fears is not merely death:

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

Rather than this, he will 'ravin up' his own 'life's means', 'cancel and tear to pieces the great bond' which keeps him human and therefore afraid, stifle in crescent evil the consequence, justice and meaning which he knows and fears:

Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill.

So the murder of Banquo, his second choice, is accomplished, and its judgement, the fearful knowledge of Banquo's ghost. Again Macbeth reiterates the whole gamut of terror and decision, stating consciously the choice of the damned, 'to know by the worst means the worst' and to stifle fear in 'use'. Here at last in the time sequence is a turning point, reiterative of other decisions but phrased absolutely:

*I am in blood
Stepped in so far, that, should I wade no more,
Returning were as tedious as go o'er.*

Go o'er. Here, as in the phrase, 'vaulting ambition' and the conception of doing *more* than becomes a man, is the image from *Lear* and *AWs Well* of going beyond human nature, indeed beyond all nature, not in Shakespeare an heroic undertaking. 'Tor mine own good' [which is evil] 'all causes shall give way'

*though the treasure
Of Nature's germens tumble all together,
Even till destruction sicken.*

Yet it is after this image of cataclysm that Macbeth speaks still, in the lines about his wife, of 'a rooted sorrow', to hear a reply sinister indeed. Not to him does the doctor say, ominously but not hopelessly, 'More needs she a divine than a physician'; for Macbeth's desire is no longer like hers to undo the deed or to wash the hands. This archetypal symbol of the sense of guilt he had once caught up and taken into the overwhelming sea-

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image, which stands elsewhere in this play, as repeatedly in Shakespeare, for eternity:

*Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood
Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
Making the green, one red.*

Lady Macbeth had mocked him then, and now in the sub-conscious revelation of the sleep-walking scene she has come to the point at which he once consciously stood. But Macbeth himself has 'gone o'er'. He no longer trembles upon this bank and shoal of time, trying to jump the life to come. He *has* jumped, or rather he has 'stepped in', and finds 'all is as it is', only irrevocably so. Now it is only anaesthetic he craves, 'sweet' and 'oblivious', blurring the memory, blunting the emotions, leaving the will as it is:

*Carist thou not minister to a mind diseased,
Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow,
Raze out the written troubles of the brain,
And with some sweet oblivious antidote
Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous stuff
Which weighs upon the heart?*

DOCTOR: *Therein the patient
Must minister to himself.*

'Himself, says the doctor significantly, not 'herself'³, though he answers an enquiry about Lady Macbeth.

So by his worst means, the double attempt at intellectual fore-knowledge and emotional anaesthetic, Macbeth indeed knows the worst, that the evil good for which he sold his soul is precisely nothing:

*Now does he feel his title
Hang loose about him, like a giant's robes
Upon a dwarfish thief.*

He has only himself, and

*all that is within him
Does condemn itself for being there.*

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It condemns itself; it does not fear or pity:

*I have almost forgot the taste offears.
The time has been my senses would have cool'd
To hear a night-shriek, and my fell of hair
Would at a dismal treatise rouse and stir
As life were in't. I have supp'd full with horrors;
Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts,
Cannot once start me.*

So the restless ecstasy is over; he feels no more. Meaning, the meaning he had denied and tried to escape from, goes at last. His will is done:

Life . . .

is a tale

*Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.*

Macbeth, falling less conventionally than Faustus, is more surely damned, so that after this speech not Christ himself, *deus ex machina*, could pluck from destruction the spirit immolated by the will. To Macbeth now, nothing divine nor human streams in the meaningless firmament; there is no Richard's 'Have mercy, Jesu!' for him to say. Secure in the insulating aura of his nihilism, he moves unarrested at the end, and what Macduff kills fighting 'bear-like', as he said with the last brief candle of vision, is no longer Macbeth. His imagination, his humanity, the *res illuminata illuminans*? has gone out.

Yet something remains, a certain shrunk and tortured knowledge of himself and of events—and courage tied to the stake:

*But get thee back, my soul is too much charged
With blood of thine already. . . .*

*And be these juggling fiends no more believed,
That palter with us in a double sense; . . .*

I will not yield, . . .

*Though Birnam wood be come to Dunsinane,
And thou opposed being of no woman born,
Yet will I try the last.*

¹ 'The Spirit of a Man is the Candle of the Lord, *res illuminata illuminans*.' Benjamin Whichcote, *Aphorisms* (The Cambridge Platonists, Oxford, 1901, p. 70).

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So St Augustine said of the devil:

Nor did He take away his whole nature from him, but left him part whereby to bewail the loss of the rest: which lamentation testifieth both what he had and what he hath, for had he not some good left he could not lament for what he had lost.¹

Even if Macbeth dies fighting,² his choice of the last of the four last things is surely ominous. He does not offer to himself the heaven or hell he offered to Duncan and Banquo. He 'will try the last'. Before his body he throws his war-like shield; there is no breastplate for his soul.

Nor is there for Lady Macbeth's. She has Richard III's strength of will, his pride, his logic, his self-deception, with that strangely combined revulsion from physical horror and cleaving to physical relationships which distinguish the typically feminine attitude to events:

Had he not resembled my father. . . .

The Thane of Fife had a wife. . . .

I have given suck. . . .

Mature and brilliant though Shakespeare's treatment of her is, she adds little to his psychology of guilt, since her history is precisely that of Richard, heightened and made massive by the environment of supernatural evil, which she invokes but never sees. She leaves the stage for the last time to the comment Shakespeare cannot now keep out of the deep damnation of his ultimate tragedy, 'God, God forgive us all': not I think meant to suggest a reprieve. 'What's done cannot be undone',³ and the

¹ *Of the Citie of God*, XIX, 13.

² That Macbeth's judgement could be played with a terrifying explicitness I had not conceived until, after the 'Damn'd be he who first cries, "Hold, enough!"', Godfrey Tearle dropped his shield as from hands suddenly nerveless, turned with a despairing gesture and fled, almost handing his sword and dagger to Macduff.

³ Cf. Aristotle's quotation from Agathon (*Ethics*, 11 £9b):

*This thing alone not God himself can do,
To make undone that which hath once been done.*

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doctor's words are meant perhaps only to crown the gentle-woman's retort:

She has *spoke* what she should not . . . Heaven
Knows what she has known.

We, maybe is the inference, do not speak what we should not.
Heaven knows what we have known.

CHAPTER VI

SHADOW AND SUBSTANCE: NATURE AND GRACE

(*Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale, The Tempest*)

Shall I not lie in publishing a truth?

Troilus and Cressida, V, ii, 116.

*Though all things foul should wear the brows of grace,
Tet grace must still look so.*

Macbeth, IV, iii, 23-4.

*So shall thou feed on death, that feeds on men,
And death once dead, there's no more dying then.*

Sonnet CXLVI, 13-14.

SHAKESPEARE'S last plays close the metaphysic of the Otragedies and the ethic of the comedies in an increasing integration of eternity and time. The tragic revelation stretching from *Troilus and Cressida* to *King Lear*, a two-fold analysis of the schism between the real and the good, published two truths; that the apparent good of unnatural nature is evil, that the real good of grace, redeemed or redeeming, dies. Both these are truths in time, and they are pendant to Shakespeare's traditionally Christian answer to the classical questions of metaphysical justice: what is evil? what is the relation between sin and suffering? how, if at all, do men become good? As we have seen, evil in Shakespeare, as in St Augustine and St Thomas,¹ is the defection of being and nature. It is caused typically and essentially by pride and the lust for power. Suffering is due to sin, but not necessarily to the sin of the person concerned. By suffering, their own or another's, men may become good. But in time—and this constitutes Shakespearian tragedy—this good, though real, is mortal. Cordelia and Lear are 'dead as earth'.

As these are truths in time, it is in time, not after time, that Shakespeare imposes on them in the last plays the truths of eternity. *Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale*, pre-Christian in apparent time, achieve an impression of timelessness, as if in the world but not of it. As in *The Winter's Tale* the sea coast of

¹ See Chapter VII, pp. 219-22, for an analysis of this in more detail.

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Bohemia is a place and yet no place, so the era of *Cymbeline* is time and yet no time. Historically the play is set, quite as plainly to Shakespeare as to us, in or about the year 33 B.C., and in such a play the anachronisms—and not quite anachronisms—are too odd to be accidental. No one could write:

*Nay Cadwal, we must lay his head to the east;
Myfather hath a reason for't,*

merely by a happy and invaluable forgetfulness. It is not by chance that Prospero's island prates not of its whereabouts, or that the heiress of Naples 'dwells ten leagues beyond man's life'. The world in all these plays is at once close and distanced, with brothel scenes and shepherd junketings set in counterpoint to unearthly music and gnomic verse. It is indeed the ultimate Shakespearian world which has been shaping itself throughout the tragedies, the world of 'is' and 'is not' transfigured instead of merely corrupt. So it is a world which is both substance and shadow, not merely in the fluctuation of poetic imagination, but in a new and typically Shakespearian pattern of recession, 'in the dark backward and abysm of time', in which each reality, each substance, dissolves to shadow in relation to some other reality behind.

The last plays are always and rightly seen in the light of their consummation. The masque in *The Tempest* is, as Dr Tillyard pointed out,¹ 'executed by players pretending to be spirits pretending to be real actors pretending to be supposed goddesses and rustics', and it is of these that Prospero speaks his famous lines, which, it is sometimes forgotten, begin, 'Be cheerful, sir'. For this reason it seems hardly logical to interpret them from the 'Tomorrow' speech of the damned Macbeth as a weary statement of meaninglessness, suffused by the last light of poetic enchantment and soothed by the last cadence of the great Shakespearian style. Professor Dover Wilson, who finds them only poetically cheering, goes on after the misleading statement, 'Obviously the philosophy of the tragedies is not a Christian philosophy, and in a sense that of the romances is', to say that in *The Tempest* 'there is not a hint of immortality'.² This is surprising enough, but when he tells us that, put into

¹ *Shakespeare's Last Plays*, p. 80.

² *The Essential Shakespeare*, pp. 130, 144.

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'scientific prose', Prospero's speech confronts us 'with an icy universe utterly regardless of man and destined to ultimate extinction, which reminds us of the philosophy of Bertrand Russell', one can only deprecate the extent to which subjective interpretation can effect a 'modern' substitution for what Shakespeare wrote. The idea of a finite universe can hardly be supposed peculiar to Bertrand Russell. It is indeed so indigenous to Christian cosmology that it was, I think, Lord Russell himself who warned us in a broadcast discussion not to assume that because physicists believe in a finite universe they necessarily believe in God. 'An icy universe, utterly regardless of man' is a conception possible only in the context of the belief that the universe, of which man is part in its normal connotation, is God.¹ Yet Prospero's 'revels' were emphatically in the hands of Prospero, and if the analogy between them and the universe is to stand, we must assume that, for Shakespeare, the universe also depends on some power exterior to itself.

It must indeed be a remarkably untraditional form of Christianity which sees Prospero's speech as unchristian. It is Platonic, Johannine, synoptic, patristic, Thomist, and if 'rewritten in scientific prose' would pass as the preliminary statement of orthodox eschatology. Time, and what happens in it, have always been said by Christian theologians to be a 'dream'; that is to derive their meaning from a reality outside, to symbolize rather than present this reality logically, to come to an end. Death is traditionally a 'sleep', and the metaphor has no meaning unless it represents something from which the sleeper 'awakes', as from the death-like sleeps in *Cymbeline* or *Pericles* or *The Winter's Tale*. St Stephen, we are told, 'fell asleep'.² In St Luke³ Christ says of Jairus's daughter, 'She is not

¹ The 'great creating nature' of *The Winter's Tale* is neither 'divine' nor 'regardless'. It is the Platonic *natura naturans* (*Timaeus*, 30A-34B), behind which lies 'the one and the good', 'that which is, and has no becoming' (*Timaeus*, 27D-2gE, *Republic*, 507B-50gA). To the educated Elizabethan, the conception of this quasi-personal and at the same time derivative Nature, as the lowest of the hierarchy of intelligences above man, was common. See Romei (I.K. p. 8). Fludd, in his dedication to *Utriusque cosmi Maioris* passes from 'Deo . . . incomprehensibile sit gloria . . .' to an address to 'Natura naturans', who, he explains further on, is 'net a goddess but the nearest' (to us) 'of God's servants'.

² Acts vii, 60.

³ viii, 52-3 (my italics).

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dead but sleepeth', and the evangelist takes this to be a definition not a denial of death, as is proved by his next verse: 'And they laughed him to scorn, *knowing* that she was dead'.

Shakespeare himself having defined evil in the tragedies as the defection of being, of nature, as corrupt good, follows in the last plays to the questions behind. What *is* being? What *is* nature? What *is* good? What is it that men lose in sin, regain in suffering and hazard in the engagement of death? What *is* death? What *is* life? And how, to come back to the ethics of comedy, should one behave in it? To all these questions it may be said, as in *The Family Reunion*, 'there is no conceivable answer', and in *Lear* and *Timon* we 'lost our way in the dark'. *Pericles* opens

To sing a song that old was sung. . . .
Assuming man's infirmities. . . .
It hath been sung at festivals,
On ember eves and holy ales;
And lords and ladies in their lives
Have read it for restoratives:
The purchase is to make men glorious.
Et bonum quo antiquius eo melius.

'Purchase' (derived from *pourchasser*) and 'glorious' are words with a typically theological background, and the play which follows this sententious prologue is full of both echoes and prophecies. Its story begins, not so entirely episodically as is sometimes stated, with the fair without and foul within theme of *The Merchant of Venice*, 'the glorious casket stor'd with ill'; and Gower's epilogue attempts rather clumsily to integrate the two Thomistic reasons for suffering, the 'just reward' of Antigonus's and Cleon's evil with the preservation of Pericles, 'led on by heaven and crown'd with joy at last'. Whether or not the Gower speeches are Shakespearian, the play, the last three acts¹ of it indubitably by Shakespeare, is set in their context and illustrates their theme. It is the theme of Providence and Grace:

We cannot but obey
The powers above us. Could I rage and roar
As doth the sea she lies in, yet the end
Must be as 'tis:

¹ All the quotations below are from these last three acts.

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and yet:

*Lychorida, no tears:
Look to your little mistress, on whose grace
You may depend hereafter.*

As in Pericles are faith and patience, and in Cerimon knowledge and charity, so in Marina, 'born in a tempest' to what seems 'a lasting storm', is above all 'grace'. She is 'absolute Marina', whose contrast 'darks in Philoten, all graceful marks'. She preaches 'divinity' in a brothel, and sends Lysimachus away 'saying his prayers'. She sings 'like one immortal', and 'deep clerks she dumbs'. Yet she is 'flesh and blood'; she has 'a working pulse'; she is 'no fairy'. If we ask:

*What country-woman?
Here of these shores?*

she replies:

*JV0, nor of any shores;
Yet I was mortally brought forth, and am
No other than I appear.*

She lives where she is 'but a stranger', and if she should tell us her history

*It would seem
Like lies, disdain'd in the reporting.*

Yet 'falseness cannot come' from her, and she looks 'modest as justice', and seems 'a palace for the crown'd truth to dwell in'. So the 'credence' which remained in the heart of the disillusioned Troilus, the

*esperance so obstinately strong
That doth invert the attest of eyes arid ears,*

is fulfilled:

*/ believe thee,
And make my senses credit thy relation
To points that seem impossible; for thou look'st
Like one I lov'd indeed.*

Like one I loved. The restored Thaisa, warm and living, but known before, does not move to the strange music which surrounds the lost, unknown Marina, 'the music of the spheres',

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which Pericles, 'wild' in his 'beholding', now hears through 'the muddy vesture of decay'¹. 'If it had been written of the Virgin Mary it had been something', said Ben Jonson of Donne's *Second Anniversary* (*Conversations with William Drummond of Hawthornden*, 1619). While Cordelia suggests Christ, Marina, fraught with her paradisaical but human perfections, suggests Mary, 'the second Eve', the 'stella maris' of Latin hymn and English lyric,¹ immaculate in the midst of corruption, 'blessed', virgin, restorative of life:

Thou that beget'st him that did thee beget.

'Figlia del tuo figlio', said Dante:

*tu se' colei, che Vumana natura
nobilitasti sì che il suo Fattore
non disdegno difarsi suafattura?*

Wordsworth is yet to write, 'Our tainted nature's solitary boast', but when Pericles turns to Thaisa with, 'Tlesh of thy flesh', she replies, 'Bless'd—and mine own'.

Behind this surely not unconscious, though not necessarily pre-conceived imagery, lies a like solution to the tragic problem of nature which emerged in *Troilus* to hold henceforward the Shakespearian stage. *Pericles* has reminiscences of *Lear*, which underpin what is, largely through the work of Professor Wilson Knight, its acknowledged resurrection theme. The unnatural vice of Antigonus, like the unnatural vice of Goneril, evokes the image of dust blown in the face; and Thaisa's actual restoration, echoing and fulfilling to the cleared eyes of Pericles the im-

¹ Cf. for instance, *Sloane* 2593 (printed *Songs and Carols*, etc., No. 77, ed. T. Wright, Warton Club):

*Ave marts stella,
The sterre on the see, . . .*

The four Latin lines of the lyric are the first stanza of a well-known Annunciation hymn sometimes assigned to Venantius Fortunatus (*Daniel*, i, 204). The second stanza has the favourite play on 'Ave' and 'Eva'. Cf. in English also, both for this and the 'maris stella', *Egerton* 613 (printed *An Old English Miscellany*, No. 194, ed. R. Morris, E.E.T.S.).

⁸ *Paradiso*, XXXIII, 1-7: 'Daughter of thy son . . . thou art she who didst human nature so ennoble that its own maker did not scorn to become its making.'

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aged 'chance' that would 'redeem all sorrows' for Lear, is a 'present kindness' which makes his 'past miseries sport':

*Did you not name a tempest
A birth and death?
The voice of dead Thaisa.*

'A birth.' In all the last comedies there is a child who is in a crucial position in the plot, and the word which echoes in *Pericles* is the word 'born':

*When I was born the wind was north. . . .
When I was born
Never were waves or wind more violent. . . .
Born in a tempest, when my mother died. . . .*

What is born in Marina, as it is to be born in Perdita and Miranda and in Cymbeline's lost sons, is a new humanity, from which redemption flows back to the old. It flows back less obviously perhaps from Miranda, but for Prospero through whom the 'brave new world' is born, Miranda was 'a cherubin that did preserve me', and Miranda herself is 'infused with a fortitude from heaven'. Hers like Perdita's is the nature 'grown in grace' which alone is natural, and it takes its place in the recession of shadow into substance as the third term. Behind the apparent substance, the seeming good, lies the corrupt reality proclaimed by the tragedies, compared with which the apparent good is only shadow; behind this corrupt reality itself, this substance, say the last plays, is the true reality to which it is in its turn only shadow, the real nature, created unfallen and restored only by grace:

*Though all things foul should wear the brows of grace,
Yet grace must still look so.*

Behind grace again lies the supernatural world out of which it comes, the 'immortal Dian' of *Pericles*, the gods by whatever name they go, the 'heaven' which 'infuses' Miranda. 'Teste David cum Sibylla', says the Roman sequence in the Mass for All Souls' Day, calling pagan as well as Jewish witness for Christian doctrine; and the *Act Against Abuses*, which made it illegal to use the words 'God', 'Christ' or 'Jesus' on the stage, made Sibylline theology a necessity in the theatre, if one were

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to have theology there at all. This, as I see it, already in *Pericles*, is Shakespeare's final theme. The redemption of the tragedies, no longer merely moral and mortal, has its place in the metaphysical recession of being to its source and end.

