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A RECONSIDERATION OF SHAKESPEAREAN TRAGEDY

by

Pavitra Lakshmanan Elliott

A thesis submitted to
the faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts.

Department of English

Carleton University

Ottawa, Ontario

December 15, 1987

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the degree of Master of Arts.

M. V. Cameron
Thesis Supervisor

W. M. S. King
Chairman, Department of English

Carleton University

ABSTRACT

This thesis re-examines the theory of tragedy in order to arrive at an acceptable definition of the tragic in Shakespeare's Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth and King Lear. In Chapter I, three recent theories of tragedy, those of Clifford Leech (1969), Jonathan Dollimore (1984) and H. A. Mason (1985), are examined critically in order to isolate the properties essential to an adequate definition of Shakespearean tragedy. In Chapter II, three Aristotelian principles of tragedy, namely, hamartia, peripeteia and anagnorisis, are examined. Chapter III examines three more of Aristotle's principles, namely, pity, fear and catharsis. Chapter IV tests Dollimore's view of the tragic principle of life against Shakespeare's tragedies; and Chapters V and VI test an extended view of Mason's notion of the tragic principle of life against Shakespeare's Macbeth. The concluding chapter appraises the results.

To Professor Cameron

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ABBREVIATIONS OF WORKS CITED

Arden	The Arden Shakespeare
Fyfe	<u>The Poetics</u> , trans. Hamilton Fyfe
CP	<u>The Common Pursuit</u>
R†	<u>Radical Tragedy</u>
SN	<u>The Story of the Night</u>
STs	<u>Shakespeare's Tragedies</u>
STy	<u>Shakespearean Tragedy</u>
T	<u>Tragedy</u>
TP	<u>The Tragic Plane</u>
"WW"	"Woe and Wonder"

INTRODUCTION

Most people would acknowledge that Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman is one of our century's most moving tragedies. Yet, unlike Shakespeare's tragedies it does not make one recoil with horror at what man does to himself and at the same time leave one with a feeling of exaltation, a feeling that life has somehow been vindicated in what one has just experienced. There seem to be a greatness and a grandeur to Shakespearean tragedy that our dejected twentieth century souls seem unable to portray. What, then, is Shakespearean tragedy?

This thesis will attempt to arrive at a notion of tragedy that forms the defining principle of Shakespearean tragedy. Since any analysis of tragedy must take into consideration those age-old concepts laid down in The Poetics as the essential constituents of tragedy, the thesis will also examine Aristotle's principles,¹ so crucial to an understanding of tragedy.

Three twentieth century notions will be examined: the prevailing humanist position, as put forth by Clifford Leech in 1969; a 1984 view that has emerged out of recent literary theories, namely, Jonathan Dollimore's Marxist/post-structuralist approach; and H. A. Mason's 1985 theory, which he derives from original Greek conceptions of "the tragic." Ideas that show most promise and seem applicable to Shakespearean tragedy will be tested, so to speak, against

¹ Interpretations of Aristotelian terms are based on

Shakespeare's tragedies. Now modern theorists of literary criticism take great exception to this method of "testing" a literary hypothesis. The opening lines of Roland Barthes' S/Z, for instance, deal with precisely this issue:

There are said to be certain Buddhists whose ascetic practices enable them to see a whole landscape in a bean. Precisely what the first analysts of narrative were attempting: to see all the world's stories (and there have been ever so many) within a single structure: we shall, they thought, extract from each tale its model, then out of these models we shall make a great narrative structure, which we shall reapply (for verification) to any one narrative: a task as exhausting . . . as it is ultimately undesirable, for the text thereby loses its difference.

If by "texts lose their difference" Barthes means to imply that we read the same story in every text when we apply the same theory to every text, then Barthes is clearly mistaken. We will see in the concluding chapter of this Thesis how a group of literary works may contain the same defining principle without allowing the defining principle to interfere, in any way, with their individual differences and richness which indeed are crucial to the plays. If, on the other hand, by sameness Barthes only means a cohesive unifying principle bringing together a diversity, then there is no good reason why we should not look for such a unity in any particular group of literary works, adopt the unifying element as a hypothesis and proceed to "test" the hypothesis against other literary works to formulate a theory. This procedure serves not only to illustrate the theory but also

serves as a means to understanding our interpreting the literary works concerned.

The first chapter of the thesis will concern itself with critical analyses of the three views of tragedy, namely, Leech's, Dollimore's and Mason's. The next two chapters will proceed to analyze and describe the Aristotelian principles that define tragedy. The fourth chapter will "test" Dollimore's hypothesis against Shakespeare's tragedies and arrive at a conclusion as to its feasibility. The two chapters that follow will "test" an expanded version of Mason's much more promising hypothesis against Shakespeare's Macbeth. The concluding chapter will appraise the results.

CHAPTER I

THREE THEORIES OF TRAGEDY

A quick perusal through the list of quotations,¹ conveniently provided by Clifford Leech in his Tragedy (Methuen), will reveal that in the last two centuries at least, critics have assumed that tragedy contains universal truths that are profoundly philosophical in content. The assumption seems legitimate. For a tragic hero seems to represent Everyman, and the tragic society, the society of mankind itself. The Aristotelian idea, then, that tragedy, as a form of poetry, gives us "general truths" only about the behaviour of certain types of men (The Poetics, trans. Hamilton Fyfe, 35) does not describe accurately the depth of insight into human nature that tragedy offers, Shakespearean tragedy at any rate. Shakespearean tragedy does not restrict itself to behaviour or action alone. It tells us why, and not merely how, men act in certain ways. That is to say, characters and motives play a greater role than that which is granted by The Poetics. Secondly, as Hamilton Fyfe rightly observes, although it is true that Aristotle's keen logician's mind has discovered "all the great first principles" of tragedy,² the philosopher has made, as Fyfe puts it, a

¹ See Tragedy, 1-11.

² The "first principles" refer to the notions of fear, pity, catharsis, anagnorisis, peripetia and hamartia, unanimously accepted as essential constituents of tragedy ever since they were first introduced into literary criticism.

"capital omission" in omitting the "principle of life" (Fyfe, xv). What Fyfe calls the "principle of life" goes beyond the "hows" and even "whys" of specific types of human behaviour. Tragic truth is not simply about this or that type of man; it says something much more important about mankind as a whole.

The prevailing humanist opinion about what this something is seems to be the one proposed by Leech (1969), who says tragedy is "an exposition of man's powerlessness in his cosmic setting" (Tragedy, 16). In an earlier work, Leech provides more particulars on this view. He observes firstly, that the punishments meted out to Shakespearean characters, including the tragic heroes, are much greater than what they deserve. Furthermore, he adds, "the plays frequently include a number of minor characters [he gives as examples Lady Macduff and her son and Polonius] whose sudden and cruel deaths do not arise out of any fault of their own" (Shakespeare's Tragedies, 9). And in cases like Macbeth, where the "final disaster springs from an evil act on the part of the hero," our feeling is that "his initial conduct is hardly within his control: Macbeth was singularly unfortunate in the joint temptation from the witches and his wife, and the witches' prophecy suggests from the beginning that his crime was predetermined" (STs, 9).

One inference that may be drawn from this is that the gods are malicious beings, enjoying man's suffering. However, Leech holds that the tragic dramatist does not see the gods

as being actively hostile to man so much as being remote from man's problems. That is, the justice of the gods is "an indifferent justice" and

... consists simply in the natural law that every act must have its consequence and that the consequence will be determined by the act and its context. If the act is in any way evil or if the situation is one with evil potentialities, then a train of evil will be the result. The tragic writer believes in causation, in the doctrine that means determine ends, and in the powerlessness of the human will to interrupt a chain of disasters. (STs, 14-15)

And it is thus that man is powerless in his cosmic setting.

It is doubtful, however, whether this conclusion does in fact follow from the above passage. In the passage Leech states that the tragic dramatist assumes a causal theory of action, and assumes that the gods do not interfere in a causal chain of events. Yet when he talks about Macbeth in relation to the question of punishment, he states that "the witches' prophecy suggests from the beginning that his crime was predetermined" (STs, 9). It appears that Leech has confused a causal issue with the issue of fatalism. That is to say, he has mistakenly equated the statement, "Every time Y occurs we know that X has occurred since X causes Y," with the statement; "Y will occur whatever happens, since Y is a predetermined event." The two are not the same. From what Leech says about Macbeth, it is clear that his fundamental position on Shakespearean tragedy is a theory of predeterminism or fatalism. But at the same time, he cannot help but

recognise what he calls a "greater degree of free-will in Elizabethan than in the Greek tragedy" (STs, 16), and has hence, forced a theory of fatalism into a causal theory of action so that he may arrive at his conclusion that "Shakespeare and his contemporaries have gone out of their way to make us realise that the pattern is preordained for their characters too" (STs, 17). Thus when he talks of the powerlessness of man in his cosmic setting, he means whatever befalls man is preordained and man is powerless to do anything about it. And this, Leech suggests is what tragedy has implied "for us in the last two centuries" (T, 16).

If this is what tragedy implies then the ramifications of tragedy are not very attractive: man is not responsible for his own downfall, and suffering or tragic circumstances are unavoidable and have to be mutely accepted as man's lot. It is not difficult to see from these ramifications that the texts themselves will not provide much support for this pessimistic theory. Shakespeare's tragedies most certainly do not remove all responsibility from the tragic protagonist. The assertion does not hold true even of Greek tragedy. For instance, even in such an oracle-bound play as Oedipus the King, the tragedy is not caused by any predetermined prophecy. Oedipus' tragedy is not that he kills his father and marries his mother. This fact lies outside the play. His tragedy is rather that he discovers this truth; and the cause of this tragedy is his persistent search, against all opposition, for an explanation or truth, believing it is for the best,

although, of course, it can only have disastrous consequences for him.

With regard to the second implication, Leech tends to mystify suffering, a fact characteristic of many humanist views of tragedy as Jonathan Dollimore rightly points out in his Radical Tragedy (190).. Dollimore is thinking of sentiments such as those Leech puts forth in his Shakespeare's Tragedies:

[Tragic protagonists] have a quality of mind that somehow atones for the nature of the world in which they and we live. They have, in a greater or lesser degree the power to endure and the power to apprehend: ultimately they are destroyed, but in all their sufferings they show an increasing readiness to endure, an even greater awareness.
(STs, 15)

In this view tragedy shows both how man can stoically endure the greatest of misfortunes and how he can learn and be redeemed through suffering. Thus, suffering is both inevitable, since man's tragic act is predetermined, and is of positive value, since its effects have a tremendous positive use and significance for man.

One can imagine, and fully sympathise with, what Dollimore's Marxist reaction to this conclusion would be: there is no better way to keep the rich complacent in their advantaged position than to convince them that suffering is not only inevitable but, since it is a means to redemption itself, the poor and the uneducated are in fact much better off than their richer brothers. Humanist readings, Dollimore observes, "tend to fatalize social dislocation; its causes

are displaced from the realm of the human; . . . thus confirming man's impotence to alleviate the human condition" (RT, 194). On the contrary, he says, quoting Raymond Williams, "we have to see not only that suffering is avoidable, but that it is not avoided. And not only that suffering breaks us but that it need not break us" (RT, 158).

Dollimore's view is, of course, based on the Marxist objection to any legitimization of a class hierarchy and hence may carry only a limited sense of the term "suffering." It is plausible to assume that "suffering" in Marxist ideology is most probably defined in strictly economic terms; that is, it is probably equivalent to "poverty." However, when we speak of "suffering" in tragedy, it is used in a much wider sense--it is an agony of the mind and poverty may or may not have any bearing on it. But the proposition that suffering is avoidable holds true with respect to tragic suffering. If man is responsible for his downfall then his tragic circumstances are self-caused and thus avoidable. In other words, to say that "tragic circumstances are unavoidable" is a contradiction in terms. For the very fact that a situation is deemed tragic is that it could and should have been avoided. Lastly, if man is powerless in his cosmic setting then the significance of self-discovery as contained in tragic plays is rendered meaningless. Since self-discovery or anagnorisis is, as we shall see, not merely a principle of tragedy but also integral to the notion of tragedy itself, any theory that renders its significance meaningless is, on

that account alone, unacceptable as a theory of tragedy.

Two more recent theories, namely, those of Jonathan Dollimore (1984) and H. A. Mason (1985), offer interesting alternative approaches to Shakespeare's tragic drama. In his Radical Tragedy: Shakespeare and His Contemporaries Dollimore postulates a view that is diametrically opposite to what Leech proposes. He contends that Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy, far from revealing that man is powerless in his cosmic setting, in fact succeeds in subverting this very notion. The tragedy of Shakespeare's period he says consists in "a realism which even as it shows the powerlessness of individuals demystifies the power structure and the social order which constitute and destroy them" (RT, 19). Dollimore claims that religious orthodoxy, which legitimized class hierarchy and the suppression of the lower classes, was being seriously undermined in the Elizabethan and Jacobean period, in that "inherited social and cultural order was disintegrating." The response of tragic drama to the situation, he contends, was to confront and articulate that crisis, so that it actually helped to precipitate the disintegration (RT, 5). It did so in several ways. It interrogated accepted notions of providentialism (RT, 19) and the Elizabethan belief that "the divine plan informed the universe generally and society particularly" (RT, 6). It disallowed the ideological aesthetic mystification of the court and showed the court "as ineradicably corrupt" (RT, 28). It explored "the way in which the disintegrating effects of grief are

resisted not through Christian or stoic renunciation of society, but a commitment to revenge" (RT, 40), and it explored the idea that "faced with a dislocated world, individual consciousness itself became dislocated" (RT, 31). Tragedy precipitated disintegration by showing "the way that sensitive people brutalize themselves in order to survive in a brutal world [and by showing that] the tragedy lies in the fact that, in so doing, they earn the esteem of their society" (RT, 41). And it also precipitated disintegration by disregarding naturalness, probability and common-sense in representation, that is, by disregarding what Brecht calls the bourgeois theatre's aim "at smoothing over contradictions, at creating false harmony, at idealization" (RT, 65), and instead, by deliberately adopting a "style" that is discontinuous and unnatural in order to reveal the discontinuities and unnaturalness in life (RT, 56-57).

Thus, according to Dollimore's theory, tragic drama of the period

violates those cherished aesthetic principles which legislate that the ultimate aim of art is to order discordant elements; to explore conflict in order ultimately to resolve it, to explore suffering in order ultimately to transcend it. (RT, 8)

Dollimore's approach is fundamentally Marxist. Such an interpretation must to a large extent be conjecture. For, naturally enough, Dollimore depends heavily on certain historical facts for evidence for the theory. For instance, he refers to views of certain contemporary thinkers like

Montaigne, Bacon, More and Hooker, who assert that "law and morality have their origins in custom rather than with an eternal order of things" (RT, 16), as evidence for his postulation that Jacobean and Elizabethan drama concerns itself with an undermining of their notion of a universally in-forming divine being and with the decentering of man. Then to support his view that "religious skepticism was available not simply as the prerogative of the individual playwright but also as possible audience positions" (RT, 86), he draws on theories on the status of religion in the sixteenth century. He observes that in Religion and the Doctrine of Magic, Keith Thomas "shows that atheistical thoughts troubled even the most devout" (RT, 86) and quotes from Alan Sinfield's Literature in Protestant England the following:

Issues which at other times were accommodated by logical evasions and evocative phraseology were teased out and stated in uncompromising terms, and the problems which ultimately confront all traditional Christianity came sharply into focus. (RT, 86)

Dollimore, then, makes extensive use of the religious and philosophical climate of the period to support his theory and thus, needless to say, commits the least dependable kind of intentional fallacy.³ Any evidence that may be drawn

³ The theory of the intentional fallacy asserts that going beyond the premisses of the text to seek out the author's intentions in the interpretation of the text is an illegitimate way of providing evidence for the interpretation.

from the text only points to an aspect of Elizabethan, and in particular Shakespearean, tragedy. For example, there is ample evidence in Hamlet to support Dollimore's contention that "the court is shown as ineradicably corrupt and the aesthetic front which mystified its violent appropriation of power is ruptured from within . . . by like violence" (RT, 28). An excellent case could be made to show that the same situation obtains in both King Lear and Macbeth. But this, as we said, is one aspect of Shakespearean tragedy. If one were to follow Dollimore's example then one may as well declare that Shakespeare's tragedies are about the emotional, and sometimes spiritual, superiority of women, since there is sufficient material in the plays to provide evidence for the claim.

At other times Dollimore is simply wrong in his reading of Shakespearean tragedy. For instance, although he is right in maintaining that grief is not resisted through stoic endurance and though he is right that tragic heroes are the sensitive souls of society, there is no evidence anywhere to show that grief is resisted through a "commitment to revenge" or through the heroes' brutalizing themselves "in order to survive in a brutal world." Othello comes closest to being committed to revenge. However, Othello's commitment is to what may be called a distorted sense of justice and duty:

See Wimsatt and Beardsley's "The Intentional Fallacy" in Philosophy Looks at the Arts, ed. Joseph Margolis, 1962, 91-105.

It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul.
 Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars.
 It is the cause, . . .
 . . . she must die, else she'll betray more men.
 (V.ii. 1-6)

Hamlet is ostensibly a play about revenge. In fact, however, it concerns the problem of action and inaction, the morality of revenge when it is not revenge for the sake of revenge and the role of providence in men's lives. This of course seems to lend support to Dollimore's general theory of Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy, that is, that tragedy subverts inherited notions of providentialism and an in-forming divine plan. However, Hamlet does not contain an attempt to subvert providentialism. On the contrary, Hamlet, at one point, concedes to the idea that providence may play a greater role in our lives than what our rational thinking would allow us to believe (V.ii. 7-10). Indeed Hamlet touches on providentialism in the same way the Lancastrian trilogy (Richard II and Henry IV, parts I and II) measures the concept of sacramental kingship against the Machiavellian concept of a good prince. The trilogy neither categorically favours nor categorically condemns either side of the issue. Thus in Hamlet, providentialism and the notion of a universally in-forming divine plan are opened up, so to speak, for question and discussion, but not in the way Dollimore assumes they are.

As for the statement that the tragedy of a tragic hero lies in the fact that he earns the esteem of his society by

brutalizing himself to survive in a brutal world, one's only comment is that it is quite plainly absurd to postulate such a view. No Shakespearean tragedy bears it out. Dollimore uses Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida to illustrate this assertion (RT, 40-41). But Troilus and Cressida, apart from not being a tragedy, is a relatively minor work. Dollimore has an unfortunate tendency to make use of minor works to make major points--as he does when he refers extensively to Marston's Antonio plays to defend the thesis that in Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy the tragic hero is dedicated to revenge, providentialism is rejected, human identity is shown to be disintegrated and decentred since it could no longer be maintained that the human essence was divine, and so on (RT, 29-31). In general, there is an unjustifiable misreading of Shakespeare's tragedies on Dollimore's part. His dependence on minor works and the intellectual climate of the period for evidence can at best produce only very tenuous arguments. Any contention that does find support is merely an aspect but not the whole of Shakespearean tragedy.

With regard to the claim that Shakespeare's plays are disconnected, in that they disregard naturalness, probability and common-sense, Dollimore maintains that this disconnectedness is a deliberate attempt on the dramatist's part to depict the human state of affairs as unnatural, improbable and non-commonsensical. He says, quoting Scriften, that "in the disconnectedness of Shakespeare's plays 'one recognises the disconnectedness of human fate'" (RT, 67). That Shakespeare

sometimes disregards naturalness, probability and common sense is quite true, although of course Shakespearean characters are by no means unnatural, improbable and non-commonsensical. But if Shakespeare's intentions are what Dollimore says they are, then how would one account for those other times when Shakespeare adopts natural, probable and commonsensical modes of expression in his plots? If we were to follow Dollimore's method of criticism, then Shakespearean tragedy, since it contains both real and unreal elements, reveals nothing more than the questionable claim that life is sometimes real and at other times not real. However, Dollimore has no clear warrant for making his contention in the first place. For the unnatural and improbable presentation of situations seems to work in the same way the natural and probable presentations do for expressing whatever it is that is expressed in any particular play. Thus in Hamlet, Hamlet's being rescued by the pirates is indeed a lucky coincidence or an improbable situation. But it is this event, amongst others, that eventually leads to Hamlet's concession to the probability of a providence "that shapes our ends" (V.ii. 10). On the other hand, in Othello, Desdemona's innocent and somewhat thoughtless pleading on Cassio's behalf to Othello is a probable situation, given the openness of her character, her knowledge of the closeness of Othello's and Cassio's relationship, her faith in Othello's love for her, and so forth. But this also plays a most important role in Othello's eventual conviction of

her infidelity. In other words, Shakespeare may use either a probable or improbable occurrence as a way of leading to another necessary occurrence and neither occurrence is more permissible than the other. Then in Macbeth, Shakespeare resorts to the unnatural and uses the witches to enhance the sense of evil that pervades the play, whereas in Lear, Shakespeare remains with the natural and introduces a storm to enhance the poignancy of Lear's situation. Both the witches and the storm are equally valid as means to emotive effects. (Since the emotive and the cognitive are very closely linked in works of art, evocation of the emotive is an important way of knowing the cognitive.) As for the non-commonsensical, it is not immediately obvious exactly where Shakespeare strays from the common sense. My point here is this: whether a dramatist uses an unrealistic means or a realistic means to convey the emotive and cognitive content of his art, they are both modes of expression and do not in themselves, in Shakespeare at least, reflect a reality that is peculiar to their respective styles. Furthermore the examples cited show that both the use of the unnatural or the use of the improbable interestingly say precisely the opposite of what is indicated by their respective modes of expression. The unnaturalness of the witches throws light on the naturalness of man and the humane; and the improbability of being rescued by the pirates indicates the probability of the existence of providence. Hence, if Dollimore means that Shakespeare by violating aesthetic principles presents a

disordered world in a disorderly fashion, I would answer that Shakespeare has not violated any aesthetic principle. Shakespeare provides a meaning and an explanation to what, in the world, seems to be meaningless conflict and senseless suffering. He orders the apparently discordant to reveal that conflict and suffering are man-made and self-caused, and, therefore, resolvable and avoidable. I emphasize, however, that Dollimore is perfectly justified in claiming that conflict and suffering have not been explained away in terms of a larger divine harmony. But the main difficulty with Dollimore's theory is that it gives no proper explanation of the constituents of tragedy. If Shakespearean tragedy is concerned with the subversion of traditional religious and political conceptions then in what sense is the subversion supposed to be tragic, or is it to be tragic at all? How in the light of Dollimore's claim, do we interpret the notions of anagnorisis, peripeteia, hamartia, and the rest? Dollimore ignores notions agreed upon for centuries as essential to tragedy.

Notwithstanding all this, Dollimore is absolutely right in his ultimate conclusion that Elizabethan and Jacobean tragedy contains the implicit truth claim that man engenders his own destruction. Further, his view of man's identity in Elizabethan Jacobean drama is well worth examining. "Faced with a dislocated world," he says, "individual consciousness itself becomes dislocated" (RT, 31). As a description of the Shakespearean tragic hero, this statement is thought-

provoking and, despite its underlying pessimism, must be contended with. I will examine it at some length later in the thesis.