Cymbeline, though it has this metaphysical background, is the most explicitly moral of the last four plays. Posthumus says of the prophecy which Jupiter lays on his breast:

*'Tis still a dream, or else such stuff as madmen
Tongue and brain not; either both or nothing;
Or senseless speaking, or a speaking such
As sense cannot untie. Be what it is,
The action of my life is like it, which
I'll keep, if but for sympathy.*

It is not, in the play, senseless, and it is untied at last, by the 'copious' redemption in which, says St Thomas, justice and mercy are reconciled and triumphant.¹ The suffering of the innocent with and for the guilty wrests from *Cymbeline* his pride in mere power, so that he acknowledges, though still free in will and body, the justice of his bond to the Emperor, which he had wished to put to the arbitrament of force. From Posthumus, 'to himself unknown', who was 'without seeking to find', and who was to be saved by suffering and knowledge, *Cymbeline* learns mercy. For Posthumus has learnt justice long before this, and mercy from his own forgiveness. He talked in prison of 'the penitent instrument' which must loose the fetters of conscience and make him 'Tree for ever', and found it not enough. 'Gods are more full of mercy'; they offer to 'satisfy', to give life for life. That offer made, Posthumus, saved by forgiveness, learns the use of power:

*The power that I have on you is to spare you;
The malice toward you to forgive you. Live,
And deal with others better.*

The innocent Imogen, towards whom from the beginning 'the flame of the taper bows', suffers for others—and for herself. She of whom the Second Lord says, 'If it be a sin to make a true selection, she is damned', has not 'lost by this a kingdom', but

¹ *Summa*, 3:46:1, 2, 3, and ff.

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'got two worlds by't'. The lines spoken of Posthumus, who is indeed more sinned against than sinning, are strikingly true of her:

*Whom best I love cross; to make my gift
The more delayed, delighted.*

Yet *Cymbeline* presents no sentimental picture of reality. 'Afflictions' are 'a punishment or a trial', and those who are punished are not all like the king 'made good'. Imogen envisages at the beginning the greatest tragedy:

*'twere a paper lost
As offered mercy is.*

So the Queen ends:

*With horror, madly dying, like her life;
Which, being cruel to the world, concluded
Most cruel to herself.*

'Look, what I will not, that I cannot do' is still true, and therefore, if one is like Posthumus before his redemption feeling vengeful,

*'tis greater skill
In a true hate to pray they have their will:
The very devils cannot plague them better.*

'A sad tale's best for winter', says Mamillius, and for three acts *The Winter's Tale* bears him out. From the wilful damnation of his choice in the teeth of the oracle, Leontes is plucked by suffering, but it is for Time that tries all, 'the joy and terror of good and bad', to turn the winter tragedy of guilty and guiltless suffering into a summer comedy of resurrection and life, 'now grown in grace, equal with wondering'.

The *volte-face* is the more remarkable in that Shakespeare's sad tale is not, like Mamillius's, 'one of sprites and goblins'. It opens in no mood of faerie or fantasy, no mood even of innocence; for the men Leontes and Polixenes look back nostalgically to the golden age of childhood when they 'knew not the doctrine of ill-doing', to which Hermione adds in conversation, as she is to add in fact, 'grace to boot'. The pagan Hermione indeed talks much of grace even before her accusation, and

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goes to her undeserved suffering with a devotion strikingly Christian:

*This action I now go on
Is for my better grace.*

So Perdita, 'grown in grace', does all things well, and at her feast offers to her guests 'grace and remembrance', rosemary and rue. Of her discovery to the 'penitent' and 'reconciled' Leontes, the first gentleman remarks:

*Who would be thence that has the benefit of access?
Every wink of an eye, some new grace will be born.*

Paulina again speaks to her royal visitors in a paraphrase of traditional devotion:

*My poor house to visit
It is a surplus of your grace.*

This is more than a verbal echo of the Missal's antecomunion prayer: 'Domine, non sum dignus ut intres sub tectum meum.' The scene is a chapel, and Paulina, changing like a priest from one receiving, to one conferring a benefit, announces Hermione's resurrection in the words:

*It is required
That you awake your faith.*

To Hermione, she says,

*Bequeath to death your numbness, for from him
Dear life redeems you.*

'If this be magic', says Leontes,

*let it be an art
Lawful as eating.*

All this in a pagan setting. Yet, 'they looked as they had heard of a world ransomed, or one destroyed'.... 'This news which is called true is so like an old tale that the verity of it is in strong suspicion.' But it is true:

*That she were living,
Were it but told you, should be hooted at
Like an old tale; but it appears she lives.*

The tragic dichotomy is atoned.

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The Winter's Tale does not discuss explicitly the relation between grace and nature, but it takes up, in Polixenes' argument with Perdita, Hamlet's image of grafting:

*Nature is made better by no mean
But nature makes that mean: so o'er that art
Which you say adds to nature, is an art
That nature makes. Tou see, sweet maid, we marry
A gentler scion to the wilder stock,
And make conceive a bark of baser kind
By bud of nobler race: this is an art
Which does mend nature, change it rather, but
The art itself is nature.*

⁴Wild' is the adjective applied by medieval lyrists to the sinful life from which the 'flour of grace'⁵ that Mary bore is to redeem them. It is easy to see behind Polixenes' speech a new toying with Hamlet's 'inoculation', which corresponds alike to the Catholic doctrine of imparted merit, infused grace, and the Incarnation image of the Shropshire poet who sang,

*There is a floure sprung of a tree,
The rote thereof is called Jesse;
A floure of price,
There is none seche in Paradise. . . .
When Gabrael this maid met
With 'Ave Maria* he here gret;
Betwene hem two this flour was set.¹*

Whatever the image, the shepherdess Perdita, 'grown in grace'⁵ and needing no 'instructions', stands in the play for both grace and nature, and for the one precisely because for the other:

*Turn good lady,
Our Perdita is found.*

So Prosperous coming salvation is, 'And they shall be themselves', and Julian of Norwich, paraphrasing the theologians, was of the same mind:

For Kind is all good and fair in itself, and Grace was sent out to save Kind and destroy sin and bring again fair Kind to the blessed point from whence it came: that is

¹ Douce 302.

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God . . . thus are Kind and Grace of one accord: for Grace is (of) God, as Kind is (of) God: He is two in manner of working, and one in love; and neither of these worketh without other; nor be disparted.¹

The Tempest makes a different emphasis. As nature without grace, apparent nature, is unnatural ('I do forgive thee, unnatural though thou art'), the new, redeemed nature, real nature, is, even in being nature, supernatural in the old sense. This is quite a different contrast from the contrast with artificial:

Nothing natural I ever saw so noble.

These are not natural events.

*There is in this business more than nature
Was ever conduct of.*

Nature indeed 'makes the mean', but behind nature, even behind the 'great creating nature' of *The Winter's Tale*, lies another power, as behind the Platonic *natura naturans* lies 'the one and the good'.² So in the orthodox theology, it is only through the Incarnation that man regains not only that lost gift of supernatural grace which raised him to communion with God and fitted him for eternal life, but the integrity of his unfallen nature itself.

The Tempest has been called 'Shakespeare's miracle play', and Sebastian, the doubter to Antonio's plain atheist, exclaims at the last and crowning mercy of Ferdinand's restoration, 'A most high miracle'. Yet this piece is much less a 'miracle' than a parable or a myth. For its typically Christian ethics it has no specifically Christian grounds like those of the earlier comedies. With a plot in the hands of Prospero as the plot of *Measure for Measure* is in the hands of the Duke, a plot directed to precisely the same ends of mercy, forgiveness, redemption and new life, there is no mention of Christ, not even an anachronistic allusion like that of Leontes to Judas's betrayal, the only specific reference to Christ's Person in the last four plays. It is, of course, as untrue to say that 'there is no word of God' as to say 'there is

¹ *Revelations of Divine Love*, ed. Roger Hudson, p. 188; cf. *Summa*, 1-2:85 and 109-14, and *passim*.

² *Timaeus*, 27E-2gD, 30A-34B.

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not a hint of immortality'. Of God there is talk enough—by the only three good men in the play.

MIRANDA: *How came we ashore?*

PROSPERO: *By Providence divine.*

FERDINAND: *Sir, she is mortal;*
 But by immortal Providence she's mine.

GONZALO: *Look down, you gods.*

Alonzo, the best of the bad, appeals, like Miranda, to the 'heavens' a common substitute for 'God' or 'Christ' or 'Jesus' after the *Act Against Abuses*. It is not in Shakespeare a vague word, and often its context witnesses to what it has replaced:

*'Heaven in my mouth,
As if I did but only chew his name,'*

says Angelo in *Measure for Measure*, and in this play it is 'heaven', again in the singular, which 'infuses' Miranda, drawing after it in the word 'infuses' the raging controversy about 'infused grace'. It is Antonio, whose deeds hardly recommend him on Aristotelian or Christian grounds as a likely man of insight,¹ who denies both deity and immortality. To him a dead Alonzo is 'no better than the earth he lies upon', and he feels not 'this deity' in his bosom. His opinions, until he converts, to his habits at least, the sceptical Sebastian, are not shared by anyone else in the play.

Yet though, in addition to this, the *kind* of God, the *kind* of immortality, and the *kind* of ethic assumed or expounded are Christian, there is a marked difference between the inner structure of this play and the inner structure of *Measure for Measure*. Since it is itself a transference of Christian doctrine into other terms, as in *Lear*, not, as *Measure for Measure* is predominantly, an application of Christian doctrine, it would damage the unity of the work to cross-reference it, as it were, with itself. So it is difficult to imagine the father in the parable adducing Christ's Passion as his reason for going to meet the prodigal son.

The play bears another resemblance to several of Christ's

¹ *Ethics*, 11443. St. Matthew v, 8.

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parables in that it is not analogically perfect; that is, it makes the point it sets out to make, but cannot be equated with its prototype in every detail. Prospero, like the unjust judge who hears the widow for her importunity, will not coincide with God at all points. He does not understand Caliban as well as Shakespeare does—and he is human enough in his irritability. He is simply God-like at one point.

Or rather, perhaps, he is, *par excellence*, 'the man who played God', played him, not merely ethically as does the Duke in *Measure for Measure*, but metaphysically, with more than human power. He himself is explicit upon his playership. Without his 'book', he says,

*What strength I have's mine own
Which is most faint. . . .
And my ending is despair
Unless I be relieved by prayer,
Which pierces so that it assaults
Mercy itself and frees all faults.*

Prayer, is the implication, is the metaphysical substitute for Prospero's 'art*'. Certainly the problems with which it is habitually supposed to deal are Prospero's problems. *The Tempest* is more complex than any parable, in that it is not one allegory but several, which cross and interact; the recessional allegory of being, summed up in the famous speech, and murmured in the typical sea-image of Ariel's song; the allegory of sin and redemption which constitutes the story of Antonio and Sebastian; and the allegory in which the quasi-symbolic figures of Ariel and Caliban shade off the parable into the morality.

The story of Antonio and Sebastian has frequent analogies with the story of Satan and Adam and Eve, analogies not coherent and consecutive, but fluctuating and reiterative, in the way artistic as opposed to didactic analogies typically are. For the artist does not set out to expound a doctrine or metaphysic; he creates in the context of doctrine and metaphysic, which are the mould of the experience he is to express, rather than the end of his expression. The function of ideas in poetry is not to be created, but to create.

So Antonio plays the roles of both Adam and Satan. Like

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both he thinks he 'is something' in himself, and, as Malvolio before him, forgets he is a steward:

*Having unto truth, by telling of it,
Made suck a sinner of his memory
To credit his own lie, he did believe
He was indeed the duke.*

Then, like Adam, he comes 'to bend the dukedom yet unbow'd' to 'an enemy to me inveterate'. Later this 'deceiver' of himself, assuming in his turn the Satanic role, tempts Sebastian as Satan tempted Eve (or Eve Adam). His redemption is typically intellectual, since it was of his memory he made a sinner.¹ As he has denied conscience and 'expelled remorse and nature', it is he, with Sebastian, whom he has seduced, 'whose inward pinches are most strong'. We are to assume that he is penitent, since he is released:

*They being penitent,
The sole drift of my purpose doth extend
Not a frown further.*

This is Prospero's 'rarer action ... in virtue than in vengeance'. He acts here, very much as a man, in the ethical tradition of Shakespearian comedy, but playing here perhaps an Incarnate God. So he replies to Ariel's childlike attempts to soften what he thinks a hard master—who has, in fact, designed all only to redeem—with an almost quizzical tenderness passing into emphatic explanation:

*And shall not myself,
One of their kind, that relish all as sharply,
Passion as they, be kindlier mov'd than thou art?
Though with their high wrongs I am struck to the quick,
Tet with my nobler reason 'gainst my fury
Do I take part.*

¹ Of moral redemption he shows no sign but silence, significant perhaps in such a dealer in gibe and repartee. He has, after the revelation, one line, forced out of him by Sebastian. It begins absent-mindedly, 'Very like', and then, psychologically right, returns to his old idiom. There is in this silence perhaps a justification for playing the scene as Mr Nevill Coghill produced it, with Antonio, after this quip, walking away from the Test, to be left alone on the stage with Prospero after the others have entered the cave, and to have addressed to him the last words of the play, 'Please you, draw near'.

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Yet though Prospero 'takes part' with reason, he is not Seneca's rational man, for whom 'those eyes are weak which are blood-shot themselves in beholding another's suffusions'¹:

*Holy Gonzalo, honourable man,
Mine eyes, even sociable to the show of thine,
Fall fellowly drops.*

This direct and pointed contradiction of Seneca has been made earlier by Miranda (she who is Prospero's 'cherubin'):

*O, / have suffer'd
With those whom I saw suffer.*

Nor is it a Senecan *dementia*, requiring desert, which Prospero extends to his brother:

*Flesh and blood
You, brother mine, . . .
I do forgive thee,
Unnatural though thou art.*

Antonio's unworthiness is made even more explicit:

*For you, most wicked sir, whom to call brother
Would even infect my mouth, I do forgive
Thy rankest fault; all of them.*

Alonzo, in whom revelation provokes vocal repentance, Prospero embraces without reproach, and speaks to him tenderly, albeit playfully, of patience:

*/ rather think
You have not sought her help, of whose soft grace,
For the like loss I have her sovereign aid,
And rest myself content.*

Forgiving thus completely and without desert, Prospero does not forgive lightly. The guilty must suffer in their salvation, and Ferdinand, quasi-innocent in the personal sense, must have 'Vexations' which, though but 'trials of love', are here still called punishments, as in St Thomas's 'medicinal punishments' for 'the corruption of nature' apart from actual sin.²

¹ *De dementia*, I, 5-6. ² *Summa*, 1-2:87:7:0.

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*If I have too austere¹ly punish'd you
Your compensation makes amends.*

'In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.'¹

*You do look, my son, in a mov'd sort
As if you were dismayed: be cheerful, sir.*

Of all, innocent and guilty, Prospero can say from the beginning what was true of neither *Cymbeline* nor *The Winter's Tale*:

*Tell your piteous heart
There's no harm done. . . .*

*There is no soul—
No, not so much perdition as an hair—*

'But the very hairs of your head are numbered', said Christ in St Matthew (x, 30), and Prospero's lines to Miranda, even in manner reminiscent of mystic revelation, to which the soul is typically feminine and sometimes also a daughter, are certainly reminiscent in sense:

*No harm.
I have done nothing but in care of thee,
Of thee, my dear one, thee, my daughter, who
Art ignorant of what thou art.*

So, 'though the seas' (and Ariel as a Dantesque harpy of justice) may 'threaten, they are merciful', and this mercy lies behind Prospero as well as in him:

*By foul play as thou say'st, were we heav'd thence
But blessedly help hither.*

The Tempest's God is indeed the God of St Augustine and St Thomas, who is so powerful that he can even make good of evil, the evil of sin for which he is not responsible. It is his omniscience which has 'chalked forth the way', and Gonzalo goes on to sum up the end of that way in a speech which trans-

¹ St John xvi, 33.

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fers into other terms, curiously reminiscent in cadence and image, the doctrine of natural *in* supernatural perfection:

*Was Milan thrust from Milan, that his issue
Should become kings of Naples? O! rejoice
Beyond a common joy, and set it down
With gold on lasting pillars. In one voyage
Did Claribel her husband find at Tunis,
And Ferdinand, her brother, found a wife
Where he himself was lost; Prospero his dukedom
In a poor isle; and all of us ourselves,
When no man was his own.*

O certe necessarium Adae peccatum, quod Christi morte deletum est! O felix culpa, quae talem ac tantum meruit habere Redemptorem!¹

This, the most famous cry of the *Exultet* from the Blessing of the Paschal Candle in the Roman Missal, passes into Shakespeare's 'pillar' image, 'glittering like gold':

Sed jam columnae hujus praeconia novimus, quam in honorem dei rutilans ignis accendit.²

'The purchase', *Pericles* promised, 'is to make men glorious'. 'O brave new world, that has such people in't!' Even Caliban, 'on whose nature, *nurture* can never stick', on whom, 'pains *humanely* (i.e. *humanly*) taken' are 'all, all lost, quite lost', 'will be wise hereafter, and seek for grace'.

Caliban is surely 'the muddy vesture of decay' itself, 'thou earth', 'that serves^in offices that profit us'. He is more than matter, he is infected matter, 'got by the devil himself upon the 'blue-eyed hag'; yielding to the first gentleness of Prospero, in love with the beauty of Miranda, but turning receptiveness to avarice and love to lust. So, though 'no standard', he is 'a thing'—albeit 'of darkness'—which Prospero must acknowledge his. And in spite of everything, because he is alive, he is to Shakespeare earthly good and lovable—'Every being, in so far as it is being is good.'³

¹ O truly necessary sin of Adam, which by Christ's death is blotted out! O happy fault, that deserved to have such and so great a Redeemer!

² And now we "now the tidings of this pillar, which the fire, glittering like gold, lights to the glory of God.

³ *Summa*, i:5:3:c.

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Everyone in the play sees Caliban; but only Prospero, by his own design perhaps, sees Ariel, the spirit over whom no material agency has power, who can be imprisoned only by good (Prospero) or evil (Sycorax), himself in essence free. Evil, which can imprison him, is powerless, once he is imprisoned, to release him. Only good can undo evil, and restore his essential freedom.