H. A. Mason's view of tragedy is, initially at least, more promising than Dollimore's. Mason asserts, first of all, that "there would be no tragedy if there were no tragic circumstances involving a whole society" (The Tragic Plane, 41). This sounds like a truism. However, what he means by it is that tragedy does not concern an isolated being, for example the stoic figure of Leech's theory or the alienated-from-society figure of Dollimore's. It involves a whole society or the world of human action. Further, it involves a reality that lies beyond this world of human action (TP, 16). Tragedy, according to Mason, gives intimations of a reality⁴ that lies "beyond the sum of . . . an all-inclusive experience" (TP, 16-17). This "invisible" reality that tragedy gives "momentary glimpses of" is the world of deep human bonds "underlying everything, bonds which create the value of human life" (TP, 44), that is, bonds between parent and child, king and subject, between kinsmen, husband and wife, and master and servant. These bonds are not feelings. We find them only when we look at the "Beyond," where we look "through and past . . . their covering of warm feeling" (TP,

⁴ The phrase that Mason actually uses, that is, "intimations of knowledge," is, strictly speaking, meaningless. Analogically it would mean the same as "red of colour," since "intimations" is a subset of knowledge just the way "red" is a subset of colour. However, from its context it is clear that the phrase simply means "intimations of reality."

44). The "beyond," a term that Mason borrows from D. H. Lawrence, is explained as, again in Lawrence's terminology, something that is not in "the emotional, loving plane" but a "mystic conjunction, the ultimate unison between people" (TP, 42). It is a plane which is "cold," "but only cold in the sense we have to use if we picture loving souls meeting in heaven"; a plane "of a supernatural fire, or as Yeats puts it, of 'flame that cannot singe a sleeve'" (TP, 44-45). The bonds are divinely sanctioned contracts. To explain what he means by this Mason traces the origin of the meaning of the Greek term philos. He says that philos does not simply mean "love" and points out that Emile Benveniste has rightly concluded that "the phil-words are not in the first place expressions of feeling but expressions of a contract comprising rights and duties for all the contracting parties" (TP, 48). By "contracts" we are not to understand a social contract, that is, the kind of union contract we have now between an employer and his employees, but an unwritten, unspoken, intuitively acknowledged contract. It is a contract that involves "the shadowy yet powerful Christian feeling in Shakespeare's plays that every human bond embodies the divine, so that a parent or an employer offended God if he did not observe the duties of his station" (TP, 55). Most times it also involves a blood tie, that is, a tie between members of a family. But to Shakespeare, Mason points out, the bonds between king and subject and between master and servant are equally sacred. It is important to note at this point that

these bonds exist even now, albeit to a lesser extent, and are not merely a thing of the past. To use an example cited by Mason, if a man who dislikes his sister intensely were asked why he entered a quarrel over her in which he hadn't a hope of winning, he might well answer, "Why, she's my sister, isn't she?" and we would accept it. Thus the bonds are not simply relations like trust, affection, sympathy, and so forth, that exist between people, but more primitive than affection for they are ties that "could exist without cultivated feelings" (TP, 56). The essential constituent of tragedy, says Mason, is the violation of these (divine) bonds (TP, 57). That is to say, tragedy occurs when the most profound of human relationships are violated. According to Mason's theory, then, man's lot is not naturally tragic; it becomes tragic when he acts in a particular way and under particular circumstances.

In the emphasis laid on the violation of human bonds Mason's view is much more in accordance with what is actually found in Shakespeare's tragedies than either Leech's or Dollimore's. Unfortunately, however, the metaphysical baggage that Mason carries with him poses some problems: it does not allow him to go far enough in his analysis and the consequences of this fact are serious; and it tends to cloud rather than clarify his ideas and makes his theory unacceptable to any thorough-going empiricist. For instance, what does it actually mean to say that the bonds exist in a plane of "flame that cannot singe a sleeve"? Experience tells us that

flames are hot and if Mason retorts "For goodness sake, use your imagination!" we would be fully justified in responding with "Of course I can imagine a cold flame. But I can also imagine unicorns!" The plane of human bonds is reduced to a fictitious one--a fairyland that is not worthy of any serious contemplation. However, this problem is easily resolvable. For the tragic plane or the reality that Mason refers to when he talks of that which lies "beyond the sum of . . . an all-inclusive experience" is such that it is easily interpretable in entirely empirical terms. That is to say, the ontological status of Mason's "invisible" world of deep human bonds does not entail a metaphysical realm, that is, a realm that exists over and above the plane of empirical existence. Thus it becomes a simple matter to clear the air of metaphysical entities, retain the substance of Mason's thesis and hence open the theory to a wider acceptance.⁵

⁵ It could be objected that being unacceptable to a particular group of people, who are perhaps disinclined to accept anything metaphysical by temperament in any case, does not sufficiently warrant a devaluation of a metaphysical theory. It must be admitted that my reason for wanting to open the theory so that it may be acceptable to both empiricists and non-empiricists is, in fact, a personal bias. I feel a great hesitation to posit a theory whose basis is in an entirely subjective experience. Whatever kind of communion a human being has with the unobservable, it is always a private communion. What I mean by this I can only explain with reference to personal experience--from the points of view both of an insider and of an outsider. As an insider, how does one explain one's tender love for a lonely woman who died twenty years ago? It is a quiet sadness and no feeling or loss is ever akin to what is connoted in the phrase "sweet sorrow." It is always painful, and yet in that pain, so strangely permeated by tenderness and purity, that I feel I have touched the divine. Does this mean that I

The first problem that arises as a result of Mason's metaphysical baggage remains unresolved. To see what is meant by "Mason does not go far enough" we will return to an example cited earlier, Oedipus the King. I have claimed that Oedipus' tragedy is not that he violates certain bonds but rather that he discovers that he has done so. His tragedy, then, is a self-discovery, a realization of the unthinkable--the unthinkable truth that in violating certain bonds he has also acted unnaturally, that is, in a manner that goes against his natural state of being and thus violated

understand what Browning means when he says that the world is intensely good, despite evidence to the contrary? Or does it mean rather that I find meaning in Browning's assertion? The latter, I should think. My point here is this: I would feel most uncomfortable moving from my experience, for the lack of a better term, of the unobservable to the assumption that a linguistic expression of it is universally comprehensible. Even if there is a comprehension as in the way in which I said I understand the statement "the world is intensely good," I would still be most unwilling to posit the existence of an unobservable entity as an objective fact --not because private communions are somehow illusory, but because they will always remain private and cannot be shared. I do not have, nor can ever presume to have, adequate language to explain what I mean by "touched the divine." If I tried I would run into the same kind of danger that Mason admits as befalling any attempt like his "which seeks to define a tragic plane somehow above the ordinary human level" (TP, 42). As he says, it will seem as if one is overdoing it. Then from the point of view of the outsider, how does one respond to a person who says that she was an atheist until she had an intimation into the "beyond" on reading the last few lines of Wordsworth's "Strange Fits of Passion Have I Known"? There is nothing in the poem that is the least bit metaphysical and yet the lines

When down behind the cottage roof,
At once, the bright moon dropped . . .
"O mercy!" to myself I cried,
"If Lucy should be dead!" (Lines 23-28)

his own humanity. Nowhere is this notion of tragedy as something which has to do with a self-realization of the unthinkable and with the idea that in violating certain bonds one has also acted unnaturally, made more clear than in Shakespeare's great tragedies: Yet Mason does not take his critique to this point. Instead he stops with a definition of tragedy in terms of an "intimations of reality," his analysis having been ousted by his inclination for giving his ideas a metaphysical colouring. In one sense it is understandable why Mason feels compelled to do this. Tragedy is a mysterious affair: that kinsmen should be tied together so strongly by the bond of blood is mysterious; that husband and wife and that friends should be tied together as strongly as those bound by blood is mysterious; that anyone should violate these bonds is mysterious; that one should suffer so much as a consequence is mysterious. The least difficult way to explain the mystery is by introducing a beyond-the-realm-of-experience entity or entities. Yet, in doing so, one removes the mystery from tragedy. It seems to me that Shakespeare's greatness lies in the retention of the inexplicability of so much in life--so starkly illustrated by Leontes's

revealed something that she had never believed existed. One can only be moved and listen in silence as she says, in complete conviction, "I saw God." As outsiders we can never presume to understand what she really means; nor can we move from here to postulate the existence of God.

Thus, when Yeats says, "flame that cannot singe a sleeve" we do not know what he really means. We may find a meaning as Mason does, but, in turn, we do not know what Mason really means when he uses the words. If a notion may be elucidated in terms that are universally comprehensible then it is best

jealousy in The Winter's Tale. Sometimes one cannot ask any more questions because they become, as Wittgenstein would say, the wrong questions and will beget only wrong answers or non-answers. To the question "why do we suffer?" there is no answer; there comes a point where we have to simply accept that we do suffer and that there is no "why" to it.

It is natural for Mason to conclude, since his notion of the realm of the bonds is that it is a mystical one, that when these bonds are violated we, the spectators, get a glimpse of that mystical realm, and it is easy for him to arrive at the further conclusion that tragedy is the violation of sacred bonds. What he does not see is that the violation of bonds, in itself, is not tragic. Iago, Regan, Goneril and Claudius break sacred bonds, but we do not think of them as tragic figures. By not going far enough, Mason has done more than proffer an incomplete theory. He has also made a serious mistake: he has misplaced the focal point of tragedy by shifting it from the unthinkable self-discovery that man has acted unnaturally to the unnatural act itself. The theory that is needed is one which will not only take a conception of essential human nature⁶ seriously into account,

to remain within these terms and not resort to metaphysical explanations.

⁶ At this stage it should be mentioned that this paper will occasionally contain phrases like "spiritual death" or "essential nature." Neither "spiritual" nor "essential" are intended to denote or even connote anything over and above the experiential realm. They are no more than convenient abbreviations for longer phrases. Hence "spiritual" stands

but will also maintain the traditional conceptions of fear, pity, catharsis, hamartia, peripeteia and anagnorisis, and at the same time will avoid the kind of untenable implications that Leech's view makes.

for the thinking, feeling, willing aspect of man and "spiritual death" simply means "the loss of one's spirit to function as a thinking, feeling, willing being." Similarly, "essential" stands for the necessary properties, as opposed to the contingent properties, of man. It is unfortunate that the term "essential" immediately brings to mind Platonic essences. But "man's essential nature" does not mean an ideal essence of man existing in a world of pure Forms so much as merely what is natural in this world to man.

CHAPTER II

THE TRAGIC WORLD (1)

Each of the three definitions of tragedy that we have looked at seems necessarily to involve two aspects: a tragic state of affairs and man's function in or relationship with a tragic state of affairs. The view that tragedy concerns man's powerlessness in his cosmic setting, for instance, entails the tragic state of affairs which is man's cosmic setting, and it entails man's powerlessness within it. The contention that tragedy shows man's dislocation when he is faced with a dislocated world entails a tragically dislocated setting, and it entails man's dislocation within it. These two elements, the tragic state of affairs and man's relationship within it, provide us with a convenient starting place in our exploration of the notion of tragedy.

The Tragic State of Affairs

A tragic state of affairs is always one of suffering. However, all situations of suffering cannot be termed tragic. A wounded soldier, for instance, may suffer both physically and mentally. But his situation is not a tragic one unless certain other conditions obtain. The relationship between tragedy and suffering, in other words, is one of implication and not one of entailment: tragedy implies suffering but suffering does not imply tragedy.¹ The most satisfactory

¹ A similar relationship holds between "death" and "tragedy": tragedy implies death but death does not imply

account of what makes a state of affairs tragic is contained in the principles of tragedy first recognized by Aristotle. This does not mean that nothing need be added to what is asserted in The Poetics; on the contrary, it is more often the case that too little is said about each principle. Nor does it mean that the philosopher is always justified in his contentions. But what he has done is to have "settled, once and for all," to use Hamilton Fyfe's phrase (xv), the precise limits of the scope within which one may work to arrive at a coherent definition of tragedy. The suffering of the wounded soldier is not tragic, for example, for the simple reason that it cannot be described in terms of the canons of tragedy laid down in The Poetics. The soldier's situation does not in itself involve an error of judgement or a moral flaw or a change of fortune or a discovery or self-discovery or a purging of emotions. As a result even the pity and the fear that one may feel for him are not the same as the pity and fear aroused in tragic circumstances. In other words, the notions of hamartia, peripeteia, anagnorisis and catharsis² are intrinsic to a definition of tragic pity and fear. Furthermore, as we shall see, the definitions of each of

tragedy. The natural death of old people and terminally ill patients cannot be said to be tragic.

² It will be argued later that the notion of catharsis can be done away with in a theory of tragedy appropriate to Shakespeare. For the purposes of convenience, however, it is retained for the moment.

these notions themselves are, to an important extent, inter-dependent. For instance, the meaning and significance of peripeteia or anagnorisis will vary according to how hamartia is interpreted. The precise meanings of these age-old concepts, however, are yet to be settled. Our first endeavour, therefore, must be to arrive at a reasonable interpretation of them and thereby to determine what makes a tragic state of affairs tragic.

My rejection of Leech's and Dollimore's theories suggest the direction this discussion will take. In both Leech's and Dollimore's understanding of tragedy, man's relationship with his tragic world is passive. Man simply interacts, in particular ways, with a pre-existent, given state of affairs. On the other hand, in Mason's view that tragedy occurs when man violates the deepest of human bonds, man may be said to play an "active" role in his tragic world since he either brings about or helps to bring about the tragic state of affairs in which he finds himself. As I attempted to argue in the last chapter, the ultimate claim for tragedy is that it reveals man as active in and responsible for his fate. If this is so then a great deal hinges on how the concept of hamartia is interpreted.

Hamartia:

The term hamartia has often been interpreted as "error of judgement," and there is indeed a sense in which the protagonists in Greek tragedy commit errors of judgement.

Oedipus in Oedipus the King and Antigone in Antigone act in the complete conviction that their judgements are sound. Their tragic acts do not involve the kind of agonizing internal conflict that, for instance, Macbeth suffers before the murder of Duncan. Any opposition that they encounter is from others and is always pushed aside as an unreasonable obstacle. The tragic act in Greek tragedy seems to be different from the tragic act in Shakespearean tragedy, and Mason's observations on the nature of the tragic act present a valuable, though not flawless, account of the difference. He rejects the interpretation of hamartia as an error of judgement because it "makes it hard to find room for the sense in which the tragic deed is a guilty act, and it eliminates our feeling of sympathy for the falling hero" (TP, 64).

Mason does not tell us exactly what he means by a "guilty act" as opposed to a non-guilty or innocent act. The characters of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, however, suggest a plausible meaning to the term "guilty" in a guilty act. Macbeth, who is fully aware of the "deep damnation" of killing Duncan, commits an intentionally immoral act. But Lady Macbeth who erroneously believes, at the time of the murder at least, that she is perfectly justified in killing Duncan, is not intentionally immoral. (She is amoral rather than immoral.) Her involvement is, in Mason's terminology, a non-guilty involvement and Macbeth's is a guilty involvement. Thus a guilty act may be said to be an intentionally immoral

act or an act for which the actor assumes moral responsibility. An act based on an error of judgement is not an intentionally immoral act.

One can agree with Mason to this extent: whatever the case might be with Greek tragedy, the Shakespearean hero's tragic act is a guilty one and not therefore a consequence of an error in judgement. Mason, however, overstates his case when he says that non-guilty acts based on errors of judgement eliminate our sympathy for the falling heroes. A hero who falls as a result of an error in judgement does evoke sympathy. But our sympathy for a hero who has committed a guilty act is much different from our sympathy for a hero who has committed a non-guilty act based on an error in judgement. As readers or audience we respond differently to tragic heroes who mulishly persist in turning deaf ears to friends and relatives asking them not to proceed with intended plans than we do to tragic heroes who commit their tragic acts in the agony of the awareness of the immorality of their acts. Because Mason believes that non-guilty acts based on errors of judgement eliminate sympathy for a falling hero, he finds what he takes to be a serious flaw in the Aristotelian notion of tragedy.

His argument runs as follows (if one may assume that by "guilty" he means "intentionally immoral"): Aristotle intends hamartia to mean "error of judgement." An act which is the result of an error in judgement is not an intentionally immoral or guilty act. Only guilty acts arouse sympathy for

the falling hero. Thus an error in judgement entails an elimination of sympathy for the falling hero. However, since sympathy for the falling hero is a crucial element in tragic pity and tragic pity is intrinsic to tragedy, the cause of the tragic act cannot be an error in judgement. This leads Mason to conclude that "Textual fidelity to Aristotle might therefore lead us to abandon the Greeks altogether and to search elsewhere for the law governing the tragic act" (TP, 64). Since the tragic act in Shakespearean tragedy involves an intentional immorality rather than an error in judgement, one must look elsewhere than Aristotle for an adequate notion of "the law governing the tragic act" (TP, 64).

The "elsewhere" that Mason looks to is the notion that he believes underlay the tragic figure and the tragic act long before The Poetics was written. He cites M. J.-P. Vernant who, in his book Mythe et tragédie en Grèce ancienne, states,

By attempting to work out a rational account of the tragic act and to distinguish more clearly the extent to which the hero was responsible for his act, Aristotle showed that he did not know what constituted the tragic figure or tragic feeling.
(TP, 65)

Agreeing with this, Mason argues that the tragic act is a mysterious one of guilt-in-innocence. The tragic protagonist is both innocent and guilty when he commits the tragic act. Since the tragic act is the direct consequence of the protagonist's hamartia, an adequate notion of hamartia must be

one that "gives us the complex of guilt-in-innocence."

Quoting M. Vernant again, Mason puts forth the following view of hamartia:

The word Aristotle uses to describe tragic error, hamartia, is a disease of the mind. The guilty man becomes the prey of an invading madness, and loses his sanity. This guilty blindness, which the Greeks described as ate or Erinys, enters and possesses the individual. He is penetrated through and through as by a malignant religious power. Eventually the victim and his madness in a sense become one, yet the invading power comes from outside and is always larger than the individual attacked. (TP, 72)

From Vernant's interpretation Mason derives the notion of a tragic hero who is "managing quite nicely, thank you" (TP, 66) until the day of the tragedy, when, possessed by an "invading" force, in a fit of madness, he commits the tragic act. The "law governing the tragic act," according to Mason, therefore has two aspects to it. The tragic agent is attacked by an "invading power [that] comes from outside," that is, by an entity external to him, and the tragic act is committed in a fit of out-of-character madness since until he is possessed by the invading force he is "managing quite nicely thank you."

Given Mason's inclination to the metaphysical, it is not surprising that he should be attracted to this quasi-metaphysical view of hamartia. Indeed there is something fascinating about the idea of a man committing a tragic act in the midst of being possessed by a madness. Nor is the idea of an invading force far-fetched. We do on occasion

say "I don't know what came over me" when we act in a manner so unexpected that we surprise even ourselves. Furthermore, an attack by an invading force explains a certain out-of-character madness that seems to characterize, for instance, Oedipus. Mason points out a pertinent observation made by Gilberte Ronnet, namely, that the Oedipus of Oedipus at Colonus has very little in common with the Oedipus of Oedipus the King. Taking particular objection to the fact that the older Oedipus "rejects the act of self-blinding, which now appears pointless" (quoted by Mason, TP, 175), she asks, "Have these two Oedipuses anything in common?" and concludes that "it is impossible to believe that Sophocles ever thought of these two characters as those of one man at different moments of his career" (TP, 175). She continues:

When two plays are found to have been written at an interval of at least ten years and, consequently, have no connection, there is no advantage to be gained by treating any characters in them who bear the same name as if they referred to one and the same person. (TP, 176)

Mason provides a better answer than Ronnet does to her question "Have these two Oedipuses anything in common?" According to his view of hamartia, the self-blinding could very well be explained as a deed performed under the influence of Erinyes. Hence its rejection, years later, as a pointless act when he has recovered from his frenzy. One consequence of this reading would be the shifting of the tragic act from Oedipus' persistent and self-destructive search for an

explanation, to the act of self-blinding. This may not be very desirable, but no obvious inconsistency arises as a result of it. Mason's theory works even better in Antigone's case. Ismene's angry, self-righteous and intimidating sister Antigone in Antigone is not the same sensible and docile young woman of Oedipus at Colonus. Her stubbornness in persistently seeking, what it comes down to in the end, her own death, can quite plausibly be seen as a fit of madness or as an attack by an external force that makes her behave in a manner quite alien to her natural self.

Is there good reason to believe that the concept of hamartia as Erinyes accords with what is found in Shakespeare's tragedies, especially in his major ones? Of these only Hamlet and Macbeth contain symbolic representations of what may be considered an invading force. Mason holds that Macbeth exemplifies his theory very well. He argues that Shakespeare has used the witches as a

... vehicle for presenting the inexplicable mystery of the tragic act in all its aspects, at one time putting all the responsibility on the "daylight" Macbeth, at another suggesting that Macbeth committed his crime in a heavy Scotch mist! (TP, 68)

By "a heavy Scotch mist" Mason means the drugging effect of an Erinyes where Erinyes is the disastrous force that brings ruin to whomever it touches. The witches represent the inexplicable mysteriousness of the tragic act that is partly caused by the invading force that has "momentarily taken

possession of Macbeth's soul.³

For my part I cannot see what is inexplicably mysterious, at least in the sense that Mason means it to be,⁴ about the murder of Duncan. The frenzied emotions that Macbeth experiences at the time of the murder all lie within him. They are the way in which his conscience works: a terrible fear of committing a crime of such profound importance and a lesser fear at being discovered. As for Hamlet, we cannot legitimately claim that his madness, which he sometimes seems to be possessed by, flies to him from the ghost of his father. Hamlet's madness is evident even before he meets the Ghost, for instance in his first soliloquy (I.ii. 129-59). In each of Shakespeare's major tragic heroes, what appears to be an out-of-character frenzy arises in fact from a trait internal to the character, from that very trait that is responsible for the character's downfall. In Othello's passion, so extraordinary that it surprises even Iago, in Lear's extraordinary pride that is offended so easily, in Hamlet's extraordinary capacity for uncontrolled and imperfectly focused emotions, and in the extraordinarily frightening way in which Macbeth's conscience works, we may well see diseases of the mind. But they are diseases that exist very much within the

³ The role of the witches in Macbeth will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter IV.

⁴ That is, a mystery caused by something that lies outside what he calls the "all-inclusive" (TP, 17) world of experience, pervading the world of experience.

protagonists and fully within their characters. They are the characteristic traits that bring the heroes to their tragic ends.