In the epilogue Prospero also, self-stripped of his divine power, prays for freedom:

*As you from crimes would pardon'd be
Let your indulgence set me free.*

Here is the Christian equation of sin and servitude; 'for whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin'.¹ Prospero's condition of freedom—'forgive and you shall be forgiven'—is much unlike that in the innocent Utopia of which Gonzalo makes conversation, and of which Alonzo says, 'Thou dost talk nothing to me'. The details of this Utopia appear to be derived from Montaigne, who admires them.² Shakespeare's semi-comic treatment, and juxtaposition to the guiltiest scene in Prospero's redemptive universe, are perhaps an index of his debt to Montaigne, to whom he owed information rather than opinions or tone of thought. His opinions he would appear to owe more plausibly to the maligned Sebonde, whose main interest, as expressed in his sub-title, was, after all, Shakespeare's own—'What is man?'

In this question, the three allegories of *The Tempest* meet, and though Shakespeare has closed the long dichotomy of the tragedies, it is as true of him as of all artists, whether in England or in Argos—or indeed in Italy—that his answer is not easily conceived. We come back to the lines to which all men and all Shakespearians must in the end come back:

*We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep.*

Time is a dream; 'a dream is but a shadow'. But without substance there is no shadow. Indeed we ourselves are not shadow but substance, the 'stuff' of which the shadow is made. In time

¹ St John viii, 34. ² *Essais*, I, 30, *Of the Caniballes*.

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we dream, in death we sleep, like those 'spell-stopp'd' in the 'strange maze' by Prospero's magic—in order that in the end 'they shall be themselves'. In *Lear* as in the *Inferno* man 'came to himself, his corrupt self, 'in the middle of the journey, in a dark wood where the straight way was lost'.¹ In Marina and Perdita he found 'grace' to lead him back to 'nature' in the profoundest sense, to the 'esperance' of *Troilus* fulfilled in *The Tempest*. 'Was Cressid here?' The answer is no. 'Be cheerful, sir.' Be more than cheerful, sir. Indeed

rejoice
Beyond a common joy, and set it down
With gold on lasting pillars.

For man has been led back by grace *through* nature, through 'the dark backward and abysm of time' to the threshold of God's eternal now. The redeemed Cressid, who has always existed there, is not the 'daughter of the game' whom Diomed held in his arms. He held in fact a dream, a shadow, a no-thing, the calumination of eyes and ears. And the dream and the dreamer must alike pass through revelation and suffering into the darkness and passivity of sleep.

*But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou owest,
JVbr shall death brag thou wanderest in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou growest;*

*Nothing of him that doth fade
But doth suffer a sea-change
Into something rich and strange.*

All this, it may be said, is an ultimate agnosticism. But

eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.²

¹ *Inferno*, I, 1-3:

*Nel mezzo del cammin di nostra vita
Mi ritrovai per una selva oscura,
Che la diritta via era smarrita.*

² I Corinthians ii, 9.

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The most dogmatic forms of Christianity, the most lucid of mystics and metaphysicians are not more explicit on the subject of being. Theirs also is a 'lightsome darkness', a *Cloud of Unknowing*. To them too, to Julian of Norwich, to St Thomas, to St Augustine, 'sin is no deed'⁵ and 'evil is nothing in itself. To them too there is in the depths of the soul a veiled point of knowing and being, never wholly separated from God. To them too the life of grace is a 'transforming union'⁵, which ends in that beatific vision where the mind becomes, according to its own mode, the God whom it knows—and 'of God himself can no man think'⁵.

So 'now in a glass, darkly', wrote St Paul, anticipating Shakespeare's image of recession. 'I come *blind* towards the light of the eternal clearness'⁵, said St Thomas, who described the metaphysics of his *Summa* as 'a little straw', and in the burial service of Elizabeth's Prayer Book the words which echo through the introductory psalms, the lesson and the sentences are Shakespeare's 'shadow' and 'sleep'. Yet the last collect exhorts us 'not to be sorry as men without hope, for them that sleep', and the sleep image goes back through the Missal to the Epistles and Gospels themselves:

Memento etiam, Domine, famulorum famularumque
tuarum qui nos praecesserunt cum signo fidei, et dormiunt
in somno pacis.¹

She is not dead but sleepeth.²

Whether through influence or parallelism Shakespeare could hardly be more orthodox.

¹ Missal: Canon: Commemoratio pro defunctis.

² St Luke viii, 52.

CHAPTER VII

THE IDEA OF JUSTICE IN THE ORTHODOX TRADITION

The term just cannot properly be applied except where men have a law to appeal to. *Ethics*, 11343.

All things that are have some operation not violent or casual... the same we term a law. *Ecclesiastical Polity*, I, ii, 2.

THE curious, if not violent or casual, will wish to trace more systematically in the metaphysicians the development of that pattern traced so far in Shakespeare's plays, and referred only in passing, and as the need arose, to its exterior sources. It is a pattern arising out of dialectic; for it is only by asking insistent and ultimate questions that men get consistent and ultimate replies.

It was in the orthodox tradition that Shakespeare had to find his answers if he were to find them at all. Machiavelli had repudiated justice in favour of expediency; Montaigne had been content to point out its lamentable absence from human and cosmic affairs; the rest, in so far as they discuss it, select from or modify the traditional pattern, modify it very considerably as Luther and Calvin did, or like Hooker with an equivocal care.

Some modify it unconsciously; for the metaphysical tradition was to the Elizabethan not a series of historical layers but a living totality, a conglomeration and interaction of one mind upon another, where even the distinction between pagan and Christian did not readily occur. St Augustine had baptized Plato, and St Thomas had baptized Aristotle, and Cicero, with his prophetically Elizabethan genius for pastiche, had, perhaps by incorporating these, secured amnesty for others besides himself. So, in number, the English editions of *Tully's Offices* rivalled those of the *Imitation of Christ*. Erasmus and Colet, like Bacon, had attacked the methods of the schoolmen, but even the utilitarian Bacon betrayed rather than attacked their aim. The

Thirty Nine Articles might indulge in the discreet infiltration of another view, but the belief of St Thomas, that 'reason cannot contradict faith', that 'every truth by whomsoever spoken is from the Holy Ghost' and that a rational theology therefore is a *Summa* of the whole continuous tradition of humane learning, had entered deeply into the texture of the sixteenth-century mind. It is in this tradition that Hooker himself was nursed, and his first great book is almost entirely Thomist and Aristotelian. Walton tells us that Clement VIII, who would have no initial prejudice in its favour, declared that

there is no learning that this man hath not searcht into . . . his books will get reverence by age; for there is in them such seeds of eternity that if the rest be like this, they shall last till the last fire consume all learning.¹

The Elizabethan piled up against that last fire 'all learning,' and something more. For if the new emphasis left untouched for the time the basic assumptions of the fathers and schoolmen, it gave, inside the tradition, a new and expanding life to Plato and Aristotle, who were cultivated with increasing avidity in their own right. When Lord Caspar doubts in *The Courtyer* that these grave philosophers danced and sang, Lord Octavian's rebuke is swift and notable. 'Almost', he says, 'it is not lawful to think that these two divine wits were not skilful in everything'.³ This, like every apotheosis, cuts both ways; I. K.'s dedication to his translation of Romei refers to the discourses as 'grounded on the firm foundations of Aristotelian and Platonic discipline and yet accompanied with a lively touch and feeling of these times'. It is this touch and feeling that a synopsis for a less leisurely and more blase age cannot hope to achieve. One can attempt only to be just to *ideas* of justice—an order perhaps tall enough.

Justice is always in some sense a matter of conduct, but it is conceived by the traditional theorists both as the natural action of a being in a psychological sense, and as a specific quality of judgement, of rewarding and punishing others outside the being concerned. So Plato says of it in the first sense, 'To do one's own business in a certain way may be assumed to be justice', and

¹ *Life of Mr Richard Hooker in Works*, Oxford, p. 57.

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again, 'Justice is acknowledged to be the habitual practice of one's own natural and proper work'.¹ Human justice in this sense, which in Plato's usage is more or less equivalent to goodness, is in Shakespeare as in Plato the rule of reason in the soul and wisdom in the state, and may be described as order, psychological and political. To define it in man is to define man's end and nature, so that justice of this sort obviously rests on metaphysical values. Yet in what—if one were to coin the phrase—one might call metaphysical justice, what Aquinas calls 'the justice of God', which 'is truth', the distinction between the two *kinds* of action, internal and external, disappears. For it is precisely the 'certain way' in which God 'does his business' with which we are concerned when we enquire what happens—justly or unjustly—to us. Plato defined the ground of a just judgement as that a man should neither have what is another's nor be deprived of his own, but should have 'what is due'.² It is in this giving or not giving what seems to be due that the final cause has come in at all times for considerable criticism, and one might therefore define metaphysical justice as a fit order of consequence in what happens to men, its ethical derivative as a similar order in men's relations with other men.

The more purely psychological problem, omnipresent to the Elizabethan in general and to Shakespeare in particular, has been significantly discussed by Charles Williams, in considering what he calls 'Shakespeare's study of the schism in reason'—the schism between the reality which reason apprehends and the appearance to which the will and passions are attached. Yet 'tragedy', said Aristotle,³ 'is essentially an imitation not of persons but of action and life', and Shakespeare, through plot and character, enquires, as we have seen, not only about appearance and reality but about cause and effect; he is concerned not merely with a static truth but with a dynamic truth, with how the *natura rerum* works. Like Plato he takes for granted, except perhaps in *Lear*, that some final cause exists, and speculates upon its nature in action. He is not content to say simply that the just man is the 'man who is not passion's slave'; he enquires as both tragedy and comedy are bound to enquire, 'What about

¹ *Republic*, 433B, D and E. ² *Ibid.*, 433E.

³ *Poetics*, 1450a.

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the unjust man, and the just or unjust God?' In short, he asks what happens. The dramatist, if his work has any relation to truth, is forced to ask what happens, and his professional problems are in this sense metaphysical problems.

They may, of course, be evaded. 'Poetic justice' is the attempt to equate the good and the beautiful without reference to the true. It may be of two types. Aristotle suggests it in order to effect the reconciliation between the individual and life which great art must effect. So, he says, if one is to accomplish the katharsis of pity and fear which is characteristic of tragedy, the highest form of art,

three forms of plot are to be avoided: (i) a good man must not be seen passing from happiness to misery, or (2) a bad man from misery to happiness. The first situation is not fear-inspiring or piteous, but simply odious to us. The second is the most untragic that can be; it has no one of the requisites of tragedy; it does not appeal either to the human feeling in us, or to our pity, or to our fears. Nor on the other hand, should (3) an extremely bad man be seen falling from happiness into misery. Such a story may arouse the human feeling in us, but it will not move us to either pity or fear; pity is occasioned by undeserved misfortune, and fear by that of one like ourselves. There remains, then, the intermediate kind of personage, a man not pre-eminently virtuous and just, whose misfortune, however, is brought upon him not by vice or depravity but by some error of judgement.¹

All the literary criticism of the Elizabethan age itself, however, inherits, presumably in Sidney's case from Plato, a far more didactic conception than Aristotle's of 'poetic justice'. There is a hint in Sidney's *Apologie* that poetry is to make 'Tact and nature' more acceptable ('Her world is brazen, the Poets only deliver a golden'), but the real standard is moral. Indeed, in the whole attack on poetry and its defence in this period, the ethical dictatorship is unquestioned; the disputants share the same criteria; they merely argue about the facts. In the *School of Abuse*, Gosson's 'pleasant invective' had attacked poetry as having a bad effect on conduct, and the charming Sidney and ponderous Puttenham alike defended it as the sugar-coated pill

¹ *Poetics*, 1452b-1453a.

in which the unpalatable admonitions of moral theory might be administered unnoticeably but with the best results:

The Philosopher . . . teacheth them that are already taught; but the Poet is the food for the tenderest stomachs, the Poet is indeed the right Popular Philosopher whereof *Aesop's* tales give good proof.

Indeed if he

do his part a-right, he will show you in *Tantalus*, *Atreus*, and such like, nothing that is not to be shunned; and in *Cyrus*, *Aeneas*, *Ulysses* each thing to be followed; where the Historian, bound to tell things as things were, cannot be liberal (without he will be poetical) of a perfect pattern, but, as in *Alexander* or *Scipio* himself, show doings, some to be liked, some to be disliked.¹

If he cannot always deal with men as they ought to be ('the golden world') he is to deal with life as it ought to be, with a world where good is rewarded and evil punished in material currency, a 'just' world:

Now, to that which commonly is attributed to the praise of histories, in respect of the notable learning is gotten by marking the success, as though therein man should see virtue exalted and vice punished, truly that commendation is peculiar to Poetry and far off from History. For indeed Poetry ever setteth virtue so out in her best colours, making Fortune her well-waiting hand-maid, that one must needs be enamoured of her. Well may you see *Ulysses* in a storm, and in other hard plights; but they are but exercises of patience and magnanimity, to make them shine the more in the near-following prosperity. And of the contrary part, if evil men come to the stage, they ever go out (as the Tragedy writer answered to one that disliked the show of such persons) so manacled as they little animate folks to follow them. But the Historian, being captived to the truth of a foolish world, is many times a terror from well-doing, and an encouragement to unbridled wickedness.²

¹ *Apologie for Poetrie*, p. 168, in *Elizabethan Critical Essays*, Vol. i, ed. Gregory Smith.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 169-70.

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Bacon, in *The Advancement of Learning* (III, p. 343), was of the same mind:

Because true history propoundeth the successes and issues of actions not so agreeable to the merits of virtue and vice, therefore poesy feigns them more just in retribution ... it doth raise and erect the mind by submitting the shows of things to the desires of the mind; whereas reason doth buckle and bow the mind unto the nature of things.

So Chapman disdains in the dedication to *The Revenge of Bussy d'Ambois*, those

'Poor envious souls' who 'cavil at truth's want in these natural fictions; material instruction, elegant and sententious excitation to virtue and deflection from her contrary, being the soul, limbs and limits of an authentional tragedy.'

Aristotle's contrast between the poet and the historian—to which Sidney refers without much understanding in the *Apologie*—is quite other than this. For to Aristotle poetry was not merely better, but truer, than history, and though he would in tragedy for specific aesthetic purposes recommend choice of one true action rather than another, he had no doubt that the poet's concern, as such, is with what is most deeply and metaphysically true:

The distinction between historian and poet is not in the one writing prose and the other verse—you might put the work of Herodotus into verse and it would still be a species of history; it consists really in this, that the one describes the thing that has been and the other the thing that might be. Hence poetry is something more philosophic and of graver import than history, since its statements are of the nature rather of universals, whereas those of history are singulars. By a universal statement I mean one as to what such and such a kind of man will probably and necessarily say or do—which is the aim of poetry though it affixes proper names to the characters; by a singular statement, one as to what, say Alcibiades, did or had done to him.¹

Shakespeare describing 'the thing that might be', was yet in Sidney's phrase 'captived to the truth'; he was interested whether it was indeed 'the truth of a foolish world'. One thing is

¹ *Poetics*, 145ib.

certain, that neither in the Aristotelian sense which controls only choice of action for aesthetic purposes, nor in the didactic sense of Sidney, and Bacon and Chapman, who would falsify a chosen action for moral ends, is there ever a merely 'poetic justice' to be found in his work. The truth which captivated him was—with cumulative insistence—the whole truth and nothing but the truth. It made him free to set himself the three real problems of justice—aesthetic, metaphysical and ethical: to provide reconciliation to suffering, deserved and undeserved, to find in human affairs 'an operation not violent or casual', from which an ethical value might be deduced and by which it might be justified, and to deduce from this operation the ethical value itself. It is true that in the early plays, *Henry VI* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, the ethical values of justice and mercy, the answer to the problem of how the rational man, the man psychologically just, should act, are already postulated with the theological and metaphysical justifications attached. The exploration of ethical and metaphysical justice proceeds in and upon this hypothesis, which is subjected to the rising storm of experience which Professor Wilson Knight sees as a symbol of his art. 'I will trust him', said Job, with whose remarks Shakespeare must perforce have been acquainted, and who also preserved his hypothesis in the teeth of circumstance, 'but I will maintain my own ways before him'. Shakespeare, whatever else he may have derived from Montaigne, did not derive an unreasoning faith. Through *Troilus and Cressida*, through *Timon of Athens*, and *King Lear*, he maintained the ways of the world.

It was in the ways of the world that all the objective philosophers from Plato to Hooker were themselves concerned to discover 'an operation not violent or casual', a 'law', and Plato already asks the three basic questions which must elucidate it: what is evil? what is the relation between sin and suffering? how, if at all, do men become good?

It may be remarked, as a friendly critic observing me with sheafs of notes from Stephanus's Plato remarked, that the Bible was a more likely source of answers to these questions for one who had 'little Latin and less Greek'. It is; and those who have read so far and propose to read further in this book are not likely to complain of a dearth of Christian theology. But at least three things should be remembered. First, Ben Jonson's

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'little Latin'⁵ might to us be not inconsiderable. It is usually assumed that Shakespeare was educated at the Grammar School in Stratford, and the Latin standard in grammar schools was likely to be rather higher in his day than in ours. Even now the normally intelligent undergraduate in the English School at Oxford can with his sixth-form Latin read Stephanus without undue difficulty. And if, as Professor Dover Wilson suggests, Shakespeare 'received his education as a singing boy in the service of some great Catholic nobleman', the 'little Latin' which appeared to the Latinist might even have exceeded what the upper schoolboy knows. Secondly, the Greeks had entered into the texture of western thinking, and the general probability that any Elizabethan of Shakespeare's position and habits, let alone of Shakespeare's curiosity, would absorb this or that from choice conversations or compulsory sermons is very strong indeed—quite apart from derivative treatises in English which would be likely to arouse tavern discussions with those who knew the 'divine wits'⁵ at first hand. Thirdly—and most factually—in a manner totally inexplicable from the Bible, Shakespeare did learn from the Greeks. With the Platonic doctrine of ideas, with the metaphysical concepts of shadow and substance he played naturally and easily in the sonnets; he turned to them to express the disillusionment of Troilus and Hamlet and he has not forgotten *natura naturans* in the last plays. It would be strange therefore if, on those questions which are bound up with such ontological notions and on which men generally, dramatists particularly and he above all speculate constantly, it should not be relevant to turn and ask systematically what the philosophers thought.

Plato, who seems to have thrown up like a leviathan nearly all the problems of men, was perhaps prevented from solving them by his fundamental dualism, and by assuming that an accurate intellectual judgement is always followed by a correct moral choice. Like all metaphysicians he connects good and being, and there is little doubt that Augustine was influenced by the dictum that what destroys and corrupts a thing is the evil and what preserves and improves it the good.¹ Yet Plato himself, encouraged by his division of being into the shadowy matter which is the source of evil, and the real and good idea,

¹ *Republic*, 608E.