The theory of Erinyes, then, does not work too well with Shakespeare's tragic heroes. It may be appropriate to talk of being attacked by Erinyes in the Greek context. The guilt-in-innocence theory will allow, as Mason points out, Agamemnon to admit he has done wrong and simultaneously claim,

Not I was the cause of this act, but Zeus and [moira] and the Erinyes who walks in darkness: they it was who in the assembly put wild ate in my understanding,⁵ on that day when I arbitrarily took Achilles' prize from him. So what could I do? Deity will always have its way. (See TP, 69)

A disclaimer like this, however, could only heap further shame on a fallen Shakespearean hero. In fact, Leavis' Othello comes very close to embarrassing himself in this manner (Common Pursuit, 150-53).

If Mason had had more to say about the guilt aspect of the guilt-in-innocence complex then we might have salvaged something from his theory of hamartia. The notion of hamartia that we are looking for is one that will do precisely what Mason rejects the Aristotelian reading of tragedy for doing, that is, "distinguish more clearly the extent to which the hero was responsible for his act" (TP, 65). Because Mason has been such an uncertain guide on this point, let us return to Aristotle and look at other translations of the term

⁵ See Appendix I.

"hamartia."

S. H. Butcher translates "hamartia" as "error or frailty" (The Poetics, 45). Mason contends ~~that~~ to translate hamartia as "frailty" is not being honest to the original text and that Bywater's translation of the term as "error of judgement" is "a salutary correction of the version provided by S. H. Butcher" (TP, 62-63). Fyfe points out that "whether Aristotle regards [hamartia] as intellectual or moral has been hotly discussed" (Fyfe, 117), and Mason and Bywater, opting for the intellectual interpretation, choose "error" or "error of judgement." Butcher, on the other hand, seems to perceive unconsciously what Fyfe, who translates hamartia as "flaw", concludes--that hamartia "may cover both senses." Fyfe explains the term as follows:

The hero must not deserve his misfortune, but he must cause it by making a fatal mistake, an error of judgement, which may well involve some imperfection of character but not such as to make us regard him as "morally responsible" for the disasters although they are nevertheless the consequences of the flaw in him, and his wrong decision at the crisis is the inevitable outcome of his character. (Fyfe, 117)

That hamartia does connote a moral sense is made clear in the context in which the term appears. The tragic hero is described as one "who is not pre-eminently virtuous and just, and yet it is through no badness or villainy of his own that he falls into the misfortune, but rather through some [hamartia] in him" (Fyfe, 47). The fall of the hero is thus caused by something that pertains to his virtues or

moral being. Further, as Fyfe (and Butcher) correctly read it, the moral sense connoted by hamartia is a moral failing--"frailty" or "flaw"--rather than an immoral characteristic. However, Fyfe is mistaken in his impression that hamartia "covers both senses" in the way he believes the term covers both senses. It is not that the error in judgement is something that may also involve some imperfection of character. In Aristotle's philosophy an error in judgement is an imperfection of character.

The merging of the intellectual and the moral in hamartia is not, however, the result of an incapability on Aristotle's part to distinguish between the two senses. The conflation seems to be very much part of the Aristotelian mode of thinking. For a similar conflation is evident in his statement that the character will be good, if the choice is good (Fyfe, 55). The "good" in the goodness of character is a moral goodness. But the "good" in the goodness of choice can be either a rational correctness or a moral goodness. The conflation of meaning here is very likely again a deliberate one and not simply an inability to perceive the difference between a rational goodness and a moral goodness. Aristotle's general thought allows us to infer that according to him rational incorrectness or an error in judgement, although not immoral, is a moral failing.

According to Aristotle, then, the tragic act is caused by the moral failing of erring in judgement. Thus, although Mason is right in his instincts to opt for the intellectual

interpretation of hamartia with respect to Aristotle, he is wrong in concluding that Butcher is not being honest to the original text when he translates hamartia as "error or frailty." The moral connotation, as we noted, is certainly there and it is this fact--the fact that hamartia connotes a moral sense--that is most valuable for us. For the downfall of a Shakespearean tragic hero seems to be caused by a moral failing--not the moral failing that Aristotle has in mind, but a moral failing that belongs to man's emotional faculties, for instance, pride or fear or an uncontrolled passion that has no proper objective correlative.⁶ If we follow the dictates of the context in which the term "hamartia" occurs in The Poetics rather than the dictates of Aristotle's general conceptual framework, then we will have a concept that explains the role of a Shakespearean tragic hero in his tragic act. That is to say, if we make use of the fact that hamartia, as it appears in The Poetics, seems more to do with a person's virtues or moral being than his intellectual capacities then we may say that hamartia or "the law governing the tragic act" in Shakespearean tragedy is "moral flaw" or "moral failing."⁷ And a Shakespearean tragic hero brings about his own downfall by succumbing to an internal moral failing when he commits his tragic act. The tragic figure

⁶ See T. S. Eliot's "Hamlet" in Selected Prose, Penguin, 107.

⁷ Needless to say, this is not what Aristotle intends by the term. But in the Shakespearean context the tragic act is caused by a moral flaw rather than an intellectual flaw.

is a morally flawed person and not an immoral person. The tragic hero falls into misfortune, as The Poetics says, not "through some . . . villainy of his own" but "through some flaw in him."

Peripeteia and Anagnorisis:

A complex plot, says Aristotle, involves a change of fortune wherein the change occurs with an anagnorisis (a discovery) and/or peripeteia (reversal). Peripeteia is described as "a change of the situation into the opposite, . . . this change being, . . . probable or inevitable." Aristotle presents the messenger scene in Oedipus the King as an illustration of what he means by peripeteia (Fyfe, 41). Fyfe expands on Aristotle's illustration in a note:

The messenger from Corinth announces the death of Polybus and Oedipus's succession to the throne. Oedipus, feeling now safe from the prophecy that he would murder his father, still fears to return to Corinth, lest he should fulfil the other prophecy and marry his mother. The messenger seeks to reassure him by announcing that Polybus and Merope are not his parents. But the effect of this was to "change the whole situation" for Oedipus by revealing the truth that he had murdered his father, Laius, and married his mother, Jocasta. (Fyfe, 40-41)

From the example it is clear that peripeteia has a much more complex meaning than the apparent simplicity of "an inevitable change of situation into the opposite" would lead us to believe. The interpretation of the term that Bywater attributes to Vahlen and Lock accords better with this

complexity, namely, that peripeteia "is conceived as arising when a man's actions . . . are found to have consequences the direct opposite of what the agent meant or expected" (Bywater, 199).

The Vahlen and Lock interpretation, however, is somewhat ambiguous as it stands. For it is not clear whether the agent whose expectations are thwarted is meant to be the same person as the man in "a man's actions" or not. If this interpretation is read in accordance with Fyfe's expansion of Aristotle's Oedipus example quoted above, then the messenger could very well correspond to "the agent" as opposed to "the man" in "a man's actions" and "the man" would then be Oedipus. This would mean that peripeteia or "change of situation" must necessarily involve an agent of discovery corresponding to the messenger in the Oedipus example. Needless to say, the inclusion of a messenger in one instance of peripeteia is too specific to a particular situation to form part of a general definition. If, however, the Vahlen and Lock reading of the term is revised so that "agent" is the same as the "man" in "a man's actions" then the necessity for a messenger or any other second person is removed and the ambiguity is also removed. The revised and clearer version will become "a man's actions . . . are found to have consequences the direct opposite of what he meant or expected."

This is a much more acceptable interpretation of peripeteia as it applies to Shakespearean tragedy, though it is still not entirely satisfactory. Leech notes two other

interpretations of peripeteia, similar to each other, which, as he says, have "a special effect of marked ironic force" (Tragedy, 64). The first is put forth by F. L. Lucas who asserts that

. . . it is the perpetual tragic irony of the Tragedy of Life that again and again men do thus laboriously contrive their own annihilation, or kill the thing they love . . . when Oedipus runs headlong into the jaws of the very destiny from which he is fleeing; . . . when Othello at last sees himself as the one who has flung away like the ignorant savage the priceless jewel of his happiness; when Macbeth is lured by the equivocations of the devil to make his own perdition sure; when Lear delivers himself into the hands of the two daughters that despise him and torments the only one that loves--all these are peripeteias in the true sense of Aristotle. (Quoted by Leech, T, 62)

Humphrey House adopts a similar view when he says "in the word peripety is contained the idea of the boomerang or recoil effect of one's own actions," (quoted by Leech, T, 62). According to these two views, the notion of peripeteia contains the ironic truth that tragic heroes contrive their own annihilation, and this notion, while, not quite Aristotle's, is especially appropriate to Shakespearean tragedy. More valuable still, Lucas's three examples from Shakespeare suggest much more than a merely physical annihilation. There is an important sense in which each of the three heroes mentioned, along with the one not mentioned, Hamlet, succeeds in contriving his own spiritual as well as physical annihilation. We could think of spiritual annihilation as the throwing away of what is most vital to man. What we see in

Shakespearean tragedy is Othello (as House points out) flinging away the "priceless jewel of his happiness," the fountain-spring of his very being (IV.ii., 60). We see Macbeth and Hamlet and Lear flinging away their "eternal jewel." It is this notion of peripeteia, then--a reversal in which the tragic hero contrives his own annihilation, spiritual as well as physical--that seems to capture best what goes on in the major Shakespearean tragedies, and I will test it in detail against Macbeth in Chapter IV.

As to the second aspect of a complex plot, namely, anagnorisis, Aristotle says that this is "a change from ignorance to knowledge, producing either friendship or hatred in those who are destined for good fortune or ill" (Fyfe, 41).⁸ One might ask why the definition of anagnorisis does not simply state that it is a change from ignorance to knowledge, resulting in the hero's good or ill fortune. However, the mention of Friendship and hatred, or in Bywater's translation, love and hate, distinguishes the kind of discovery that is pertinent to tragedy. It is not a scientific or a philosophical discovery, but a discovery that effects an emotional response. To be even more specific, it is a discovery that not only has to do entirely with human relationships but that also evokes love or hatred. The inclusion of "love or hate" in a definition of anagnorisis is therefore, a necessary one.

⁸ See Appendix II.

Aristotle lists various kinds of discoveries, both artistic as well as inartistic ones, that are found in tragedies. The best kind of anagnorisis, he proposes, "is the discovery which is brought about directly by the incidents" (Fyfe, 63), and he cites the scene in Oedipus as an example of this kind of discovery. The example once again reveals that more is involved in the notion of anagnorisis than what is made clear in Aristotle's definition itself. Anagnorisis in tragedy is not simply a movement from any ignorance to any knowledge but from an ignorance of oneself to a knowledge of oneself. Anagnorisis is thus a self-discovery or a self-realization. Oedipus discovers the whole truth about himself. Leech, enlarging on this, calls the discovery a realization of the unthinkable--the kind of realization a man makes in his last moment of consciousness (T, 65-66). It is doubtless risky to speculate on what exactly passes through the mind of a man in his last moment of consciousness. Nevertheless, it would not be unwarranted to assume that if it is a self-realization then it must be such that one, stripped of all one's layers of self-deceptions, sees oneself in one's complete and painful nakedness. Bearing in mind what was said about peripeteia, namely, that it is a bringing about of one's own spiritual and physical annihilation, we may say that tragic anagnorisis consists of the tragic hero's discovery of the unthinkable truth that he has brought about his own spiritual death. It is a discovery that involves a recognition which is, as Leech puts it,

"most painfully and most humiliatingly achieved" (T, 69), as when the proud soul of Othello discovers what he has reduced himself to. This noble soldier has to recognize and acknowledge that he has become no better than the "circumsized dog" that he despises.

In the Shakespearean context, then, peripeteia and anagnorisis are to be understood as follows: peripeteia is a reversal of fortune where a man's actions are found to have consequences that are the direct opposite of what he meant or expected, and where this discovery brings about an ultimate self-caused annihilation; and anagnorisis is a change from ignorance to knowledge where a man tragically discovers the unthinkable truth that he has brought about his own physical and spiritual death.

It is worth noting at this point that insofar as Shakespearean tragedy is concerned, to understand hamartia as an external force responsible for the tragic act would entail changing the significance of both peripeteia and anagnorisis, for they would no longer affirm that a man's tragic situation is unexpectedly brought about by his own actions. If there is an Erinyes that is even partly responsible for, for example, Othello's change of fortune, then he could have claimed, as does Agamemnon over Iphigeneia, that Desdemona's death had to be. What could he do, since the gods would always have their way? That is to say, his discovery would be neither painful nor humiliating. It may be objected that the realization that one is powerless in

the hands of the gods is painful and teaches one humility.

But Agamemnon's words--

Not I was the cause of this act, but Zeus and
[moira] and the Erinyes who walks in darkness: they
it was who in the assembly put wild ate in my
understanding, on that day when I arbitrarily took
Achilles' prize from him. So what could I do?
Deity will always have its way. . . . (See Mason,
TP, 69)

are barely expressive of the deep agony and the complete
humiliation, both in his own eyes and in those of his fellow
men, that Othello suffers in his dying speech:

. . . then must you speak
. . . of one whose hand,
Like the base Indian, threw a pearl away,
Richer than all his tribe: of one whose subdued eyes,
Albeit unused to the melting mood,
Drops tears as fast as the Arabian trees
Their medicinal gum; set you down this,
And say besides, that in Aleppo once,
Where a malignant and a turban'd Turk
Beat a Venetian, and tradu'd the state,
I took by the throat the circumcised dog,
And smote him thus. (V.ii. 344-57)

His last words are

I kiss'd thee ere I kill'd thee, no way but this,
Killing myself, to die upon a kiss. (V.ii. 359-60)

The Shakespearean tragic hero here blames not even Iago
for the death of Desdemona. He knows that in killing his
pearl, he has also killed the fountain-spring of his inner-
most being. Othello has died long before he stabs himself;
he has died even as he stifled the life out of Desdemona.

Lastly, Aristotle's assertion that "a discovery is most effective when it coincides with reversals" (Fyfe, 41) still holds. He wisely refrains from mentioning any specific point in the play at which they must occur. We may then safely infer that there is no specific point at which they must happen. In Macbeth their occurrence is a process, beginning in the first act and reaching its completion in the last. In Othello, it happens swiftly, exploding in the last act.

CHAPTER III

THE TRAGIC WORLD (2)

So far we have looked at the more formal side of tragedy. Aristotle points out that the structure of tragedy, apart from being complex, "should be . . . one that represents incidents arousing fear and pity" (Fyfe, 45). In parenthesis he adds that fear and pity are "peculiar to this form of art" (Fyfe, 45). In other words, what is peculiar to tragedy is that the emotional involvement of the audience is also one of its defining elements. Tragedy is defined partly in terms of its emotive effects, that is, fear and pity, and in turn, the arousal of fear and pity in works of art is made exclusive to tragedy. In this chapter I will examine these emotive constituents of the definition of Shakespearean tragedy.

It is interesting to note that later notions of the two terms fall short of explaining what is found in Shakespearean tragedy, while Aristotle's notion, although it needs to be filled out, pinpoints the nature of tragic pity and tragic fear with surprising precision. Pity, says Aristotle, is "for the man who does not deserve his misfortune" (Fyfe, 45-47), and fear is "for the man who is like ourselves" (Fyfe, 47). I will look at tragic pity first because it will have an important and direct bearing on what I will say about tragic fear.

Pity:

J. V. Cunningham posits that woe is the ground of pity, ("Woe and Wonder," 147). Observing that "woe is not precisely pity" but that "it is the more general term, of which pity is a species", he holds that "pity denotes . . . the relationship of the spectator to the catastrophe . . . [where] the nature of the catastrophe . . . is woeful" ("WW," 148). In other words, "catastrophe is sorrowful and naturally begets pity" ("WW," 148).

All this is quite true, but it does not really tell us much about the nature of tragic pity. I have argued that the relationship between tragedy and suffering is one of implication and not entailment. That is to say, all that is sorrowful is not tragic, although all that is tragic is sorrowful. Since all that is sorrowful begets pity, the distinction between the sorrowful and the tragic calls for a distinction between pity and tragic pity. Only certain kinds of sorrowful events beget tragic pity. Our problem, then, is to delineate the kinds of sorrowful events that will arouse tragic pity. Cunningham provides a convenient place for us to start. Catastrophic events, he suggests, produce tragic pity, and events become catastrophic when they involve a great deal of suffering. His formulation, however, encompasses much too much. One might refer to an air-disaster that leaves no survivors as a terrible tragedy. Yet there is a distinction between an air disaster that could have been avoided, for instance by proper upkeep of the aeroplane,

and an air disaster that could not have been avoided, because it was caused, say, by a bird having accidentally been sucked into the air-shaft. Both events are equally catastrophic and beget pity. But a catastrophe caused by human negligence evokes a pity that is intermingled with an anger at the terrible injustice of the situation. Our response to the catastrophe caused by negligence is much closer to our response to a dramatic tragedy than our response to an accidental catastrophe is, though the accidental catastrophe is equally terrible. The difference seems to turn on the notion of justice. Our sense of justice is offended by the thought of innocent people paying for the negligence of one man, and it is offended in a way that it is not offended by the thought of innocent people dying as a result of a bird's being sucked into the air-shaft of the aeroplane. Our offended sense of justice arouses anger on behalf of, and with it, pity for the passive sufferers.

Does tragic pity have something to do, then, with passive suffering? Mason's thought-provoking analysis of pathos in tragedy insists on precisely this. He contends that tragic pity is pity for passive suffering¹ and points out that "what arouses tragic pity is not the fate of the fighters in wars but the fate of those who are war's helpless

¹ It is true that Mason's words, namely, "allowing passive suffering to be included among the heights of tragedy" (TP, 137) in themselves do not posit that tragic pity is pity for passive suffering. But one of his concluding remarks, that is, "I end by seeing the pathetic tragic victim as a true tragic agent" (TP, 162), allows us to justifiably infer the view.

victims" (TP, 136), that is, the fate of those innocent victims of another man's frailties.

Mason is right. Cordelia, Ophelia and Desdemona arouse the kind of pity that is called tragic pity, and the death of Young Siward, who dies fighting as a soldier for his lawful king in Macbeth, does not. Mason's view, however, is not wholly satisfactory. His observation does not explain the terrible pity aroused by the agony of the man who suffers his realization that he is responsible for the suffering of the innocent, for instance the person responsible for the upkeep of the doomed aeroplane. It is painful to watch as helpless spectators the passive suffering of a Cordelia or an Ophelia or a Desdemona, and the pity that the spectacle arouses is an important element in the plays in question. But it is even more painful to watch, again as helpless spectators, the suffering of Lear, Hamlet and Othello when they realize their own roles in bringing about the tragic fate of their loved ones.

The case of Macbeth is particularly interesting from this point of view. There is no single character in the play who suffers passively, and evokes pity the way Cordelia, Ophelia and Desdemona do. Lady Macduff and her son are passive sufferers, and they are ultimately helpless in the hands of their fate. But unlike Cordelia, Ophelia or Desdemona, they do not submit to their fate without a valiant fight:

Mur. Where is your husband?

L. Macd. I hope, in no place so unsanctified,

Where such as thou may'st find him.

Mur.

He's a traitor.

Son. Thou liest, thou shag-hair'd villain!

(IV.ii. 79-82)

And there is nothing in their dying words that parallels, for instance, Desdemona's dying words, "Nobody, I myself, farewell" (V.ii. 125), in response to Emilia's question, "O, who has done this deed?" (V.ii. 124). It is Macbeth, terrifying though he is, who elicits that compassion that we call tragic pity. Indeed despite the savagery of the slaughter of innocent Lady Macduff and her son, Macbeth, as the hunted victim of the tragic fate he has brought upon himself, seems ultimately the more pitiable.

When Mason says that tragic pity is pity for the passively suffering, he does not intend to exclude sympathy for the falling hero. His theory of hamartia makes the hero partly innocent, and as a result his suffering becomes partly passive, for he becomes a helpless victim in the power of Erinyes. Nevertheless, his notion of pity is inadequate to our purposes here. Hamartia as Erinyes, we have seen, does not apply in the Shakespearean context, and therefore, to limit tragic pity to pity for the passive sufferers is in effect to exclude the tragic hero. Besides, Mason's theory has an inner inconsistency. He has argued that we have sympathy for the falling hero because that hero has committed a guilty act, and this proposition implies that that aspect of the suffering of the tragic hero that is not passive arouses tragic pity.

Aristotle's notion of tragic pity provides a corrective to Mason's view. Tragic pity in The Poetics is pity "for the man who does not deserve his misfortune" (Fyfe, 45-47). Although Aristotle does not include passive sufferers in his definition,² his definition can be extended to encompass both passive suffering, since passive sufferers also do not deserve their misfortune, and suffering due to guilt. Shakespearean tragedy includes not only the guilty suffering of the better rather than the worse tragic hero, but also the guilty sufferings of the worthy as well as the bad tragic heroes. Regarding the latter, that is, the bad tragic heroes, Aristotle's claim that "the passing of a thoroughly bad man from good fortune to bad fortune . . . might satisfy our feelings but . . . arouses neither pity nor fear" (Fyfe, 45) is not entirely appropriate for Shakespeare, as Richard III and Macbeth both demonstrate. Far from satisfying our feelings (presumably for revenge), both Richard III and Macbeth, when they meet their final moments, evoke the same

² There is no indication whatsoever that Aristotle means to include passive sufferers in his definition. Tragic pity in Aristotle is reserved for the man who is "not preeminently virtuous and just, and yet . . . through no badness or villainy of his own . . . he falls into the misfortune . . . through some flaw in him" (Fyfe, 47). This does not mean that Aristotle fails to include something which he should have. For it is not clear whether Greek plays contain characters corresponding to Desdemona or Ophelia. Mason examines the character of Cassandra in Agamemnon to elucidate his theory with reference to Greek tragedy (TP, 151-52). But a woman madly dancing around in a fit of deranged celebration because, as Mason himself points out, "in marrying [Agamemnon] she would be bringing ruin down the whole House of Atreus" (TP, 152), somehow does not fit the image of a

terrible pity and fear that is evoked when Lear and Othello meet their final moments. Also from the point of view of the spectator, Shakespeare reveals his insightful understanding of human psychology when he shows us that however villainous a person may be, there is a natural distaste to take pleasure in the terror of a lone man, trapped and hunted by several others who will not stop at anything of his bloody death. Instead of applauding the villain's deserved death, the spectator responds in instinctive sympathy. It is hard to imagine, for instance, a villain more villainous and deserving of death than Shakespeare's Richard III. And yet when the man, fighting alone and desperate on foot as if he were an army in himself, refusing to withdraw, cries out in hopeless agony for a horse in exchange for his kingdom (V.iv), we, as audience, rather than take pleasure in this villain's agony, respond to his need. Fearing for his life, we despair with him.