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and forced by his failure to work out the implications of human freewill and corruptibility, arrives at something like the Manichaeism against which Augustine fought:

That which does no evil cannot be the cause of evil, . . . so that God, if he be good, is not the author of all things, as many declare, but is the cause of a few things only, and not of most things which happen to men.¹

The 'happen to' suggests suffering rather than sin, the evils which Plato recognizes elsewhere being sin (which is 'injustice', failure to fulfil one's nature) and undeserved suffering, which is indeed an evil though the least. To *be* unjust is a far greater evil, and to be unjust and not be punished the greatest of all evils; for if a man be justly punished he is delivered from the evil of his soul.²

This purgative process is in fact the dominant relation which Plato sees between sin and suffering. So, says Socrates, *if* suffering comes from God we

must say that God did what was right and just and they were better for being punished, but that those who are punished are miserable and that God is the author of their misery the poet is not to be permitted to say, though he may say that the wicked are miserable because they require to be punished, and are benefited by receiving punishment from God.³

Yet the vision of Ur recounts 'retributions' by no means all corrective:

He mentioned that he was present when one of the spirits asked another, 'Where is Ardiaeus the Great?' . . . and the answer was, 'He comes not hither and will never come.' . . . And this was one of the dreadful sights which we ourselves witnessed. We were at the mouth of the cavern, and having completed all our experiences were about to reascend when of a sudden Ardiaeus appeared and several others, most of whom were tyrants, and there were also besides the tyrants private individuals who had been great criminals: they were just, as they fancied, about to return into the upper world, but the mouth instead of admitting them gave a roar, whenever any of these incurable sinners or someone who had not been sufficiently punished tried to ascend; and then wild

¹ Republic, 379B. ² Gorgias, 469B-470A. ³ Republic, 380A-B.

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men of fiery aspect . . . seized and carried them off . . . declaring to the passers-by what were their crimes and that they were being taken away to be cast into hell.¹

The implications of the vision of Ur are reiterated explicitly in the *Gorgias* (525B-C),² which declares the office of punishment twofold, purgative and deterrent:

Those who are improved when they are punished by Gods or men are those whose sins are curable, and they are improved as in this world, so in the other, by suffering; for there is no other way in which they can be delivered from their evil. Those, however, who are contaminated by the worst crimes are made examples; for as they are incurable the time has past at which they could receive any benefit. . . they acquire no good but others acquire good from seeing their punishment.

Plato suggests, therefore, that men become better—if not good—by deserved suffering or by the spectacle of deserved suffering in others, both which are mediums of knowledge. Knowledge, he always tends to suggest, is virtue and evil ignorance, leaving the enquirer with no explanation of why the incurables are incurable, and denying that their suffering is any good to them. Undeserved suffering, moreover, which occurs only in this world, remains a simple—if nugatory—evil, out of which no good comes. Plato like Cicero, but at a much deeper level than Cicero's, insists everywhere that goodness is

¹ *Republic*, 615C-616A.

² It might be considered that Plato thought all punishment in this life at least potentially purgative, and that this was the aim of punishment whether God's or men's, were it not that Bk. i of the *Republic* and the *Crito* both register a doubt of the purgative value of suffering, insisting that the good man should not hurt anyone, even the wicked, 'because the evil when hurt become still more evil', and did not the *Protagoras* say roundly that the end of punishment is deterrence. The distinction seems to be between vengeance (*Crito* and *Republic*, Bk. i) and justice (*Republic*, Bks. II and X, and *Gorgias*), and the passage in the *Protagoras* might be reconciled with the purgative theory in terms of a distinction akin to that of Aquinas between civil and moral justice, the state punishing the action because its object is deterrence, but God the motive, the person, since his end is in the person. That is, to use Aristotle's terms, the state's justice is 'conventional'* directed towards the utilitarian end of its society, but God's justice is 'natural' being an operation of the nature of things as he has created them.

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'expediency', not merely because evil is punished in the next world, but because in goodness a man fulfils his nature and in fulfilling his nature is happy. The picture drawn in the *Republic* (362A) of the absolutely good man 'scourged, tormented, fettered and crucified'—as he says such a man would be—and yet happy, incomparably happier than the evil men who inflict his sufferings, is curiously prophetic in its detail, but the suffering itself remains 'no good'.

It remains so still in Aristotle, and Aristotle's failure to produce a wholly Christian metaphysic depends quite simply on his inability to close that gap between God and the universe which could in fact be closed only by Christ. At closing other gaps Aristotle was expert. With the doctrine that ideas exist as forms embodied in objects, he united in 'substance' the Platonic dichotomy of being, and in material substances, matter, no longer evil, is potentiality and as such a good. So he sets the metaphysical stage for the act of incarnation.

Moral good and evil, he clears the air by insisting, lie in choice, though choice is necessarily preceded or accompanied by an intellectual opinion or judgement affecting moral responsibility, which requires both knowledge *and* will. For if Aristotle refused to put asunder what God and 'common sense' have joined together, the 'form' and the material object, and produced essentially a metaphysic of unity, he was able to do so precisely because of a mind capable to a much greater degree than Plato's of clear distinctions. His doctrine of free will, unsupported by any doctrine of 'fall' or 'creation', carried him very near to Aquinas's analysis that the subject, object and agent of evil are all good, but because he had never really involved his God with his universe, he had no need to find this way to delivering him from the responsibility for its evil. The nature and life of God in eternal contemplation, the 'pure actuality' of 'thought thinking itself' (1072b), has only to be collated with other parts of the *Metaphysics*—1024-75a and 993b for instance—to suggest the Christian doctrines of Trinity and creation, but it did not suggest them in any explicit sense to Aristotle. And though our highest good is to be like God in contemplating God (1072b), no doctrine of providence involves the God who *has* caused all things with the nature of things as they are. If it did, the famous statement that 'the final

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cause produces motion by being loved and by that which it moves, moves all things³, set beside that other statement, that 'the completest realization of justice seems to be the realization of friendship or love',¹ would set Aristotle the problem, perhaps without revelation insoluble, of finding the *natura rerum* just.

As a contribution to its solution he subtilizes Plato's general statement that justice is what is due, by asking, 'Due in what sense?'. 'The word justice', he says, 'cannot properly be applied except where men have a law to appeal to', and he draws not only the distinction much discussed by Elizabethan writers on political affairs, the distinction between arithmetical and geometrical justice, but another distinction between what is natural and what is conventional.² There seem indeed three sorts or levels of justice conceivable: first rigid application of an exterior law, arithmetical justice; secondly adjustment to the individual, geometrical (or 'harmonical', according to Bodin), where the discretion of the judge may set aside the law, according to 'equity', which allows also for the exercise of 'clemency' in Cicero's and Seneca's sense; and thirdly a deeper level where law is consequential or natural, not retributive or conventional, inherent in the action not imposed upon it.

Aristotle prefers the second level to the first, and the third to the second. The 'equitable' (or individual correction of legal justice) is, he says, better than rigid application of code, but not better than absolute justice, the universal *principle* of law, which actual codes, though absolutely stated can never accurately express.³ His theory of justice is, as he himself points out, in political terms, which Augustine still uses transcendently in the *De Civitate Dei*, and which indeed Aristotle uses transcendently himself, since the 'law' which embraces within its obedience the whole of reciprocal virtue⁴ can hardly except in a *City of God* be a civil law. It is rather the *kind* of justice which lies behind all codes, and Aristotle criticizes existing civil laws precisely according to whether they are framed to produce and preserve individual virtue. Indeed for a man of incomparable virtue, or more than one, if there could be such, 'there is no law; they are themselves a law', and 'such a one' (as if rejecting

¹ *Ethics*, 1155a.

²

Ibid., 1131-7.

³ *Ibid.*, 1137b, and *Politics*, 1286-7a.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1129b-1130a.

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his own even more unlikely plural hypothesis) 'may truly be deemed a God among men'.¹

The dictum 'for such there is no law' St Paul seems to lift bodily from Aristotle in order to speak (in Galatians v, 23) of those who in the grace of Christ have 'the fruit of the Spirit', changing only Aristotle's '*for such*', '*anent such*', '*in application to such*', to the more triumphant but less fundamental '*against*'. He seems to reflect also the insight of 'they are themselves a law' when he talks (in Romans viii, 2) of 'the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus' which has made him free from the law of sin and death'. Yet the law of sin and death is itself on the third level of the inherently consequential, and St Paul saw well enough that in preaching the life of the Spirit, he preached the Cross. Whether this would indeed have been 'foolishness to the Greek' Aristotle we can only speculate, but Aristotle himself, on this third level of justice propounds an interesting natural moral law:

Vice perverts us and causes us to err about the principles of action. So it is plain that it is impossible to be wise in practice without being morally good.²

That is, far from the 'knowledge is virtue' which Plato suggests, Aristotle suggests 'virtue is knowledge'. One is reminded of Iago, whose 'habits' caused him to miscalculate the reactions of Desdemona, Othello and Emilia, and so bring about his own death.

Do we pity Iago? In an attempt at semi-psychological, semi-moral analysis, Aristotle declares with Seneca—and in marked contrast to Prospero—that no good man pities deserved suffering,³ and to the question, 'How, if at all, do bad men become good', he replies very much in Platonic terms but with his own typical subtlety. The tragic suffering of the *Poetics*, the loss of *hubris* in self-knowledge is, as in Plato, only for the curable, the 'men of middle character'; to the incurably evil good itself

¹ *Politics*, 1284a.

² *Ethics*, 1144a.

³ *Rhetoric*, 1386b. It is only fair to point out, however, that Montaigne, who does not give his sources, makes Aristotle, when blamed for being too merciful to a wicked man, retort with Christian charm, 'It is true I was merciful to the man but not to his wickedness.'

becomes evil.¹ So, as we saw in Shakespeare's explicit studies in damnation, the objective knowledge which comes too late to Macbeth and Iago is powerless to change the habit of their will.

Aristotle's conception of the pity which he, unlike Shakespeare, would deny to them, appears distinct and perhaps unique, in that he advises tragedians to avoid completely *undeserved* suffering because this also is not piteous—or terrible—but merely odious. Whatever the adjective, undeserved suffering remains with Aristotle as with Plato a simple evil out of which no good comes, and Cicero, whose popular contribution to the classic problems of justice and mercy consists only in pragmatizing them, has the rhetorician's double standard, so that high seriousness about the soul's integrity forms an astonishing but not very illuminating pediment to the counsel chamber for the comfortable life.²

Oddly enough the only classical writer to whom undeserved suffering is at times a good is the Stoic Seneca, lying, as it were, on the periphery of the classical-Christian tradition, belonging neither to the main line of development through patristic writers, nor to the Arab deviation from which Aristotle returned so triumphantly to Europe under the aegis of St Thomas Aquinas.

Seneca, who was indeed known and quoted by St Thomas in order to distinguish 'mercy' from 'clemency', was certainly in a sense an Elizabethan favourite, both as a dramatist and as a political theorist. Yet he remained still, at the time when the great plays were being written, essentially an outsider, whose impact in resuscitation, occurring earlier than Machiavelli's or Montaigne's, was, like theirs, a new and exciting mode of experience rather than the basic mode. Many indeed tried according to a common human failing to have their orthodox cake and eat it too, as witness Thomas Newton's apologia in the dedication to the 'Englished' *Tenne Tragedies* in 1581. And they were in fact helped in this attempt to whitewash the 'philosophy' of Seneca's plays by the dramatist's theoretical devotion in the *De Providentia* to one of their own dominating ideas.

Of Seneca's two relevant treatises, the *De dementia* appears

¹ *Ethics*, 11373.

² Cf. *De Officiis*, III, 5, with II, 5.

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most ubiquitously in the political theorists, and its condemnation of pity and mercy in favour of 'clemency*' comes into that marked collision with Christian and Shakespearian values which was noticed in the discussion of the Shakespearian plays themselves. The *De Providentia*, as 'Englised' in Lodge's translation of the Works in 1614, has, relevantly enough, as its subtitle, 'Why good men are afflicted since there is a divine Providence', and its doctrine is that those things 'thou callest difficulties, adversities and abominable are first of all for the good of those to whom they happen and afterwards for other men's good, of whom the gods have more care than of everyone in particular' (C. III, p. 503). God is compared with a parent who disciplines the children he loves, or a schoolmaster who tries out his promising pupils, and the virtuous man, being 'more powerful than all external things', . . . turneth whatsoever happeneth to his good (C. II, p. 499). Two remarks, the first having something in common with Augustine's and Aquinas's doctrine of *deserved* suffering, invite collation with *Lear*:

There is nothing [says Demetrius] more unhappy than that man that hath never been touched with adversitie for he hath not had the means to know himself. . . . Let them [the good who suffer] say we have been thought worthy by God to be esteemed such in whom he might make trial how much human nature may suffer (C. III-IV, p. 503-4).

But whatever Seneca may say in the *De Providentia* or in letter or treatise in general, it is vain to try with Thomas Newton to set the plays from which the Elizabethans drank avid draughts of horror and cynicism in Sidney's mould of poetry or Raleigh's mould of life. Not only does the action, as in life and Shakespeare, make innocent and guilty suffer alike, but the innocent are *not* improved by their sufferings, and Seneca's, as distinct from Shakespeare's, questionings concerning evil, responsibility and justice are answered by a 'Fate' little like a Providence of any kind. The 'wanton boys' of Gloucester's retracted judgement are not Shakespeare's but Seneca's gods:

*Res humanas ordine nullo
Fortuna regit spargitque manu
Munera caeca, peiora fovens;*

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*Vincit sanctos dira libido
Fraus sublimi regnat in aula.*¹

In the *Tenne Tragedies* John Studley's translation weakens the sense, making Fortune an aberration rather than a rule; and he treats circumspectly indeed the last bitter words of the *Medea*, in which Jason sums up a verdict nearer to Montaigne's *Apologie* than to Newton's dedication. So

*Per alia vade spatia sublimi aethere;
Testare nullos esse, qua veheris, deos*²

becomes

*Go through the ample spaces wide, infect the
poisoned air,
Bear witness grace of God is none in place of
thy repair.*

Yet many Elizabethans read their Seneca in Latin, and towards the solution of the problems of cosmic justice, neither he in particular, nor the Stoics and Epicureans in general, have much to add to Plato and Aristotle.

Christian metaphysics, as is perhaps to be expected, has. The scriptures contribute their data both in the actual statement and refutation of certain natural doctrines, that is doctrines deducible by the normal exercise of human reason from the normal facts of life, and in the assertion of other facts from which doctrines may be and are derived. These facts and doctrines, coalescing with Platonic and Neo-Platonic and with Aristotelian philosophy, and made active by a new genius, produced in St Augustine and St Thomas the theologies we know—or do not know. To the problem of justice the pre-Augustinian fathers contribute little not contributed by the New Testament; for they were concerned to clarify the being rather than the action of God. And since with the Reformation both the Old and the New Testaments were rethrown into the cultural tradition in their own right, and since the Old Testa-

¹ *Hippolytus*, 978-82: Fortune rules human affairs without order, and scatters [her] gifts with a blind hand, fostering the worse; cruel lust overthrows good men, and in the lofty palace crime reigns.

² 'Go through the towering spaces of high heaven, and witness, where you ride, that there are no gods.'

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ment has, in the history of Puritan Christianity particularly, exerted a very marked influence, it is perhaps logical to treat here, not only the consensus of scriptural teaching as such, but even those doctrines of the Old Testament which the New modifies or in their literal terms rejects.

The Jews have always paid the price of being a figurative rather than a philosophical people, peculiarly liable therefore to be misunderstood. They are liable also to be simply not understood, so that few remember with what strict ontological exactitude the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob gave his name to Moses, as 'I am'. In this staggering assertion of the third chapter of Exodus is summed up the whole protest of Greek philosophy against contingent gods, the whole development in Plato and Aristotle towards the definition, 'pure actuality'. Pure actuality: I am. And if at this assertion in the mouth of Christ the high priest's guard fell to the ground,¹ it was out of these two assertions that Christian theology in St Augustine and St Thomas was to answer the basic Platonic questions about justice: What is evil? How do men become good?

In metaphysical terms, however, these questions are not asked let alone answered in the Old Testament. Evil is simply what is contrary to God's expressed will. Pride, the *hubris* of Greek tragedy, is in fact what leads scriptural characters from Adam onwards to disobedience, but the whole conception of evil in the Old Testament is, as St Paul is to point out later, the transgression of an exterior law, rigidly imposed by—in most contexts—a fiercely transcendent God. Men are here not friends but servants of justice, 'knowing not what their Lord doeth', and, between Job and Moses, scarcely daring to ask.

Yet there is a difference between the transcendent God of Aristotle (with whom also, says the philosopher \yistfully, friendship is not possible because he is 'so very far removed') and the transcendent God of the Jews. Not only has Jahweh created the world—he penetrates and orders it. Though his judgement when Adam falls is retributively and anthropomorphically conceived like that of an earthly potentate, and not yet as following consequentially upon Adam's action according to the 'law' of life as he has created it, this judgement,

¹ St John xviii, 6.

like the notion of a chosen people with an historical mission, draws in firm lines the picture of a God involved in time. The sins of the fathers visited upon the children show, as in Greek tragedy, a knowledge of moral consequence operating outside the individual, though here also the writer's conception is often anthropomorphic and vengeful, rather than consequential, just as even in Christian contexts God's justice continues to be conceived by childish minds. Indeed God's providence, that is his beneficent control of temporal affairs, is an idea common to Jewish and Christian scripture and in distinct contrast to the absenteeism of Aristotle's God. What on this common ground differentiates the Old Testament from the New is the *kind* of rewarding and punishing which Providence does.

It is perhaps not only to the literal mind incapable of penetrating images that Hebrew cosmology seems on the whole moral and materialistic, comforting itself when it found facts that did not fit in with it with the assertion that they were not so. 'I have been young and now I am old', says the psalmist; 'yet saw I never the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging their bread.' 'The wicked' may 'flourish like a green bay tree' but 'I went by and lo he was gone'—and this really seems to contain not merely the warning of a common mortality but the suggestion that it is the bad who die young, or at the very least die out of bed. Exquisite in cadence and capable of—even demanding—the more profound interpretations which traditional Christianity has placed upon their images, many of the psalms have suggested to the individual what the prophets seem to have suggested to the nation, that the God who 'spreads his net' in Ezekiel, and whose 'day'⁵ in Joel 'is at hand', is a God who rewards and punishes in this world and in this world's goods. It is noticeable, moreover, that whenever the Judaistic elements reassert themselves within the Christian tradition there is an automatic return of this doctrine, which in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is apt to degenerate in emphasis from the suggestion that the good shall prosper to the suggestion that those who prosper are good. The prophets themselves disdain this inversion, being attractively disrespectful, even when humanly fearful, of the paraphernalia of wealth and power.

Moreover, in Isaiah and Job and some of the psalms them.

selves, the *simfliste* material economy of sin and suffering is, as a closed system, renounced—though it is true that even Isaiah's doctrine of vicarious suffering does not *necessarily* imply that the punishment from which the transgressor is delivered is not material punishment in this world. The book of Job, without any suggestion of vicarious suffering, questions the motives of those who are good to escape material punishment or deserve material reward. Job, who complains of injustice, though his protest is not that he is sinless, but that he is comparatively good and suffers more than the comparatively wicked, is told by his 'comforters' that suffering is always personal punishment. Job however, and not the comforters, is justified by God, who says simply that Job is ignorant, but in his ignorance asks the right questions, while the comforters are condemned as having given the wrong replies. Job is not given back prosperity until he has accepted adversity, though perhaps to our artistic taste, which prefers verisimilitude to poetic justice, the book would be more effective if he died with Lear. One of Job's questions God does not answer: 'Why dost thou not pardon my transgression and take away mine iniquity?' Unlike Lear, he is not redeemed.