With regard to worthy tragic heroes, Aristotle's claim that a worthy man's passing from good to bad fortune "does not arouse fear or pity but shocks our feelings" (Fyfe, 45) has no real grounds to rest on. In the first place, the implication that a calamity must either shock or arouse fear and pity is quite unacceptable! All calamities are shocking; but this does not in itself prevent some from arousing tragic

passive sufferer. Thus Aristotle may or may not have been completely correct in his definition of tragic pity insofar as Greek tragedy is concerned. But when we speak of tragic pity in Shakespeare, an extended version of his definition becomes necessary.

pity and fear. In the second place, worthy men, in Shakespeare at any rate, do in fact raise pity and fear when they pass from good to bad fortune; for it is Shakespeare's greatness that he not only sees no man so unworthy and villainous as to deserve a tragic misfortune, but he also sees no man so worthy as to be always free of moral frailty." This immediately raises the further question of whether there is any justification for maintaining a distinction between men who are worthy but, at the same time, not always free of moral frailty and men who are not preeminently virtuous but whose fall is not caused by any villainy in them. The distinction, it could be objected, is so hazy as to be negligible. Once again, however, I believe there is a distinction and, as usual, there is no better place to look for evidence than in Shakespeare's plays themselves.

Othello is a worthy man in the sense that King Lear is not.³ When Othello claims that he is not easily jealous he speaks the truth. Othello is not a Leontes: there is an outside influence that inspires his jealousy, there is no trusted voice of reason like Camillo's to deplore it, and there is no sudden fall into jealousy, but a temptation that lasts from the third scene of the third ~~act~~ to line 196 of Act IV, scene i ("I will chop her into messes . . . Cuckold me!"). Indeed, Othello is not simply better rather than

³ An excellent case can be made to show that Hamlet is also more "worthy" than merely "not preeminently virtuous". But for present purposes citing one instance of a "worthy" tragic hero is sufficient.

worse than most men, but one of the best. The most respected men in Venice, the seat of European culture, hold him in the highest esteem; Cassio's feeling for him is close to veneration; Desdemona, a paragon of women, loves him; even Iago, for all his hatred, admires him in secret. Whereas Lear is the perfect example of a man who is not preeminently virtuous but who does not fall as a result of some badness or villainy in him, it is not so easy to describe Othello as not a preeminently virtuous person. It is not so easy simply because he is preeminently virtuous.

It is this phrase, "preeminently virtuous," that distinguishes Othello from Lear. There is no external influence, diabolic or not, to initiate Lear's anger. Then, despite Kent, who quite clearly has only the King's interests at heart, and who tries to reason with him, Lear rushes headlong into making his fatal mistake. Finally, his pride is so great that he succumbs to words that even an onlooker can recognize as nothing more than flattery, and rejects Cordelia's honest answer, all within a matter of a few lines (I.i. 57-110). This is not to denigrate Lear's character. Lear is a good man, and Shakespeare presents him as a good enough king to have secured the absolute loyalty and affection of men like Kent and Gloucester and to have secured the love of Cordelia. But if we may speak in terms of levels of virtue, then there is a distinct difference in level between Othello and Lear. The former is a worthy man who on one, albeit fatal, occasion reveals a moral frailty, and the latter is a

man, not preeminently virtuous, but whose fall was not the result of some villainy in him. In this qualified sense of "worthy" as "preeminently virtuous," then, worthy men passing from good to bad fortune are also included amongst Shakespeare's tragic heroes. Thus in Shakespearean tragedy, any man, good (for example, Othello), bad (for example, Macbeth) or otherwise (for example, Lear), when he suffers tragic misfortune, is capable of arousing tragic pity, since no man deserves such a misfortune. The range of objects of tragic pity is thus much wider in Shakespeare than what Aristotle will allow. However, Aristotle's definition of pity itself, that it is "for the man who does not deserve his misfortune," succinctly expresses the nature of pity in tragedy.

Fear:

The Poetics states that fear in tragedy is "for the man who is like ourselves" (Fyfe, 47). Aristotle distinguishes fear and pity in terms of their relational properties, and in doing so he shows surprising perceptiveness into the nature of human emotion. Whereas pity is an emotion that relates (more often than not) two objects, in that we feel pity for another, fear is an emotion that is non-relational, in the sense that it is always an emotion that is directed towards ourselves. On those occasions when we speak of fear for another it is in fact an empathetic or sympathetic feeling. We say that we fear for the other because in that moment of fear, we feel the other is ourselves. That is, we fear for

another as if we fear for ourselves, in that we are afraid because we feel that what is happening to the other is happening to us. It is in this sense that we are to understand the "man like ourselves" of Aristotle's definition. Literary works have the capacity to take the reader or spectator into the very hearts, minds and souls of the characters they concern themselves with. And it is thus that tragedy can arouse the terrible fear it does--since it deals with frightening calamities. This explains the seemingly strange phenomenon, that the spectator is afraid for a tragic protagonist even when the protagonist is the very person to be feared. We are afraid for Macbeth, for instance, because Shakespeare has taken us into the depths of his heart and soul. We want to protect the hunted man because we feel as if we are the hunted. Whereas we feel pity for Macbeth; his terror becomes our terror.

Fear in tragedy differs from pity in that there are not different kinds of fear such that we may distinguish a "tragic fear" from other "fears." J. V. Cunningham contends that the concept of wonder is intimately related to fear in tragedy: "Wonder is . . . the result of a surprising and unexpected turn in events, and is thus intimately involved in the tragic catastrophe and its proper effect" ("WW," 194). It is clear that Cunningham has derived his views from the following remarks made by Aristotle: ". . . tragedy represents . . . incidents that cause fear and pity, and this happens most of all when the incidents are unexpected and yet one is

the consequence of the other. ~~For~~ in that way the incidents will cause more amazement" (Fyfe, 39).

Cunningham holds that "the relation of wonder to fear is similar to that of pity to sorrow" ("WW," 149).

However, this is not quite true. Since, according to him, sorrow begets pity ("WW," 148), wonder must similarly beget fear. It appears that he derives the proposition (1) "wondrous or amazing incidents are also fearful" from the two propositions (2) "fearful incidents are also unexpected" and (3) "unexpected incidents are also wondrous or amazing". However, it is impossible to derive (1) from (2) and (3) without committing a serious logical fallacy. The propositions, expressed in their hypothetical equivalents, "if fearful then unexpected" and "if unexpected then amazing" do not imply "if amazing then fearful," although they do imply "if fearful then amazing." In the same way that tragic pity implies sorrow but all that is sorrowful does not imply tragic pity, fear implies wonder or amazement, but all that is wondrous or amazing does not imply fear. Now there is no obvious difficulty in accepting that fearful incidents are also amazing. But Cunningham's implication that the compound of amazement and fear somehow defines "tragic fear" as opposed to other kinds of "fears" is mistaken. Popular horror fiction, whose sole purpose is to arouse fear, also contains the same element of the wondrous or the amazing; that is, it contains extraordinary incidents that serve to fascinate rather than repel its readers. The difference is that

tragedy offers more profound reasons for fear, as it does in the terror that Macbeth experiences when he knows he is going against his conscience, or in the terror he experiences when he realizes that he is a doomed man and there is no escaping the consequences of his tragic act. However, the fear itself is no more profound, and thus "different" than the fear aroused by horror fiction. The means of evocation may be different in that fear in tragedy is evoked in (to borrow Aristotle's language) a more "artistic" manner. As Aristotle says, fear that is aroused by spectacle is "inartistic" and the effect of such spectacle "is not fearful but merely monstrous [having] nothing in common with tragedy" (Fyfe, 49-51).

Fear in tragic works as stipulated in The Poetics is, therefore, particularly suitable to Shakespearean tragedy. The statement that fear is for the man who is like ourselves, that is, fear that is felt as if it is for ourselves, explains why we feel fear for protagonists like Macbeth or Othello even when they are the persons to be feared. Further, fear in tragedy engenders wonder or amazement so that rather than be repelled by say, the appearance of Hamlet's father's ghost or Othello's insane jealousy, we are held in fascination by these phenomena. And in the presentation of fearsome scenes, Shakespeare is indeed a master in his "artistic" touch. Just as Macbeth reports on the execution of the most heinous of crimes in five simple words "I have done the deed" (II.ii. 14), so does Shakespeare

present even the most monstrous of events--quietly, quickly, without recourse to the spectacular. For instance, the killing of Desdemona is over almost before it begins. She dies, very quickly and very quietly, so that Emilia's loudness almost seems an intrusion on a scene which strangely demands silence. Or again, in the terrible scene in Hamlet where four of the play's main characters are killed, the characters are killed in quick succession without being subjected to any prolonged melodramatic histrionics. Aristotle's definition of fear, then, accords well with what is found in Shakespearean tragedy.

One last point must be raised. Whenever the emotive content of tragedy is mentioned in The Poetics, Aristotle always refers to pity and fear as a single unit.⁴ This fact has given rise to a mistaken impression that Aristotle means to imply a balance between pity and fear in any tragic play. Leech points out that this question of balance between pity and fear is an invention by I. A. Richards and that "Aristotle never argued that pity and fear balanced one another" (T, 56). Leech is quite right. Nowhere in The Poetics is there any mention of balance between the two emotions. Nor is there a balance between the two in Shakespeare's tragedies. We find that sometimes, without any loss to the tragic impact, one emotion rather than the other can dominate a whole play.

⁴ There is only one occasion where each emotion is spoken of individually and this is when they are defined. That is, when pity is said to be aroused by the man who does not deserve his misfortune and fear by the man who is like ourselves.

Both fear and pity are evoked in Macbeth and King Lear, and powerfully so, but in Macbeth the fear surpasses the pity, and in King Lear, the pity surpasses the fear.

Catharsis:

According to Aristotle, the function of tragedy is to arouse pity and fear in order that we may be purged of these emotions. He says, "through pity and fear tragedy effects relief to these and similar emotions" (Fyfe, 23). The notion of catharsis has been accepted, as Aristotle intends it to be, as the very soul of tragedy, as the quality without which tragedy cannot exist. Aristotle fixes on what becomes of our pity and fear in tragedy, and in doing this he points us just where we should be pointed: toward the note of enhanced life on which tragedies resolve themselves. But he has also made the way difficult for us, because it is hard to support the notion of catharsis as purgation. Why, we may justifiably ask, do we need to be purged of tragic pity and fear for another being--and if tragedy is said to contain truth claims about the world then why do we need to be purged of tragic pity and fear for mankind itself? Surely, such emotions need to be retained rather than purged from us. Moreover, as spectators, we find that a tragic play, far from leaving one with a feeling of "all passions spent" leaves one with, as Leavis puts it, a feeling of exaltation (Common Pursuit, 127).

moves to the general, and it becomes an awe for the tragedy of mankind itself. The experience at the close of a Shakespearean tragedy has another element, one that is lacking in the final experience of say, The Death of a Salesman. The latter leaves one in a state of oppressive sadness that arises out of the realization that perhaps man's condition in this world is perennially melancholic, perennially hopeless. Shakespeare, on the other hand, presents devastating calamities--calamities that man can blame nobody for but himself. But the final moment is always one of hope of a new future. Men may destroy themselves but there is always new life to replace them. It is not so much that new life is generated out of the old one as that it comes into being simply because it is the nature of existence that it does. It is the nature of existence that mankind is given not merely a second chance but a third and a fourth and a fifth right up to the Nth chance. Thus the feeling of exaltation is a feeling of great sadness and awe for mankind, mixed with a sense of hope that life is greater than any drive towards self-destruction. That there is so much greatness and vitality in the character destroyed that despite his destruction life is vindicated.⁵ Now it is quite true that sometimes tragic

⁵ I do not mean to imply what Leavis seems to when he quotes from D. W. Harding's The Poetry of Isaac Rosenberg--that "the value of what has been destroyed seemed . . . to have brought into sight only by destruction" (CP, 132). The idea I am proposing is the idea (which incidently Leavis accepts as part of the same view quoted above) that the feeling of hope springs from the sense of man being allowed to "be new-born into a new situation" (CP, 133).

plays leave us subdued. But this is because the power of tragic emotion shakes us to the very core before the sense of exaltation creeps in. To talk of catharsis as a simple purging of emotion seems, therefore, wrong.