The New Testament answers Job's question, but first it denies outright the doctrine of material punishment and reward:

There were present at that season some that told him of the Galilaeans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilaeans were sinners above all the Galilaeans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

'The wages of sin is death',² and 'if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves',³ but the contingent variations, the *how* of men's lives and deaths, are not conceived in Christian scripture as personal punishments and rewards. Moreover, when we transfer the question of justice from this world to the other, the

¹ St Luke xiii, 1-5.

² Romans vi, 23.

³ I John i, 8.

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eternal world of the soul's integrity both in and 'after' time, that is, to 'the kingdom of heaven', we are told the parable of the labourers in the vineyard,¹ which, whatever else it may mean, does mean that God is not a geometer. If 'the wages of sin is death', it is 'the gift of God' which 'is eternal life'. The beatific vision is not, in the phrase of St Thomas, *ex debito*, though if men reject it they fall under the 'law'.²

The terms 'beatific vision'⁵ and 'eternal life' are those of revelation, and the Christian revelation is essentially concerned with metaphysical or consequential justice, about which its doctrine is distinguishable into three main parts or phases, creation, fall and redemption.

God, the first cause of the metaphysicians, creates beings with free will, whose good consists in the love and knowledge of himself. Knowledge appears primary and ultimate: 'The end is everlasting life', and 'this is life eternal that they might know God'.⁸ But 'everyone that loveth . . . knoweth God', and 'we love him because he first loved us'.⁴ Love is, therefore, apparently inextricable from knowledge, as it is in the doctrine of the Trinity, and between knowledge and virtue there is a two-way connection, so that in Christianity the insights of Plato and Aristotle are complementary: 'Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God', and yet, 'we shall be like him because we shall see him as he is'.⁵ Freewill itself seems largely the content of the phrase 'the image of God', repeated by Christian writers from Genesis, and freedom is everywhere associated with knowledge and virtue: 'Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free . . . whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin ... if the Son therefore shall make you free ye shall be free indeed'.⁶

Man, created free, forsakes his end, turning in pride from God, with the consequence that he suffers diminution in being, in 'life'. Good is always in Christian scripture inextricable from 'life'—'I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly'⁷; and sin is 'alienation from the life of God'.⁸ In this alienation both man's internal order and

¹ St Matthew xx, 1-16.

² Galatians iii, 13, and context.

³ Romans vi, 22; St John xvii, 3.

⁴ i John iv, 7-19.

⁵ St Matthew v, 8, and i John iii, 2.

⁶ St John viii, 32-6.

⁷ *Ibid.*, x, 10.

⁸ Ephesians iv, 18.

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the external order are upset, evil following evil both inside and outside the person willing and acting: 'If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves',¹ 'In Adam *all* die'² and 'the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together'.³ Evil, therefore, once begun, is, in human terms, ineradicable though resistable, since only a completely good will could sustain being and goodness let alone restore it. The internal disorder, which men inherit, is what theologians from St Paul onwards call concupiscence, the corruption of nature, the deflection of the infinite desire and will from their rational object to the objects—whatever they may be—of sense. This concupiscence or 'lust'—'the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life . . . the lust of the world'⁴—is not itself sin, being involuntary, but certain, if uncontrolled by grace, to lead to sin, which in its turn leads to death.⁵

About the spread of this train of evil consequence outside the person Shakespeare had begun to think already in *Lucrece*, where the pagan Lucretia speaks in terms not of Adam and Eve but of Paris and Helen and the ancient tale of Troy to which Englishmen had, throughout the Middle Ages, traced the founding of their race:

*Show me the strumpet that began this stir,
That with my nails her beauty I may tear.
Thy heat of lust, fond Paris, did incur
This load of wrath that burning Troy doth bear:
Thy eye kindled the fire that burneth here;
And here in Troy for trespass of thine eye,
The sire, the son, the dame and daughter die.*

*Why should the private pleasure of someone
Become the public plague of many moe?
Let sin, alone committed, light alone
Upon his head that hath transgressed so;
Let guiltless souls be freed from guilty woe:
For one's offence why should so many fall
To plague a private sin in general?*

¹ I John i, 8.

⁴ I John ii, 16-17.

² I Corinthians xv, 22 (my italics). ⁵ James i, 15.

³ Romans viii, 22.

Here Shakespeare questions the justice of a moral consequence which overflows the individual, so that 'one man's lust these many lives confounds'. The tragedies, and indeed the comedies, convinced of its factual truth—that in fact man *has* no private sins—still explore in reverse the Thomist *sententia*. In them we find not only that 'the justice of God is truth', but that truth, the 'foolish' truth to which Shakespeare was 'captived', is justice, and justice mercy. For not only evil but good spreads outwards and downwards to the last outposts of sin and death:

*Thou hast one daughter,
Who redeems nature from the general curse
Which twain hath brought her to.*

*Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia,
The Gods themselves throw incense.*

So—to write back the analogue of Cordelia into the Word of God—God becomes Man and therefore becomes part of the texture of metaphysical and moral consequence. He does not destroy free will or consequence, the 'law',¹ but suffers it, overcoming death and evil in imparting life and good. The life and the good are God's and therefore infinite; the will and the suffering are Man's and therefore operative. So, says Shakespeare's Berowne, 'Charity itself fulfils the law'. Objectively Christ completely restores freedom, and it is possible to be essentially good even in time, provided one chooses to be, that is chooses to assimilate the good, that is life, of Christ. So 'he that hath the Son hath life',² and 'if any man be in Christ he is a new creature',³ and 'the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin'.⁴ These phrases 'new man', 'new life' recur, like the phrase 'born again'. 'Not I', says St Paul, 'but Christ liveth in me'⁵ and I 'now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the Church'.⁶ Here at last, therefore, is a reason and a motive for undeserved suffering, that it can, *in Christs*, be vicarious.

At death, the individual escapes from time and therefore

¹ St Matthew v, 17.

² i John v, 12.

³ 2 Corinthians v, 17.

⁵

⁴ Romans viii, 2.

Galatians ii, 20.

⁶ Colossians i, 24.

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from others' evil, and is left merely with his own. Christ has 'made good' the 'eternal' consequence of both original and repented sin so that either suffering becomes purgative (Dives at least develops an interest in his brothers) or, with the repentant thief, the soul has immediately the vision of God. The parable of Dives and Lazarus suggests also what has always been a part of subsequent Christian doctrine, that if suffering is *accepted* in this world it becomes purgative here. Purgatory itself was at least an idea significant enough to Shakespeare for him to make it integral to the plot of his most popular play, and even the twenty-second of the *Thirty Nine Articles* observes only, perhaps with some circumspection, that 'the Romish doctrine concerning' it is a fond thing. The general conception seems akin to that of Plato's 'thousand year journey', which is a variety of time, post-time.

In hell, which appears repeatedly in the New Testament as a warning, and where Catholic as distinct from Calvinist dogma does not demand that one believes anyone *necessarily* is (but only that anyone can be), suffering is, as in Plato's myth, incurable; for those there have used their free will deliberately to deprive themselves of God. The New Testament provides a solution to the problem of undeserved suffering, since it is at least a privilege and at best, if willed, a vicarious good. It provides an answer also to Job's question, 'Why dost thou not pardon my transgression and take away my iniquity?' What it does not explicitly provide is any answer to a metaphysician who wants to know in what sense the suffering of the incurables may be conceived as a good *to them*. Its implication seems simply to be that of Aristotle, that to the incurably evil, good is experienced as evil. Shakespeare focussing the problem in time, has perhaps something more to say than this.

So also has St Augustine, of whom it has been well said that he was a Platonist first and a Christian second. Like all second thoughts his Christianity developed or corrected what was thought before. He has indeed three distinct contributions to make.

First he rejects unequivocally the Manichaeism which is present in the *Republic* and which formed a Christian heresy of his own day. All things are from thee', says the *Confessions* (VII, 26), 'on this most sure ground alone that they are.' That

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is, ontologically, there is a final cause. Secondly, as a corollary to this, 'Let none therefore seek the efficient cause of an evil will, for it is not *efficient* but *deficient*, nor is there *effect* but *defect*'.⁹ This is the phrasing of *The Citie of God* (XII, 7) as 'Englished by J.H.' in 1610. *The Heavenly Meditations*, translated in 1581, reiterates constantly that 'evil is nothing', but 'a privation of good'. 'So', says *The Citie of God* (XIX, 13), developing the argument, 'there may be a nature wherein no evil may have inherence, but to find a nature void of goodness is utterly impossible.' Thus

*There is some soul of goodness in things evil
Would men observingly distil it out.*

Though St Augustine speaks in *The Citie of God* in terms of loss rather than of corruption, the *Confessions*, of which the Catalogues of the Bodleian and the British Museum Libraries record two new Latin editions in Shakespeare's lifetime, goes further:

Those things be good which yet are corrupted: ... for if sovereignly good, they were incorruptible, if not good at all, there were nothing in them to be corrupted. For corruption injures, but unless it diminished goodness it could not injure. Either then corruption injures not, which cannot be; or, which is most certain, all which is corrupted is deprived of good. But if they be deprived of all good, they shall cease to be. ... So long therefore as they are, they are good: therefore whatsoever is, is good.¹

This might indeed be a paraphrase of Bradley's dictum that evil in Shakespeare lives only by virtue of good, and in destroying good destroys itself. For Aristotle's dichotomy in the *Poetics* into good and bad (not an absolute dichotomy it is true, but Aristotle tends always to think of characters in these terms) Shakespeare substitutes, as it were, a dramatic monism, which makes it easy to pass from tragedy to comedy, and which is interested rather in the direction in which a character is developing than in the affixing of moral labels at any particular moment. That is, he studies the *processes* of corruption and salvation rather than gives a straight combat, as Beaumont and Fletcher tend to do, between a quasi-static evil and a quasi-static good.

¹ VII, 18, trans. Pusey.

The third point to be noted in St Augustine concerns the statically bad. Even the incurables 'are digested into some kind of methodical form and consequently into some peaceful order', and since the consciousness of suffering argues being, or 'nature', it is itself indicative of good. 'He that bewaileth the loss of his natural peace hath his light from the remainders of that peace.' Moreover, continues *The Citie of God* (XIX, 13), though 'he transgressed the peaceful law of order' which God designed for his nature; 'yet could he not avoid the powerful hand of the orderer', whom he knows, as all but the blessed know him, only in act. Knowledge of God, even in act, is obviously metaphysically a good, as the knowledge of the essence of God is *the* good. So hell, as the First Grave-Digger observed of the gallows, does well to them that do ill.

Suffering in this world, however, St Augustine cannot digest into any methodical form. He points out that if the good always suffered and the bad not, the process might be conceived as a merciful dispensation of spurs and exercises, but as both good and bad sometimes suffer and sometimes not, 'this proves God's judgements more inscrutable and his ways unsearchable' (XX, 2). He comes to the conclusion that all we can learn from the observation of this inscrutability is the unimportance of temporal things. That is, we have escaped again from the distortion of well-articulated cosmologies and are back with Socrates, who in this matter, as in others, was wise because he knew he did not know.¹

To go from St Augustine to St Thomas is perhaps justified, not merely by the title of Aquinas's great work, but by the fact that there is between them no formative influence of the same scope and power. Anselm and Abelard made important contributions to the doctrine of the Atonement and therefore indirectly to the idea of justice, but they are contributions incorporated with much else in the *Summa*. Scotus himself seems to have produced as his most interesting speculation that the Incarnation would have occurred even if the fall had not,

¹ La Primaudaye, however, in the *Acadtmic Franfoise* of 1579, has a suggestion to make. 'As all things are present with God,' he says, 'his punishments do not always appear—we must not look unto time—but sometimes for our benefit he makes object lessons.' This would presumably justify 'poetic justice*' of Sidney's type.

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but it is, in the nature of the case, more highly speculative than most speculations, and merely gives an emphasis to St Thomas's doctrine of the difference between natural and supernatural perfection.

Aquinas himself affirms, analyses and develops Augustine's assertions of the final ontological cause and the consequent negativeness of evil; examines more closely the operation of the 'eternal law', the 'order' of *The Citie of God*, which is to form most of the content of Hooker's first book; and discusses in detail the relation between justice and mercy. His work, in his own Latin, has an almost incredible lucidity; for not only did Thomas of Aquino combine, like Aristotle, virtues often found at variance, profundity and precision, but he wrote 'for beginners'. And because apparently none of his students could produce an hypothesis so foolish or so repugnant that he would not discuss it in an 'objection', the *Summa* contains not only a coherent metaphysic of the orthodox theology but a patient examination of all the classical heresies before and since his time—together with a good many which it never occurred to anyone else to conceive. His own thought on justice groups itself naturally about three clear and pivotal doctrines, all pushed askew in one way or another by Luther and Calvin, but upheld with one important equivocation by Hooker.

First, *'being, as such, is good, and evil is the deprivation of being and therefore of good—the absence of the one implies the absence of the other'*. More specifically, evil is the absence of the good which is natural and due to a thing as that thing, and, apart from the corruptibility of certain non-voluntary things which the good of the universe as a whole requires, it is divided into sin (*culpa*), 'which consists in the subtraction of the due operation in voluntary things', and suffering (*poena*), 'which is the withdrawal of the form and integrity of the thing and of whose nature it is to be against the will (1:48:1 and 5x5 1149:1 :c and *passim*). Sin is more essentially an evil than suffering, not only more evil than the pain of sense, but more evil than the loss of grace or beatitude which may follow from sin. And this is both because one *becomes* evil by sin and not by suffering, and because, while suffering is the forfeit according to God's will of some form of the creatures' good, whether this itself be created, or uncreated like the vision of God, sin is by definition directly

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opposed to the uncreated good, the absolute being and will of God (1:48:6:0).

God, that is, causes the evil of suffering but not the evil of sin. Yet sin itself, insists St Thomas, is always caused by a created good; for 'nothing can be a cause except in so far as it is, and in so far as it is, it is good'. So the movement of an evil will is caused by the rational creature which is good. Moreover, even matter as a potentiality to good has the nature of good, so that good is the cause of evil in that it is the subject, the material of evil. Evil has no formal cause, for it is the deprivation of form, and no final cause, for it is the loss of order to the proper end, but it has an object and that object also is good. Indeed evil, St Thomas argues with Aristotle and the pseudo-Dionysius (and Shakespeare's Iago would seem to bear them out), 'neither acts nor is desired except by virtue of some good joined to it'. So the aim of the intemperate man is not the loss of the good of reason (which is the good of man, as man), but the pleasure of sense unordered by reason.¹

Yet though he points out that it is in the senses that the majority erroneously seeks its good, St Thomas is very far from conceiving choosing the good of the senses as such to be the primary evil. Pride is not only 'the most grievous of sins', but 'is the beginning of every sin in so far as it is a turning away from God 'who is' the good of reason'. It is 'essentially sin', and other sins are so only as they follow from it. The sensual vices, it will be remembered, come last and least among mortal sins, as Claudio, in *Measure for Measure*, III, i, 109, rather carefully points out.²

Moreover, if God is delivered from the responsibility for men's sin, so is Satan. For 'there is not one supreme evil' (which is the cause of all other evil), 'since nothing can be essentially bad', and 'if the wholly evil could be it would destroy itself' (1:49:3:0 and *Ethics*, ii26a).

This Augustinian and Thomist doctrine that 'being as such is good' is not only attacked in Melancthon's statement of the

¹ 1148:112, 1149:i; cf. *Ethics*, 1113a and b, and *De Divinis Nominibus*, IV, of which there is a Venetian edition by Ficino in 1538. Cf. also Plato, *Meno*, 77C-78A; Hooker, *Eccles. Polity*, I, vii, 6; and Castiglione, *Courtyer* (Hoby), Bk. IV, Ool.

² (1:12:1, 1:49:3:5, 1-2:84:2:0, 2-2:162:6:c.)

Lutheran view in the *Augsburg Confession*, but is denied outright by Calvin's *Institute*, to which original sin is a 'positive energy'. To Calvin, 'our nature is not merely bereft of good', and 'those who have called sin' (original sin) 'concupiscence' (the Thomist word for the corruption of a nature itself good) may do so only 'if it were added that whatever is in man, from intellect to will, from the soul to the flesh is all defiled and crammed with concupiscence; or to sum it up briefly that the whole man is in himself nothing but concupiscence'.¹

To see how the reformers arrived at this quasi-Manichean doctrine of an evil being, one has to turn to their repudiation of the distinction made by Catholic theologians between man's natural and his supernatural perfection. St Thomas² distinguishes between, on the one hand, that integrity of human nature in which man was created, with the body subject to the mind and all the inferior faculties under the control of reason, and, on the other, that added gift of supernatural grace (grace being essentially a sharing in the nature of God) which raised his own unfallen nature to communion with its maker and alone fitted him to grow into eternal life. This gift of supernatural grace is 'original justice', justice in the first, quasi-psychological, Platonic sense, and eternal life itself is 'deiformity'; for 'the beatific vision' is the end of a 'transforming union', in which—because the mind becomes what it knows, the essence of God, which cannot be seen by any created similitude, is *in* the blessed as known and loved, not destroying their human and individual nature, but transforming it to the likeness of God (1:12:2, 4, 5 and 6).

This doctrine of deiformity, it may be noted, is only St John, St Peter and St Paul elucidated in the language of Aristotelian metaphysics, in terms of 'form' and 'essence' and 'intelligibility'. For the 'new creature' the 'new man' of St Paul, the 'not I but Christ', who 'liveth in me', is, because one cannot divide a Person even if he has two Natures, an indwelling God as well as perfect Man.³ And again, because God is one, where the Son is, there also are the Father and the Spirit. So for St Peter we are called not only to 'virtue', but to 'glory', to 'be partakers of the divine nature',⁴ and this glory is defined by St

¹ *Institutio*, II, i. ³ I Corinthians iii, 16.

² *Summa*, 1:1:8:2, 2-2:8:1:2 and *passim*. ⁴ 2 Peter i, 3-4.

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John in terms of vision: 'We shall be like him because we shall see him as he is.'¹

By his original turning from God in sin man lost 'original justice', the gift of supernatural grace which leads to this eternal life, and he marred, though he did not lose, his natural faculties for natural good. So, for St Thomas, original sin (the inherited penalty) consists essentially in the loss of the supernatural life of grace, and consequently in the disorder of natural faculties, concupiscence. Concupiscence hinders the exercise of reason and free will but does not destroy them, and is not itself sinful, because involuntary, but certain, unless controlled by grace (restored by Christ's Passion; for grace is '*the fruit of redemption*') to lead to sin (1-2:87:7 and 106:3:1, 3:86:2:1 and *passim*). So, since the fall, only by supernatural means can man be even natural; the gift of grace though not *of his* nature is *in it*, and comes to order and perfect natural virtues as well as to infuse and transform them with supernatural faith and hope and love. Yet, as his free will was only impaired and not destroyed by the fall, man is able to co-operate with God's grace, though unable of himself to avoid sin or come to eternal life, to which he could never in any case have come by the unaided powers of his own nature (1-2:111:2:2).

So in *The Tempest*, where indeed the 'heavens rain grace', and we are told continually that this is 'no mortal business' and these 'not natural events', free and fallen men are not only redeemed in 'finding themselves' and 'being themselves'; they not only speak in liturgical symbolism of the disinherited gaining more than their inheritance; beyond even this explicitness, vision and being interlock and recede from eye and ear and language in Prospero's famous speech; just as the Spirit Ariel had sung earlier of transformation in the eternal sea-image, 'No sound that the earth owes'.

To Luther and Calvin, however, one imagines, *The Tempest* would have proved a shocking play. For they repudiated the supernatural character of man's original capacity for eternal life—which was certainly not deformity—regarding it as part of the essence of human nature itself, in which both the capabilities and the acts of virtue were also implanted by God, so that there was no real freedom of the will, since our acts were

¹ I John iii, 2.

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God's acts (*De Servo Arbitrio* and *The Formulary of Concord*). At the fall (whose occurrence it is hard on these terms to explain except as also God's act—a conclusion in keeping with Calvin's doctrine of predestination but one from which Luther understandably if illogically shrank), man lost an integral part of his nature, for which he substituted a positive quality, of sin. Man is 'born with sin', which is 'truly sin', actual sin not being distinct from original sin.¹ Indeed, in Calvin, man is not only a sinner but 'is sin'.² So heathen virtues *non sunt*, and the pagan philosophers are proscribed. For 'from man's corrupted nature comes only what is damnable'.³

This is a far cry from St Thomas, for whom 'every truth by whomsoever spoken is from the Holy Ghost as bestowing the *natural light*' (1-2:109:1 :i), and for whom 'the benefits of grace are forfeited by sin but not the benefits of nature' (1-2:98:4:3). The grace of Christ (that is, all grace) comes indeed to perfect nature, and to be also that 'disposition of a perfect thing to the best' which was Aristotle's definition of virtue. It comes even to pagans who lived before Christ (for to God's eternity Christ's redemption is always present), and as the Jews obtained salvation *in* Christ under the observance of the Jewish law, so did the Gentiles under the observance of 'the natural law' (1-2:98:5:3). Shakespeare's timeless plays are thus justified not only aesthetically but theologically, and the pagan Hermione may go to her suffering 'for her better grace'.

The *Thirty Nine Articles*, which have, in Article IX, what seems a careful equivocation on the subject of original sin (since it is said both that 'every man is of his own nature *inclined* to evil', and that 'concupiscence hath *of itself the* nature of sin), seem in Article XIII to take a Calvinistic view of natural virtues. What is certain is that the Lutheran and Calvinist notion of the intrinsic evilness of our human nature—and that Christ's goodness can be imputed (and not imparted) only to the predestined elect—lies behind that secularization of whole territories of economic and political life as unredeemable which characterizes the Reformation epoch, and which Shakespeare with his constant attacks on usury and political injustice never accepts. From Calvin also is derived the Puritan stress on the sensual vices (for not only the will but the flesh itself is, in

¹ *Augsburg, Art. 2.* ² *Institutio, II, i.* ³ *Institutio, II, 3.* .

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this reforming theology, evil), and the notable lack of worry about pride and avarice and the lust for power. The world of Shakespeare, both in comedy and tragedy, is always, as we have seen, that not of Calvin but of St Thomas, a world where 'being in so far as it is being is good', where in comedy the sexual peccadillo is seen with a charity too forgiving for puritanical critics, and the incipient Puritan himself evokes the nearest approach to satire to which Shakespeare could ever be induced. In the tragedies, where the typical and terrible evil is always the proud lust for power, the great archetypal figure of Macbeth haunts us with its self-wasted good, and Iago, the player with human chessmen, exhibits the skill in execution and courage in defeat which we rightly admire in more charming characters nearly every day of our lives. One wonders indeed of the calculating Goneril and Regan—who are striking instances of St Thomas's verdict that 'a man may sin by not playing enough'—whether they indeed qualify, by a different and Thomist method, for a Calvinistic badness, positive and complete. Not Goneril, who has courage, but of Regan it might be said that she could not even be damned. Thomistically, Augustinianly, Aristotelianly enough, she is, as a character, *not there*. Nothing could be essentially bad or it could not exist, says St Thomas, and the courage which Regan lacks is, one gathers from *Paradise Lost*, *Othello* and *Macbeth*, the last and lonely virtue which the damned retain.

Courage is indeed the one virtue which all men admire, and orthodox Christianity alone of all religions has dared to attribute it to its God. For it is the God who foreknows the results of man's free will who freely creates it and freely suffers it, 'not refusing', for the 'family' his own infinite perfection had no need to make, 'to be delivered into the hands of wicked men and endure the torments of the Cross'.¹

Though of the original evil of sin in a free will which turns from its source and end in God, God is not the cause, says St Thomas, he is the cause of the suffering which in the nature of things as he has created them follows from it, and which he himself vicariously bears. *Our* suffering may be punishment proper, for actual sin, or what St Thomas calls 'medicinal

¹ Roman Lauds throughout Holy Week and Anglican Collect for Good Friday.

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punishment', which the corruption of nature, due to original sin, requires. The pains of this life are more medicinal than punishments for actual sin (2-2:66:6:2), and if they are voluntarily accepted 'purge much more' than suffering after death (SuppL, 74:8:5). Vicarious suffering other than Christ's can *in Christ's* atone for actual sin and help others to co-operate with grace and repent,¹ and it can also 'merit an increase of grace for another' (1-2:114:6); but only to Christ's may one apply the word redemptive, for only Christ's merits the objective restoration of the supernatural life, and so re-forms the creature distorted by sin, so that, infused with grace, it can co-operate in atonement and become itself, its natural self and its supernatural self (3:48:5:3)-

The *lex credendi* of St Thomas is here very strikingly his *lex orandi*. As the Pauline 'filling up' of 'that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ' must not be taken to imply any objective incompleteness in Christ's Atonement, so St Thomas prays in the *Adoro Te* of the 'one drop' of blood 'which makes whole the whole world':

*Pie pellicane, Jesu Domine,
Me immundum munda tuo sanguine,
Cuius una stilla salvum facere
Totum mundum quit ab omni scelere.*²

It is this prayer which Marlowe's Dr Faustus seems to have remembered in subjective despair, unable to pray with St Thomas its corollary:

that for love of thy love I may die, who, for love of my love,
did not scorn to die on the wood of the cross.

This close-knit *metaphysical* economy of good and evil, flooded with inexhaustible assets by Christ's Passion, implies not only a creative and re-creative God who thus involves himself in time, but one who is in absolute and constant control of time, a dynamic cause. So, says St Thomas, '*All created things, contingent or necessary, are ordered to their end by the eternal law, which is the wisdom of God*' (1-2 :g3: i, 4,5 and 6). 'Justice' may be used to mean

¹ SuppL, 13:2, *Contra Gent*, III, 158, and IV, 55.

² 'O loving pelican, O Jesus, Lord, make me, who am unclean, clean with thy blood, of which one drop can make whole the whole world, of every sin.'

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either the law itself, the *wisdom* of God, or the operation of the law, the *will* of God (1:21:1 and 2). As always in Plato, Aristotle, St Thomas and Hooker, it is the intellect which is primary and ultimate, and 'they err who think that of the will of God to do this or that there is no reason beside his will'. For 'the being of God is a kind of law to his working'.¹ This justice of God, his will fulfilling his wisdom in things, *is* truth; for truth is the conforming of intellect and thing, whether, as in human thought, it is the conforming of the *intellect to the thing*, or, as in human art and conduct, and in divine creation and providence, it is the conforming of *thing to intellect* (1:21:a).² This is indeed another way of saying that in our search for the nature of justice we should not try to ignore or repudiate what actually happens in life, but try to understand it, and find in it 'that order which God before all ages hath set down with himself for himself to do all things by'.³ This is Hooker's 'first law eternal', and as Hooker gathers up and elucidates in one consecutive argument doctrine strewn in diverse parts and questions of the *Summa*, it is perhaps worth quoting in full his distinction of the 'first' and 'second' eternal laws:

I am not ignorant that by 'law eternal' the learned for the most part do understand the order, not which God hath eternally purposed himself in all his works to observe, but rather that which with himself he hath set down as expedient to be kept by all his creatures, according to the several conditions wherewith he hath endued them. They who thus are accustomed to speak apply the name of Law unto that only rule of working which superior authority imposeth; whereas we, somewhat more enlarging the sense thereof term any kind of rule or canon whereby actions are framed a law. Now that law, which as it is laid up in the bosom of God they call eternal, receiveth according unto the different kinds of

¹ *Eccles. Polity*, I, ii, 5 and 2.

* To 'absolute truth' or God himself, justice is related *as the active to the actual*. It is the essence of God as a principle of action (1:21:1:4). St Thomas plays in the *Adoro Te* on the double meaning of 'truth', relative and absolute: 'Nothing can be truer than the word of Truth', where 'the word' also is that of the absolute Word. He would presumably say that we call absolute being 'absolute truth' precisely because it is a relationship, the Trinity.

, ³ *Eccles. Polity*, I, ii, 6.

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things which are subject unto it different and sundry kinds of names. That part of it which ordereth natural agents we call Nature's law; that which angels do clearly behold and without any swerving observe is a law Celestial and heavenly; the law of Reason that which bindeth creatures reasonable in this world and with which by reason they may most plainly perceive themselves bound; that which bindeth them and is not known but by special revelation from God, Divine Law; Human law that which out of the law either of reason or of God men probably gathering to be expedient they make it a law. All things therefore which are as they ought to be, are conformed unto *this second law eternal*¹, and even those things which to this eternal law are not conformable are notwithstanding in some sort ordered by *the first eternal law*. For what good or evil is there under the sun, what action correspondent or repugnant unto the law which God hath imposed upon his creatures, but in and upon it God doth work according to the law which himself hath eternally purposed to keep; that is to say *the first law eternal*. So that a two-fold law eternal being thus made, it is not hard to conceive how they both take place in all things.¹

So, says Aquinas quoting Augustine, 'God is so powerful that he can even make good out of evil'⁵ (1:48:2:3); for both the devils and the damned 'perceive God in his effects' (SuppL, g8:8:c). Their 'intellect is not darkened by privation of the knowledge of all truth' (1:64:1). Iago, too, knows more of the principle of men's action as well as of God's in the last scene of his play than in the first.

St Thomas's and Hooker's doctrine of Providence, which is also Raleigh's, is necessarily part of their conception of the eternal law, and St Thomas distinguishes as 'belonging to Providence' both 'the plan of the order of things towards an end and the execution of this order'. In execution

there are certain intermediaries of divine providence, for he governs things inferior by superior, not on account of any defect in his power but by reason of the abundance of his goodness, so that the dignity of causality is imparted even to creatures (1:22:3^).

Some of these intermediary causes are necessary, some contingent (1:22:4^). Even Fate is allowed a name and a *mttier*,

¹ Eccles. Polity, I, iii, i; cf. *Summa*, 1-2:91-95.

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being 'the ordering of second causes to effects foreseen by God. Whatever therefore is subject to second causes is subject also to Fate', which 'is changeable in respect to mediate causes' [thereby becoming Fortune] but unchangeable in the first cause (1:116:1-4; cf. Raleigh, *History of the World*, I, i, n).

Providence and Fortune are, as has been said, the rival deities of the Elizabethan drama, but there is no doubt that the orthodox view was Raleigh's, seeking always the first cause. Man, 'star-crossed' because God allows him to be, is not entirely 'Fortune's fool', and 'the wheel' that 'comes full circle' in Edmund's death is spoken of as fulfilling Edgar's words. The emphasis may change from first cause to second, or second to first, and it may, in the domestic tragedy, which approximates in tone to pamphlets such as *God's Judgements on Murder*, suggest that life is nothing but a series of object lessons after the manner of La Primaudaye. But written over Raleigh's *History of the World* is the Thomist verdict:

The judgements of God are for ever unchangeable; neither is he wearied by the long process of time, and won to give his blessing in one age to that which he hath cursed in another.

[His] justice . . . doth require none other accuser than our own consciences. . . . If any (saith Euripides) having in his life committed wickedness, think he can hide it from the everlasting gods, he thinks not well (Preface).

So "conscience does make cowards of us all", whether we think of the next world with Hamlet or this world with Henry VI.

This doctrine that the ordering of all things to their end by the eternal law still leaves to man his responsibility to his own conscience, that is his freedom of choice, is, as was seen, vigorously assailed by Calvin. St Thomas insists that though predestination is, *in a certain sense*, a fact following from God's eternity and absolute causality, it is not so 'of necessity' (i.e. in the Calvinist sense). God creates all men for eternal life and dies for all men, and no man is damned unless he chooses to be. But God, to whom all things are present, 'foreknows' and 'allows' that men sin, and, though to all men he offers grace, he does not compel them to receive it. 'Those alone are deprived of grace who place in themselves an obstacle to grace', though

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to some for his own purposes God gives more assistance than to others, sometimes removing by 'prevenient' grace a sinful obstacle to common grace.¹

St Thomas uses the word 'predestination' only of this predestination to eternal life, which God wills all men to attain, and in those who do attain it God's will is the cause both of what is received in this life, grace, and what is received in the next, beatitude. In 'reprobation', which he defines simply as the 'foreknowledge and the will of God to permit some men to fall away from their end', 'causality acts quite differently, for here God's will is not the cause of what is present, sin, but only of what follows in the nature of things as he has created them, damnation (1:23:3). In salvation as in damnation there must be a movement of the free will, except in infants, madmen and idiots, who, as their 'sin' is only the non-voluntary original sin (unless a madman has before been sane), could not be damned (since 'no one suffers loss in the goods of the soul without fault of his own'), and can be justified by the grace of Christ without free will (i-2:87:8:c and 113:3). This infant class however, it may be conceded, has little dramatic interest, and for Shakespeare 'what I will not, that I cannot, do'.

Calvin, whose genius was for political organization rather than for metaphysical thought, will have none of what he calls these 'fine distinctions' which make predestination (by which here he means predestination to hell) only ' "foreknowledge" or "permission"':

By predestination we mean the eternal decree of God, by which he has decided in his own mind what he wishes to happen in the case of each individual. For all men are not created on an equal footing, but for some eternal life is pre-ordained, for others eternal damnation.²

For these last, according to Calvin, Christ did not die, but only for the elect.

To St Thomas this notion was 'blasphemy'. For, 'in every work of God, there is both mercy and justice, if mercy be taken to be the

¹ 1:23:3 and *Contra Gent.*, III, 159, 161, 162, 163.

² *Institutio*, II, iv. and III, xxi. Art. XVII of the *Thirty Nine Articles* also talks of 'the sentence of God's predestination', but, by commenting on the psychological effects rather than on the truth of a doctrine which it never actually states, produces a convenient haze.

removal of any kind of defect (1:21:4). This, the third of what I have called the *Summers* pivotal statements, is based on both creation and atonement. First 'a work of justice in God is always founded upon a work of mercy and presupposes it, since nothing is due to creatures except for something pre-existing in them*. They have their nature from the goodness of God giving something more than is due (1:21:4:c). So, 'by acting mercifully, God does not act contrary to justice, since he does something more than justice' (1:21:3:2). Moreover, when creation is conceived as continuous, as the operation of the eternal law, 'it is more proper to God to have mercy and spare, than to punish; for the former becomes God in himself; the latter by reason of our sins' (2-2:2i:2:c). So God always has mercy in punishing less and rewarding more than is deserved (i:2i.-4:1).

So also in St Thomas's doctrine of the Atonement, Christ's Passion is said to be 'more suitable' than a mere gesture of forgiveness, having in it more of justice and more of mercy (3'.46:3:c and *passim*). Even this, Christ's Passion, was not 'necessary', he says, in St Anselm's ultimate sense, but only as God's provision thus to redeem man. God could have acted and still justly, in forgiving him without it, but this was 'copious' mercy and justice. It also, he says, reveals love, and therefore evokes love in return (cf. St. John and Abelard), and gives an example of obedience (3:46-49).

Aquinas and Scotus and indeed all pre-Reformation theologians of the Atonement are in strong contrast not only to Calvin but to Luther at two critical points.

First the Father delivers Christ to his Passion out of love, and similarly Christ, both as God and as Man, so delivers himself (3:47:3). St Thomas (3:48:6:3) uses the Pauline construction 'to reconcile us to his Father'¹ not that of the *Augsburg Confession* (Article III) and the *Thirty Nine Articles* (Article II), 'to reconcile his Father to us'. For objectively, as the divine act, God's love is eternal and unchangeable; only subjectively in the effect it imprints on us is it sometimes interrupted (1-2:113:2:c). So it is we who change, 'turn away' and must be 'reconciled', not God, and 'the wrath of God' is only a metaphor for the effect felt by the sinner who is *allowed* to turn away.² So for

¹ 2 Corinthians v, 19, and Romans v, 10.

² *Contra Gent.*, I, 91.

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Shakespeare also

*Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds
Or bends with the remover to remove.*

*Why, all the souls that were were forfeit once;
And He, that might the vantage best have took
Found out the remedy.*

Secondly, Christ's merit is imparted, not merely imputed, to men (3:48:1, 3:62:6:3, 3:86:6:1 and *passim*), and this is the doctrine of infused grace, which remakes nature (1-2:109-114). For when, co-operating with initial grace, a man repents, the love of God is infused into his soul, and thus he is not only *accounted*, but *made*, good. It is this gradual infusing with grace, the imparting of, and growing into, the life of Christ, which is both 'justification' and 'sanctification'—justification if looked at in its origin, sanctification in its nature (1:43:3 and 6, and 3:62:6:2). St Thomas is here strongly contrasted with Article XI of the *Thirty Nine Articles*, where the conception is only that of a 'transferring of the law on to the mediator'.¹ 'We are *accounted* righteous', says Article XI, following the *Formulary of Concord's* 'reputat' and the *De Servo Arbitrio's* 'imputatio', simply acquitted from sin's eternal penalties, not 'made good'. Hooker, though he quarrels (Sermon II, 6) with Aquinas's doctrine of infused grace and uses the phrase 'putteth away his sin by not imputing it', takes up an equivocal position ('By faith are we incorporated into him') maintained and enlarged by the liturgical phraseology of the Prayer Book ('that we may evermore dwell in him and he in us'). Shakespeare, if he benefited at all from the Prayer Book, benefited from the *lex orandi*:

. . . *infused with a fortitude from heaven.*

*And mercy then shall breathe within your lips
Like man new made.*

'Like man new made.' So the last, the most difficult, the most ontological, the most practical of Plato's questions was answered, and it is an answer integral not mere'y to the tone of

¹ Chemnitz, *Loci Theologici*, ii, 313.

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the earlier comedies, but to the inner structure of the great plays. It is—in the Aristotelian sense—their *form*. Though it shapes the dramatist's art from the beginning, it does so first explicitly and superficially as an ethical motive, entering more and more deeply into the action of each play. At last, completely implicit, it makes and moulds the plot and character which embody it, never simply or directly, but played upon by innumerable over- and undertones, as of the very life in which its revelation took root and grew. It is the life also in which it still takes root and grows. For if the Christian revelation is not true, we have not learnt to phrase our ultimate questions more precisely than the Greeks did; if it is true, it is little wonder that St Paul, like St Augustine and St Thomas after him, recognized in Athens the altar of the unknown God. Before this altar, tacitly raised again in the secular drama of a controversial age, Shakespeare and his generation were, as artists, in a position of peculiar and intense power. They too stood at the end of an era, but they stood also at the end of a continuous tradition, and they do not forget, as modern men are inclined to forget, precisely *what* they doubt. In solving their dramatic problems—which are inescapably the problems of justice—they had all the data of the Graeco-Jewish-Christian civilization in which they were born. It should perhaps not strike us as strange if, in the plays of the greatest of them, we find the Christian hypothesis subjected, as it were, to a recapitulation of its own history, a bombardment by all the questions to which it claimed to reply. Shakespeare did indeed so subject it with an intellectual ruthlessness unparalleled by any other artist of any faith, and perhaps it was to himself as the tragic dramatist that the Shakespeare of the final plays wrote the words of Prospero:

*You doyet taste
Some subtelties of the isle, which will not letyou
Believe things certain.*

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WAS SHAKESPEARE A RECUSANT?

SHAKESPEARE'S maturing theological theme poses, as it were by accident, the moot question whether he was a recusant; and this is a matter on which the biographical verdict is simply 'not proven', though it has been pending for some three and a half centuries—and though, contrary to a still commonly stated opinion, we know a great deal today about his life and family. The latest and most critical treatment of the purely biographical evidence seems to be *Shakespeare and Catholicism*, by H. Mutschmann and K. Wentersdorf (New York, 1952), and, where other authorities are not cited, biographical reference below is to this book.

There has never been doubt in any quarter that Shakespeare's mother, Mary Arden, was of distinguished recusant stock, with even more distinguished recusant connections. Edgar Fripp notes that on November 24, 1556, Robert Arden of Wilmcote, Shakespeare's grandfather, appointing Shakespeare's mother and her sister as his executors, 'like a good Catholic bequeathed his soul 'to Almighty God and to our Blessed Lady St Mary and to all the Holy Company of Heaven'.¹ The will is signed by the local parish priest, William Burton, who was deprived by Elizabeth, but twenty-one years later, when Shakespeare was thirteen, 'Leicester wrote from Kenilworth to Burghley: "since Queen Mary's time the papists were never in that jollity they be at this present in this country" [Warwickshire]'.²

This, however, was a state of affairs in Warwickshire which did not last. For on December 20, 1583, when the persecution following Campion's mission and death was at its height, Shakespeare's cousin (their great-grandfathers were brothers), Edward Arden of Park Hall, some twenty miles from Stratford, was hanged, disembowelled, quartered and beheaded at Smithfield for his connection with his impetuous son-in-law, John Somerville. This was the brother of the William Somerville of

¹ *Shakespeare's Haunts near Stratford*, pp. 54-5.

² Edgar Fripp, *Shakespeare Studies*, p. 91.

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Edstone who became one of William Shakespeare's intimate friends, and who had a miniature portrait of the poet which was handed down in the family and still survives—the Milliard miniature so called. Edward Arden, the uncle of both Francis Tresham and Robert Catesby of fame to come, was an acknowledged recusant, and maintained a private chaplain, Hugh Hall, disguised as a gardener. He was, however, completely innocent of the mad and unaccompanied ride during which the distraught Somerville announced from time to time to the public that he was on his way to kill the Queen. There was in fact no 'conspiracy', only one unbalanced man, and Edward Arden died protesting that he died for his faith. The case was a famous one, of which even Burghley lived to be ashamed, and the virulently anti-papist Sir Thomas Lucy of Charlecote himself arrested Edward. A warrant was issued for the apprehension of 'such as shall be in any way akin to all touched, and to search their houses', and Lucy and Wilkes (the clerk of the Privy Council sent down for the purpose) conducted this search for fifteen days, apprehending Hugh Hall nine miles from Stratford at the house of William Underbill, a 'stubborn recusant' (usefully possessed of houses in three parishes), from whom Shakespeare subsequently bought New Place. Mary Shakespeare's 'akin'-ness was well known, and it is almost impossible that her house should have escaped search or her family temporary arrest. Rowe, Shakespeare's first biographer, records significantly that in order to avenge 'ill-usage' William made a ballad upon Lucy.

'And though this, probably the first essay of his poetry, be lost, yet it is said to have been so very bitter that it redoubled the prosecution against him to that degree that he was obliged to leave his business and family in Warwickshire for some time and shelter himself in London.'¹

Rowe appears to have known nothing of the Arden warrant, and repeats in vague terms the story, afterwards popularized, that William feared prosecution for poaching Lucy's deer. But Edgar Fripp and others made short work of this story some thirty years ago. Lucy had in fact no deer park at Charlecote in the fifteen-eighties.

¹ Nicholas Rowe: *Life*, in edition of Works, 1709.

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So much for the faith of Mary Shakespeare, which no one has apparently been able to doubt; the religion of her husband John has been the subject of speculation and controversy. It has been suggested that he was a Catholic recusant, a Puritan recusant, and not a recusant at all; but it is only the first suggestion which seems to stand up to detailed examination in the light of recent discoveries. It was first publicly advanced as a definite part of Shakespeare studies by Halliwell-Phillipps, and when Bowden came to the downright conclusion in 1899 that both the poet's parents were Roman Catholics, there seems to have set in, by way of shocked reaction, an attempt to give him at least a Puritan father—by which subtle blend perhaps the desired broad churchman might be produced. The facts from which speculation started were those of John Shakespeare's unexplained withdrawal from public life, his appearance twice in 1592 in a list of persons at Stratford 'presented for not coming monthly to the Church according to her Majesty's laws', and the discovery in 1757 in one of his Henley Street houses of almost the whole of an undated *testamentum animi* or confession of Catholic faith, made throughout by 'I John Shakespeare'.

The first of these facts, the withdrawal from public life, once vaguely believed to be gradual and due to a gradual decline in prosperity, is shown by the records to have been sudden, to have occurred in January, 1577, without record of any public calamity or untoward private expense, or the sale or mortgage of any portion of his land. For some reason, after being absent from the borough council only once since the records were begun in 1564, John Shakespeare ceased entirely to attend, was repeatedly summoned to do so, nominally fined for not doing so, and only after ten years of persistent non-attendance had his name removed from the list of aldermen.

Now in April, 1576, Elizabeth had appointed a Grand Commission Ecclesiastical to enquire into offences against the Supremacy and Uniformity Statutes, and the summer of 1577 saw Whitgift, the unpopular Bishop of Worcester, finding his own clergy backward in reporting recusants, conferring with Lucy over the 'discipline' of that part of Warwickshire which is in my diocese'. An order had been sent to each Bishop to report not only names of recusants but 'the value of their land and goods, as he shall think they are, not as they are given. In

the Subsidy Book', and consequently recusants began all over the country hiding or handing over to other keeping their goods and valuables, and devising their land to tenants, friends or relatives of less suspicion or wealth.

John Shakespeare indeed undertook between 1578 and 1580 three otherwise mysterious transactions. On November 12, 1578, he and his wife leased in perpetuity eighty-six acres of land in Wilmcote to Thomas Webbe and Humphrey Hooper (two unknown persons who may have lived in different dioceses and of whom Webbe may have been related to the Ardens, one of whom married another Webbe) on condition that George Gibbes, a friend and neighbour of the Ardens, was to be tenant from September 29, 1580, for twenty-one years on payment to Webbe and Hooper of one quarter of wheat and one quarter of barley annually! Two days after this rather unrewarding conveyance, the Shakespeares mortgaged their house at Wilmcote, with about fifty acres of land, to their brother-in-law, Edmund Lambert of Barton-on-Heath; and on October 15, 1579, they sold to their nephew, Robert Webbe, their share in the Snitterfield property inherited from Robert Arden. The price of this last was £40, and the final concord was made in April, 1580, in which month Alderman John Shakespeare of Stratford had to give securities for his appearance at the Queen's Bench in Westminster in June. His 'offence' remains mysterious, and he and his guarantors, not fellow-townsmen or even Warwickshire men but John Audley of Nottingham and Thomas Cobley of Stoke-on-Trent, adopted an apparently preconcerted and curious policy by which, with a Kidderminster man and an Elmley man, they produced an interlocking system of sureties. Their apparent attempts to flaw the Government by administrative difficulties were, however, useless, and John Shakespeare was fined £20 for his own non-appearance, and £20 for not bringing John Audley into court, all this at a time when 'popish recusants' all over the country were being similarly and mysteriously summoned and fined.

John Shakespeare's second breach with the ecclesiastical laws was more open. E. K. Chambers, who had not gone into the financial details, commented on his 'presenting' for non-attendance at church Li 1592, that if this were due to recusance, and not, as he believed, to the debt which John alleged in excuse, it

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must be Catholic recusance, since at this date 'clearly Catholics alone and not Puritans were in danger'.¹ The first return at Easter said that nine of the list, including John Shakespeare, gave the excuse 'for fear of process', and of the same nine the same is said in September; but Fripp points out that this was 'an old and recognized excuse', and effectively demolishes it by his evidence of John's solvency at the time.² The nine included John Wheeler, known to be well-off, and the actual phrasing of the commissioners' report (*'are thought to forbear the church for debt' . . . 'it is said that these last nine come not for fear of process for debt'*)³ is indication enough that the telescope was at the blind eye. Indeed, the remark about another section in the same list that they 'have now conformed themselves or have promised to conform themselves', shows that the commissioners possessed a temper innocent indeed if it were not sympathetically disingenuous.

The third significant and well-known fact, the *testamentum animiy* could conceivably be, on the face of it, as Chambers suggested, pre-Elizabethan, but its recusant temper would, in the reign of Queen Mary, have been pointless in anyone expressing such orthodox Catholic belief. John Shakespeare goes on to repent in advance 'any impatience or temptation of blasphemy or murmuration against God or the Catholic faith* into which he might be led 'through violence of pain or agony' in death; he pardons 'all injuries and offences' to 'reputation, life and goods', and protests that he 'will willingly accept of death in what manner soever it may befall' him. The reference to these actualities and prospects would strongly favour a date not earlier than 1581, when the initial successes of the seminary priests and Jesuits had evoked £240 a year fines for 'popish recusancy' (in modern money roughly £4320), and changed martyrdom from a legal threat to a present reality; and this postulate on general grounds is strikingly borne out by recent research into the origin of the document's form.

For the 'spiritual will' represents a standard text composed and popularized by St Charles Borromeo (1538-84), Archbishop of Milan (extant for instance in Italian, Spanish and—in a slightly variant form—French), and reproduced either by

¹ William Shakespeare, Vol. I, pp. 15-16.

² Shakespeare Studies, pp. 88-98.

My italics.

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handwriting or printing so that the 'testator' had only to sign his name in the appropriate places. If one enquires how this came to England, one has a clear answer (a) in the fact that Campion and Persons visited the Archbishop in Milan in May, 1580, immediately before leaving on the mission which led to Campion's death in December, 1581; and (b) in a letter, dated June 23, 1581, from Allen in Rheims to the English College in Rome, which has the following significant request:

We have heard from England, by a letter from Fr. Robert, Persons, S. J., that the persecution still rages with the same fury. . . . Fr. Robert wants three or four thousand more of the testaments, for many persons desire to have them.

Allen cannot mean the New Testament, the translation of which was not finished till March, 1582, printing following in the same year. This was moreover an 800-page quarto volume costing £4 a copy, and would not have been ordered from Rome because it was printed at Rheims. Campion passed through Warwickshire on one of his journeys, and it is probable that John Shakespeare made his 'spiritual testament' sometime between 1581 and 1583, when, during the fifteen-day house search for evidence of 'papisty', especially for 'books and writings', among those 'akin in any way' to Edward Arden, he took it and hid it in the roof of his Henley Street house where it was found. It says much for his faith and courage that he left it there, and did not burn it, after the fate which overtook his wife's relations.

This recent research into the document (which, whatever its date, would not be that of a likely Puritan) would in itself dispose of Fripp's Puritan theory, which he bases mainly on the fact that John Shakespeare was acting Chamberlain to the Corporation of Stratford when the Guild Chapel was 'Protestantized' after the last of the powerful Cloptons went into exile at the end of 1563 (a date not noted by Fripp). But Fripp's exposition¹ bears in itself elements of its own unlikelihood. He quotes the lines from *Richard III* (II, i, 122-4):

*When your carters and your waiting vassals
Have done a drunken slaughter, and defaced
The precious image of our dear Redeemer,*

¹ *Shakespeare Studies*, pp. 84-5.

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in order to illustrate the effect on the mind of young William (not born till 1564), whom he regards as never a recusant but sentimentally rather than doctrinally attached to his mother's faith. Yet like other quoters from the plays, Fripp does not remark in what context his quotation occurs. The lines are spoken by a King who goes on to say that he '*must unjustly*'³ pardon the violence done by his subordinate's henchman, as no doubt John Shakespeare was also forced to do if he wished to preserve his life.

Fripp's only other broad arguments for John Shakespeare's Puritanism are that Warwickshire was provided with Puritan as well as Papist recusants, that they helped each other against authority, and that John Shakespeare was in office with Adrian Quayney, whom Fripp describes as a Puritan—all of which arguments could be assembled on the other side. Adrian Quayney was in fact a conforming Anglican, and was extremely friendly with Catholic recusants other than John Shakespeare, notably with Thomas Badger whom he asked to be godfather to his son (Richard, William Shakespeare's friend), and who was executor to Atwood (John Shakespeare's father's friend). If it be suggested that it is at all significant that John Shakespeare was High Bailiff in 1568-69, and as such a Justice of the Peace to whom the Oath of Supremacy would be presented, one has only to note that in 1564 the Bishops' returns allege that 421 of the 852 Justices are open or concealed Papists, and that by 1579 thirty per cent, are still said to have 'been absent' when the oath was taken and are warned to come and take it!¹ In 1579, just after this warning, the 'obstinate recusant' George Badger (to whom John Shakespeare had just sold part of his Henley Street property to enable Badger to rebuild his burnt-down house) was elected High Bailiff, and refused the honour. He was promptly fined £10 for refusing to serve, and in due course, like John Shakespeare before him, was deprived of his rank as Alderman for failure to attend meetings. Quite apart, therefore, from the *testamentum animi*, Fripp's case for Puritan recusancy is disproved by Chambers, and Chambers's case for debt by Fripp, leaving us with Halliwell-Phillipps's original interpretation of the facts known to him.

One particular argument of Fripp, which he regards as

¹ Magee, *The English Recusants*, p. 34.

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'clinch' his case for John's Puritan recusancy, is curiously unaware of what even Lee knew, that to the Elizabethan Puritans coats of arms were anathema, and it is moreover crucially inaccurate in its facts. In 1599 John Shakespeare applied for permission to impale with his own the arms of his wife's family, and in the first sketch of the impalement *the fess chequy* of the Park Hall Ardens is drawn on the sinister side of the shield. This was scratched out and replaced by another coat, in use by various cadet branches of the Ardens, *three cross crosslets fitchtes with a martlet for difference*. Fripp says wrongly that this was the coat of Simon Arden of Longcroft, 'the only Arden who was a Protestant'.¹ In fact, the impalement adopted was borne by the Papist Ardens of Warwick and Bedfordshire, whereas Simon's coat was *three cross crosslets* without the differentiating *martlet*. It may indeed be that John Shakespeare was advised not to *trail* the Park Hall coat; it may even be that his son was disappointed, and omitted for that reason ever to use the coat, as Fripp avers, but the change cannot be attributed to Puritan or Protestant sympathies on the part of John Shakespeare.

If we turn to the other influences which surrounded his son, several interesting facts emerge. Professor Dover Wilson, assuming John to be 'an ardent Catholic', suggests that William may 'have received his education as a singing boy in the house of some great Catholic nobleman', explaining thus his more than usual knowledge of the life of a great household. There are, however, other Explanations of this, and there is no need to doubt Rowe's statement that he was educated at Stratford School. If he was, the man who was in charge of his education during the longest period of his school life (8-12) was the Oxford man, Simon Hunt, a 'secret Catholic', who was appointed during John Shakespeare's Deputy Bailiffship, and whose secret appears to have been a more or less open one. He left for Douai in 1575, and in 1578 joined the Society of Jesus, being appointed to succeed Persons as English penitentiary at St Peter's when Persons and Campion left on the English Mission in 1580.

Hunt was followed at Stratford for three years by an unknown person from Warwick School, and then for one year by

¹ *Shakespeare Studies*, p. 98.

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the Welsh Protestant Thomas Jenkins, also an Oxford man, who was offered a bribe to resign—Fripp thinks actually advanced by Stratford Corporation—and who, Fripp suggests, 'may have offended the taste of the aristocratic young Shakespeare, a kinsman of the Ardens, brought up by the English and well-connected Simon Hunt'. In any case it seems convincing enough that Jenkins provided copy for Sir Hugh Evans in *The Merry Wives*. He was succeeded in 1579 by John Cottam, another Oxford man, who came from a recusant family and whose brother Thomas was executed as a seminary priest in 1582, when John retired. Robert Debdale, who must have been somewhat older than Shakespeare though at school with him, and who was a neighbour of the Hathaways in Shuttery, went, probably with Hunt, to Douai, was at Rheims with Thomas Cottam and Campion, and sent with Cottam in 1580 a letter, a crucifix and rosaries for his family, never delivered because of Cottam's arrest and execution. The pace in Warwickshire was already quickening towards the Arden *debacle* and Shakespeare's departure. Debdale himself was executed in London in 1586, when Shakespeare was almost certainly there.

Before one enquires into what *milieu* Shakespeare gravitated in London, it is interesting to notice the rather curious circumstances of his marriage. On November 27, 1582, the register of the diocesan court records a licence issued at Worcester for marriage '*inter Willelmum Shaxpere et Annam Whateley de Temple Grafton*' and on the following day a bond of £40 was signed by two Shuttery farmers, Fulke Sandells and John Richardson, guaranteeing that there were no legal impediments and indemnifying the Bishop of Worcester for any penalties that might arise for having licensed the marriage of 'William Shagspere on th(e) one partie and Anne Hathwey of Stratford in the diocese of Worcester, maiden'. Lee's improbable suggestion that there were two William Shakespeares in the diocese of Worcester, both wanting to marry by special licence at the end of November Annes of surnames so remarkably similar in the Elizabethan hand, has been rightly consigned to limbo. As Chambers pointed out, the bond, as an original document, is the greater authority, and there is other evidence that Shakespeare's wife was in fact Anne Hathaway (the form of the name in Rowe) of Shuttery, for whose father his father had as early as

1566 stood bail. Why, therefore, 'Whateley de Temple Grafton' in the register record?

The 'Whateley' is easily explained as a slip, from its similarity to Hathaway in Elizabethan handwriting, and from the fact that the clerk who made the entry had recorded a dispute in which one William Whateley was a party, and which was dealt with by the diocesan court on the same day. But 'Temple Grafton' (a village near Stratford, where Chambers comes to the conclusion that the marriage probably did take place) provides a more subtle problem, until one discovers that its incumbent at the time was the 'Romish' 'old John Frith', a Marian priest who had escaped deprivation owing to age, harmlessness and the well-known shortage of new men. He is described in the official records as 'unsound in religion', and he was allegedly unable (?) to 'read well' the book of Homilies provided by authority for the instruction of his flock. He ministered to the needs of numerous Catholic recusants in the neighbourhood and was apparently, like Friar Lawrence in *Romeo and Juliet*, interested in the art of healing, being able to cure sick birds.

Marriage by special licence was not uncommon at the time, though, being expensive, more frequent among those in more exalted circles; but if the purpose of this licence was merely to get married before the prohibited season of Advent began on December 2, it is at least peculiar to have left it quite so late as November 27, when the slightest hitch would be fatal. Above all the *choice* of Temple Grafton (for had Anne been living there accidentally and temporarily it would be unnatural not to return to Shottery or Stratford) is inexplicable on any other count than the desire to be married by John Frith. Anne was pregnant, but would not be apparently so (so that there would be no point in being away from home for that reason), and no one with even a passing acquaintance with Elizabethan literature could reasonably suppose her at twenty-six either so ignorant of the facts of life as not to realize before November 27 that it would be a good thing to be married before Advent, or so prudish that she could not inform Shakespeare or her family of this. If we are to say Shakespeare (and/or her friends and family) required prolonged persuasion to act, we are still left with the riddle of Temple Grafton. But if a residential qualifica-

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tion in Temple Grafton were required, so that Anne could be described as 'of Temple Grafton' and have her banns called there once (as necessary even under special licence), that would explain both the licence and the delay.

Perhaps indeed Shakespeare was tempted like Touchstone to be married by a Protestant 'parson', 'for he is not like to marry me well, and not being well married it will be a good excuse for me hereafter to leave my wife'. But like Touchstone perhaps he could not bring himself to it, and went off to 'a good priest who can tell you what marriage is'. Jaques' words about the 'green timber' that will 'warp' if merely 'joined together as they join wainscot' by Sir Oliver Martext may well be an echo of some family insistence in the case of William Shakespeare, aged eighteen and a half.

Shakespeare's children, like himself, were baptized at Stratford, but Anglican baptisms were, as now, regarded as generally valid by Rome, and if the layman had any doubts of the incumbent's 'form' or 'matter', he could always repeat the rite provisionally himself and in fact sometimes did. The law enforced baptism in the parish Church, and Montague (a 'notorious recusant' and Southampton's grandfather) was considerably persecuted and forced to dismiss all his servants, for having baptized his own son. The Jacobean law, becoming alive apparently to the more frequent and crucial habit of secret marriages, imposed on parents without land to forfeit, £100 fines if they did not *both* have a child baptized by a Protestant clergyman *and* present themselves to be married according to the rite of the Church of England.

Up to the biographical point of his marriage, Shakespeare might be conceived not improbably as reflecting no more than the way he had been brought up, though that is the impression neither of *As You Like It* nor of the other plays. When, however, he reappears ten years later at the centre of London life it is under the patronage of one of the leading Catholic recusants, the young Southampton, to whom he dedicated with warm affection *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*, and who is almost universally believed to be, anagrammatically, the 'Mr. W. H.'^J of the sonnets. (The other sonnet candidate, Oxford, Burghley's son-in-law, was also by this time a Tescuant, having returned to the old faith during Campion's mission.)

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Henry Wriothesley, Earl of Southampton, had been a royal ward, over whose education Burghley, his legal guardian, and the widowed and recusant Countess had battled long and interestingly. *Venus and Adonis* and *Lucrece* were dedicated to him in 1593 and 1594, and in 1594 Southampton House was well known to the London authorities as a centre of Papist activities, and among the recorded examinations of suspects at this time, a remarkable number are noted to have frequented it or lived near it. How long and definitely Shakespeare remained under Southampton's patronage, or the precise shades through which Southampton's Catholicism subsequently passed we are not certain. It has been said that the Earl ultimately became an Anglican, and in 1603 the Venetian Ambassador reported that he attended the Anglican service in the King's train, together with 'old Howard' and the Queen, Anne of Denmark, a convert of the Jesuits who refused Anglican Communion but went occasionally to church. But in 1604-05 Southampton appears in a list of recusants whose fines were granted to Lady Walsingham. The Dowager Countess had died in 1604, rooted to the last in her faith, and in January, 1605, her son summoned Shakespeare and his company to Southampton House to entertain the Queen with *Love's Labour's Lost*, a play markedly Catholic in tone and sympathy. Only a few days afterwards the Government, resuming more vigorously its religious persecution after the temporary lull had shown in the increased recusancy returns how dangerously numerous and influential the Papists were, raided and searched Southampton House and took from it 'above two hundred pounds worth of Popish books' which were burned in St Paul's Churchyard. Indeed, the fact that Edwin Sandys is alleging again in 1620 (four years after Shakespeare's death) that he has persuaded his friend Southampton to abandon Popery, suggests that all reports of this sort are records of wishful thinking among those who made them, which Southampton encouraged by putting in an occasional required attendance at an Anglican service. He was elected treasurer of the Virginia Company in 1620, and, for this, outward conformity was a *sine qua non*. There is no doubt that like the majority of Catholic recusants, and like Shakespeare himself, he was anti-Spanish, and he died fighting the Spaniards in the Netherlands in 1624. Even his cousin

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Anthony Copley, who lived in exile all his life in order to practise his religion, was determined to keep foreign forces out of his own country, hoping in due course that the old faith would be internally tolerated and restored.

It is perhaps useful at this point to put all discussion of Shakespeare's (or Southampton's) 'Toper' into the general context of that confusion in practice and opinion under Elizabeth which Professor Trevelyan has pointed out we so much underestimate. A 'Papist' was not necessarily a recusant, nor a recusant necessarily a convicted recusant, and even a convicted recusant might fluctuate between occasional expedient conformity and complete refusal 'to bring in his body to save his bail'. Elizabethan Papists in the broadest sense were indeed very much more numerous than is usually supposed, and Dr Brian Magee, undertaking, in *The English Recusants*, an exhaustive and critical enquiry into contemporary documents, puts them at two-thirds of the population up to the time of the Armada, falling probably to a half by the end of the reign.

It may be asked in this case why and how the Bills of Supremacy and Uniformity were passed in 1559. A document of the reign of Charles I,¹ reinforced by the contemporary evidence of Feria, the Spanish Ambassador, writing on February 20, 1559, and by Camden, the Protestant historian (Vol. I, p. 36), writing under James I but born early in Elizabeth's reign, alleges that 'it appears that some violence was used in these elections' (of 1559) in order to get a parliament which would legislate the Elizabethan Settlement. Dr Magee, who gives detailed references, discusses this at length and deals with Professor Bayne's cautious opposition.² Apart from the actual elections, Professor Bayne agrees that the Commons was certainly packed to the extent of the official twenty-one per cent., i.e. a solid Protestant *bloc* of eighty in a House of a little over four hundred. Dr Magee shows too that normal representation was greater per population in the south and east than in the north and west, thus giving a quite accidental parliamentary advantage to the new religion. The Lords held up the Supremacy Bill for some time, deleting its original doctrinal clauses,

¹ State Papers, collected by Clarendon, p. 92.

² *English Historical Review*, Vol. 23.

and with the help of five new Protestant peers created by Elizabeth, passed the Uniformity Bill by only three votes, in the absence of more than half of the lay peers, of ten Bishops whose sees had fallen vacant and not been filled, of Goldwell of St Asaph's, who was not summoned on the technical pretext that he was in the process of translation to another see, and of the Bishops of Lincoln and Winchester and the Abbot of Feckenham, who were under arrest.¹ Even so, all the Lords Spiritual voted against the Bill.² The figures for the Commons are also interesting. In spite of the possibly forced elections, the twenty-one per cent, official *bloc* and the geographical anomaly, two-fifths of the House voted against the Bill.³

Apart from this evidence of the 1559 Parliament there is widespread contemporary witness, both Protestant and Catholic, to a Papist majority, which Feria, in March 1559, and a paper found on Creighton the Scottish Jesuit in 1586, both assess at two-thirds. But this two-thirds fell into at least four classes: first convicted recusants, the smallest class; secondly recusants who by influence, the good-will of local authorities, ingenious excuse or perpetual motion, eluded conviction; thirdly 'Church Papists', as the common name was, many of whom actually *were* 'Papists', in the sense of seeing papal authority as necessary to Catholic doctrine, however they might put in an appearance at the national Church for the sake of expediency; and lastly a class which probably cut across all the other three (at least until the seminary priests of Allen's Mission restored contact with Rome), persons of Catholic faith and practice, to whom the Prayer Book and the Act of Uniformity were anathema, but to whom the Act of Supremacy, as such, was irrelevant or even sympathetic.

By 1600, moreover, a new division had appeared, probably again cutting across the division into recusant and Church Papist. The quarrel between the Jesuits and the seculars, which had begun over the appointment of an Archpriest but which raged particularly virulently over the Deposition Bull and over the question of equivocation under oath, split English Roman

¹ Magee, pp. 14-20.

² Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church* p. 331.

³ Sec D'Ewes, *Journal of Queen Elizabeth's Parliaments*^ p. 54, quoted by Magee, and, for the whole question, Birt, *The Elizabethan Settlement*.

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Catholics into two distinct, pamphlet-warring camps, the overwhelming majority supporting the seculars. There is, in the plays themselves, interesting evidence of Shakespeare's cognizance of this quarrel, of his political and personal sympathies generally and perhaps of his personal affairs, but to deal with this and with the difficult historical context would need another book.

If one returns to purely biographical matters, several curious facts emerge. First, for some time from about 1602 onwards, and probably until he retired to Stratford, Shakespeare lived in Silver Street in the house of Christopher Mountjoy, a Huguenot tiremaker, as one of whose household he could have refrained with impunity from attending Anglican services, and who was described by his brethren of the French Protestant Church in London as 'debauched', a verdict possibly helped by his connection with *Papists and players'.

Secondly, in 1611, a very dangerous allusion to Shakespeare was made in print. After the trouble in 1597 over the apparent pillorying in *Henry IV* of the renowned Lollard martyr Sir John Oldcastle, Shakespeare had been obliged to change his name in this play—and sardonically substituted for it that of Sir John Falstaff, another but less famous Lollard martyr. A rival company replied with *Sir John Oldcastle*, defending the Lollard and introducing a 'Catholic priest' whose habits resemble Falstaff's even to highway robbery, and the trouble seems to have died down. But in 1611, following an allusion by Robert Persons, S. J., under his pseudonym of Nicholas Dolman, the Protestant historian John Speed wrote:

that N. D., author of the *Three Conversions*, hath made Oldcastle a ruffian, a robber and a rebel, and his authority taken from the stage-players is more befitting the pen of his slanderous report than the credit of the judicious, being only grounded from this papist and his poet, of like conscience for lies, the one ever feigning, and the other falsifying the truth. ... I am not ignorant.¹

There could have been no doubt in any mind who the poet was—the very Shakescene of his country as Greene had enviously

¹ *History of Great Britain*, Bk. 9, Ch. XV, p. 637.

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remarked, and *Henry IV* remained one of his most popular plays, so that Leonard Digges wrote in 1623:

*Let but Falstaff come,
Hal, Poins, the rest. You scarce shall have a room
All is so pestered.*¹

Moreover, in 1611, only five years after the Gunpowder Plot, Speed's allusion might well have found careful eyes to consider it. The ringleaders of the plot were all related to Shakespeare, Francis Tresham and Robert Catesby being nephews of Edward Arden, and the Winters second cousins of Arden's wife, besides being first cousins of Thomas Bushell, on whose security with his own Richard Quayney had requested from Shakespeare in 1598 the not inconsiderable loan of £30.² Whether Speed's allusion focussed these facts, or whether perhaps it was enough without them, we do not know, but certainly 1611 is the year in which Shakespeare, at the age of forty-seven and in apparent good health, wrote his farewell to the stage and retired to the country. There, during the last five years of his life, he neither wrote any more plays nor took any steps towards publishing a collected edition of those already written, although since fourteen extant 'good' quartos and four pirated quartos were already in existence, a collected edition could hardly have damaged box office receipts.

There also, it was reported, 'he died a Papist',³ whatever the precise meaning of this may be. Richard Davies, Vicar of Sapperton and later Archdeacon of Coventry, who conducted biographical investigations in Warwickshire between 1688 and 1708, added this statement to Fulman's memoranda which had come into his hands, and it is worth noting that he interviewed people who were alive when Shakespeare died, that he would not be likely to be pleased by his discovery, that he stated it categorically, without any qualifying expression such as 'they say', and that he stated it as an interesting addition in its own

¹ Prefatory to 1640 edition of Shakespeare's *Poems*.

² 'Mr Mytton', the other possible security named in Quayney's letter, served in some capacity Sir Edward Greville, said to be a good friend and near kinsman of Robert Catesby's father, William, Edward Arden's brother-in-law.

³ Ms. Oxf. 31577.

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right, not as an explanation of anything in Fulman. Fripp's only reason for brushing it aside as legend is that—as he alleges—Shakespeare did not, a month before 'dying a Papist', make such a will 'as a devout Catholic should', and this therefore needs examination.

There is, in point of fact, nothing un-Catholic about Shakespeare's will, which merely omits (no doubt to the less embarrassment of the heirs) any specific reference to 'Our Blessed Lady, St Mary, and the Holy Company of Heaven', by whom Fripp regards Shakespeare's father-in-law as guaranteed. Elze, in 1876, started the *canard* that the wording, 'hoping and assuredly believing through the only merits of Jesus Christ, my Saviour, to be made partaker of life everlasting', indicated Shakespeare's belief in the Protestant doctrine of salvation by faith alone. But his interpretation depends on an ignorance of Elizabethan English, in which 'only' regularly means 'unique' or 'peerless',¹ and Shakespeare's form corresponds to that used in her will by his persecuted fellow-townswoman, Margaret Reynolds, in 1615, and by other recusants. It is quite unlike the form, 'and that only by the merits', affected by the extreme Protestant, William Cooke, in 1614. The stress on the merits of Christ as such is not at all Protestant.² The Council of Trent anathematizes in its first two Canons on Justification the doctrine that a man can be saved by his own works apart from the merits of Christ, but attacks in subsequent anathemas various forms of the *sola fide* doctrine of the reformers, according to which a man, however wicked he continued to be, was saved by the mere conviction that he had been saved, Christ's merits being merely imputed to him and not imparted to him.

That there was considerable confusion, then as now, in England, about the Tridentine doctrine, is shown not only by Margaret Clitheroe's conversations with her accusers and 'advisors', who were surprised that she reiterated her belief that 'by the passion and death and merits of Jesus Christ I must be saved', but also by the report of the execution of Robert Southwell, S. J., whose prayer, 'I pray and beseech our Saviour,

¹ Cf. O.E.D. and *Hamlet*, III, ii, 132, *The Two Gentlemen*, III, i, 339, *i Henry VI*, IV, vii, 77, and *passim*.

² Cf. John Shakespeare's *testamentum animi*, the production of a canonized saint, Papal Secretary of State and reconvenor of the Council of Trent,

through whose precious Passion and Death I hop*, to be saved' . . . was interrupted by a Protestant divine, who asked him to explain himself, as he conceived his doctrine to be, according to the Council of Trent, damnable. Southwell replied calmly, 'I am a Catholic, and interpret it how you will, I trust to be saved by the merits and Passion of our Saviour', and then continued, 'I commend to the hands of Almighty God this my poor soul; this wretched body I leave to the Queen's will'. As Dr Mutschmann and Herr Wentersdorf point out, this is in striking conformity with the phrasing of Shakespeare's will:

*I commend my soul into the hands of God my creator, hoping and assuredly believing through the only (=unique) merits of Jesus Christ my Saviour to be made partaker of life everlasting, and my body to the earth whereof it is made.'

Shakespeare himself is unlikely to have been in any confusion on the point. Not only does he reflect accurately in his plays doctrines and practices regularly mistaken by contemporary Protestant writers, such as the use of indulgences and the conditions for forgiveness required of a penitent, but he shows, as the foregoing chapters suggest, a profound metaphysical knowledge of this very doctrine of infused grace by which Christ's merits are imparted to the sinner.

It is interesting to note perhaps one last fact in connection with the will, that one of its signatories was Shakespeare's London tenant, John Robinson, to whom he had let the Blackfriars Gatehouse since he acquired it in 1613. This house, once the lodging of the Prior of Blackfriars and later owned by Northumberland (the ninth Earl, who was reputed ? Papist), had had throughout the period a reputation for Topishness* and priest harbouring, being also on John Gerard's list as a *pied d terre*. John Robinson's father was accused of harbouring the priest Richard Dudley in another house, and after his death one son, Edward, left England for the English College in Rome, where he was ordained, and the other rented the Blackfriars Gatehouse from Shakespeare, who, as Fripp pointed out, kept regularly in touch with his 'business' interests in London. John Robinson was obviously visiting him at Stratford in 1616, the year of his death.

The fact that Shakespeare is buried in the parish Church of

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Holy Trinity, though it has been thought to prove he died a conforming Anglican, is in fact a completely neutral circumstance. William Glopton, presented in the recusancy returns of 1592 as paying his monthly fines, was buried there in 1592, and his wife, similarly presented, in 1596. The recusant Thomas and Margaret Reynolds were buried there in 1613 and 1615, and among other recusants the Earl and Countess of Totnes (died 1629 and 1637) share an altar tomb! The same sort of thing is to be found elsewhere, and not even the Puritan Commonwealth apparently could prevent Adrian Fortescue, S. J., having a plate put up as well as being buried in Huddington Parish Church near Worcester. Shakespeare, as part owner of the Stratford tithes, was entitled to be buried in the chancel, and the curious anomalies produced by 'lay rectors' who were recusants can be gathered from the fact that in the Arundel aisle in Lanherne are buried ten of the English Carmelite nuns from Flanders, to whose community Lady Arundel gave the Manor House in 1794!

To sum up, it would appear that Shakespeare was indeed a Papist in sympathy and doctrine, but whether he was a recusant or not we shall probably never know for certain.

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[NOTE. In indexing subjects it is impossible in a small compass to be exhaustive, and for this reason the bracketed cross-references given in italics after many headings may be useful, though these also cannot cover every relevance. Justice in general is not indexed, since it is in some sense discussed on every page, but references are given to distinctions in kind made by the theorists, and also to its relation to mercy (*v. mercy*). Plays, which are clearly indicated in chapter headings on the contents page, are not indexed, and page references to subjects which similarly appear are given only when these occur outside the chapters concerned (*Romeo and Juliet* is discussed in Chapter II). An entry such as 191-5 does not necessarily indicate continuous reference.]

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