Leech proposes a more sophisticated interpretation of catharsis by invoking the notion of sacrifice (T, 51-55). He suggests that the tragic protagonist becomes a sacrificial scapegoat and takes on the suffering and sins of mankind, thereby purging mankind of its sins. But, he adds, this kind of cathartic process--heaping our own sins on another--is also repulsive to the spectator. Hence, we experience catharsis only to reject it.

The view is interesting but not convincing. It is interesting because it enhances the feelings of pity and fear in catharsis, for one can only feel a tremendous pity and a terrible fear for the man who has sacrificed himself and who has sacrificed himself for others, that is, by extension for us. On the other hand, Leech's interpretation is dubious when considered from the point of view of the spectator. Does the spectator in fact perceive the tragic protagonist as a scapegoat for the spectator's own sins? Leech sees Lear's death as "an emblem of our deaths, his madness of the frenzy that we too, from time to time, know, his rejection of Cordelia of the rejections that we have made" (T, 51) and hence "the king has suffered and died for us" (T, 51). In other words, we identify ourselves with a tragic hero, seeing in him the same sins that exist within

us. And when he is destroyed for his sins, we see him as also being destroyed for ours, and he thus purges or purifies us of our sins. But is this really how we respond to Shakespeare's tragedies? Is not the Shakespearean tragic hero too grand, too huge a person for us to project ourselves on to? We, as individual souls, may identify ourselves with his fears or with him as an object of pity or even with him in his failings. But surely not in those large, awesome, heroic qualities, where even his tragic act is of an immense proportion, qualities that set him apart from us and make it possible for him to represent the soul of humanity itself rather than individual souls? Even if Leech were granted his scapegoat ritual, it is difficult to understand what the significance of this cathartic process is, if one experiences it only to reject it. We may safely assume that no suitable explanation will be forthcoming.

The notion of catharsis in terms of a sacrificial cleansing is, therefore, not very satisfactory. Nor is the original Aristotelian view of catharsis as a purgation of pity and fear, for if we believe that tragic emotions are valuable in themselves then catharsis as a purgation of these emotions negates something very significant to tragedy. It seems better therefore not to talk of the function of tragedy as a purging of emotions but to talk instead of the effect of tragedy, that is, its effect of leaving the spectator in a profound sense of exaltation.

To recapitulate: I have argued that any definition of tragedy must include analyses of both the tragic state of affairs and man's function in that tragic state of affairs. In the last two chapters I have argued that the tragic state of affairs or the tragic world that is found in Shakespearean tragedy is one where man destroys himself and is responsible for his own destruction. The great irony of man's tragic situation is that he believes that a particular act that he commits is the only way in which he can bring about a better state of affairs than the one he is in. But the act is in fact a tragic act, resulting in devastating consequences for himself. The tragic world is also a world of self-discovery, however, a painful and humiliating discovery whereby man learns that he has himself destroyed his very being. It is, therefore, a frightening world of terrible suffering that evokes terror as well as a great pity for the tragic condition of man.

My definition remains within the scope provided by Aristotle's principles of tragedy in The Poetics, though Aristotle has to be interpreted and expanded in order to accommodate Shakespearean tragedy. The exercise has interestingly brought to light the interdependency of the meanings of the terms hamartia, peripetia, anagnorisis, tragic pity and fear. If peripeteia and anagnorisis are to be interpreted in terms of a self-caused annihilation, then hamartia, as the cause of the tragic act, must have wholly to do with the moral being of the tragic hero. And if hamartia is to

exclude an invading force and to be interpreted in terms of the moral character of the hero, then peripeteia and anagnorisis must involve a bringing about of one's own tragic situation. The pity and the fear for the hero's capacity for, and determined drive towards, annihilation ultimately become a deep compassion and awe when the hero tragically realizes that his destruction is self-caused. Thus the ultimate feeling at the close of a tragic play is not one of being purged but one of exaltation.

CHAPTER IV

MAN'S FUNCTION IN THE TRAGIC WORLD (1)

The second part of the definition of tragedy concerns man's function in his tragic world and how his relationship to that world yields a general truth about mankind. I have proposed two different views--Dollimore's and Mason's--as plausible descriptions of the way in which a Shakespearean hero functions in his tragic world. I would like now to return to them, beginning with Dollimore's view that man becomes dislocated when he is faced with a dislocated world.

Dollimore argues that in Jacobean and Elizabethan tragedy, suffering is not endured through stoicism. Dollimore illustrates his argument by citing Marston's Antonio's Revenge. Here, he says, "stoicism is a position precariously attained and incapable of being maintained; attitudes of stoical resistance simply break down" (RF, 31). He denies not that the tragic hero is inclined to bear his grief stoically but that the hero is able to maintain his stoic strength. Nor does he deny, as Mason does, that the hero is a stoic in a stoic universe. If we were to borrow from Mason's imagery, we would describe Dollimore's picture of the tragic soul as a solid, metallic spheroid falling apart when it bumps into another object, thereby revealing that it was not very solid in the first place.¹ Dollimore can thus

¹ The image of a tragic soul presented by Mason is couched in poetic language but appropriately so. He says

arrive at his conclusion that a tragic hero becomes dislocated when he confronts a dislocated world. Although Dollimore points to only Antonio's Revenge and Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida as illustrations of this thesis, the thesis could be cogently argued with reference to much more important works. Hamlet is the best example: a vision of a dislocated society and questions about how it can dislocate an individual are presented as early as the first act. Hamlet says of a particular Danish custom that it should be "more honoured in the breach than the observance" (I.iv.16). In response to Horatio's question he explains what "this heavy-headed revel" is, in which the king himself takes part:

The king doth wake tonight and takes his rouse,
Keeps wassail, and the swaggering up-spring reels,
And as he drains his draughts of Rhenish down,
The kettle-drum and trumpet thus bray out
The triumph of his pledge. (I.iv. 8-12)

Night-time carousing, regardless of whether it is ceremonious or not, with riotous dancing and draining draughts of Rhenish wine, whilst kettle-drums and trumpets bray out an honour to this important event of drinking, is hardly the image of a well-integrated and wholesome society. Soon afterwards he meets the ghost of his father. He is horrified because the appearance of his father's ghost means that the order of things has been upset terribly. "Tell," he cries to the Ghost,

that the traditional concept of a tragic soul as a stoic resisting even the greatest of misfortunes brings to his mind a soul that is a solid, metallic spheroid floating through space, occasionally bumping into other heavier and more solid

Why thy canonised bones, hearsèd in death,
 Have burst their cerements; why the sepulchre,
 Wherein we saw thee quietly enurned,
 Hath oped his pondrous and marble jaws
 To cast thee up again. What may this mean,
 That thou, dead corse, again in complete steel
 Revisits thus the glimpses of the moon,
 Making night hideous, and we fools of nature
 So horridly to shake our disposition
 With thought beyond the reaches of our souls?
 (I.iv. 46-56)

The unnatural rising of the canonized bones of Hamlet's father, which has shaken the very roots of nature's fools, suggests that natural order in the world has been disrupted and that the world has fallen apart and become disordered. In the light of this, Hamlet's earlier observation takes on a new meaning:

That it should come to this!
 But two months dead--nay not so much, not two--
 So excellent a king, that was to this
 Hyperion to a satyr, so loving to my mother
 That he might not beteem the winds of heaven
 Visit her face too roughly--heaven and earth,
 Must I remember? Why she would hang on him
 As if increase of appetite had grown
 By what it fed on, and yet within a month--
 Let me not think on't; frailty, thy name is woman--
 . . . --married with my uncle,
 My father's brother, but no more like my father
 Than I to Hercules--within a month,
 Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
 Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,
 She married. Oh most wicked speed, to post
 With such dexterity to incestuous sheets.
 (I.ii. 137-57)

Hamlet has been thrown into this disjointed world and is confined there. The experience disrupts him enough that he

objects but remaining untouched. In contrast his own vision of a tragic soul is one that is wholly porous and sensitive, so that when it bumps into another object the impact seeps through to its very centre.

contemplates suicide:

O that this too too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew,
Or that the Everlasting had not fixed
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter. (I.ii. 129-32)

On hearing that his uncle, Claudius, has poisoned his father, Hamlet is more than just agitated. His almost non-sensical words provoke Horatio into saying "These are but wild and whirling words, my lord" (I.v. 133). Hamlet's response is to over-react--"I'm sorry they offend you, heartily,/Yes faith, heartily" (I.v. 134). Hamlet's language gets wilder and wilder--"Ha, ha, boy, sayst thou so? art thou there truepenny?" (I.v. 150), he cries boisterously to his father's ghost. He calls him an "old mole" (I.v. 161)--hardly a respectful way of addressing the spirit of one's father! Hamlet, then, is well and truly on his way to becoming dislocated. The rest of the play deals with the various stages of the disruption of the tragic soul until it culminates in disaster.

Lear and Othello could contain material that might support Dollimore's view. The society in which Lear has to function is, as Gloucester puts it, "one where

Love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide:
in cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in
palaces, treason; and the bond crack'd 'twixt son
and father. (I.ii. 103-106)

It is a world which contains "machinations, hollowness, treachery, and all ruinous disorders" (I.ii. 109-110). To

function in such a world, Lear has to break, and thus he "falls from the bias of nature" (I.ii. 108). He turns against his child and banishes a "noble and true-hearted" man like Kent. And for what?--for honesty! (I.ii. 108-109 and 113-14). The rest of this play takes us through various stages of Lear's dislocation until the culmination in disaster.

Othello's dislocated society is described by the character of Iago. It could be said that the play reveals an interesting geographic and cultural opposition between Venice and Turkey, where Venice, the seat of European culture, may be said to contain all that is sophisticated and ordered. However, the sophistication and order is on the surface only. Unknown to most there is an internal disintegration, fostered by Iago, that is taking place. We see the first signs of it in the distraction and irrationality of Brabantio who is a respected citizen of Venice. We cannot help thinking that if the poor man had not been wakened up and been frightened in the middle of the night by Iago, Brabantio may have been less conspicuously distracted and irrational. Then the dull-headed Roderigo, a member of the upper class, that is, one of the maintainers of the sophisticated order and culture, can hardly be said to be either cultured or sophisticated, and the suggestion is that neither attribute in fact applies to the upper classes. Iago not only initiates and encourages Roderigo's foolishness but also directs the dull fellow's actions. Finally, there is Iago himself, filled with malice,

who neither respects nor loves anybody, who has only hate and envy for his superiors and contempt for his subordinates. There is also the remark about Venetian ladies who "let God see the pranks/ They dare not show their husbands." Here again Venice is shown to contain an outwardly sophisticated but internally corrupt society. On coming face to face with Iago's malice and this feature of the ladies of Venice, Othello begins to disintegrate and continues to do so till the final complete collapse.

Macbeth, in contrast, does not fit Dollimore's theory very neatly. To make Macbeth out as a character dislocated by a dislocated world, the dislocated world must be limited to the witches and the character of Lady Macbeth, specifically to her character prior to the murder of Duncan. The play, of course, opens in the midst of what seems to be a disordered world. Scotland is at war and Duncan comes upon one of his Captains who is almost fainting from the bleeding of his wounds. From the Captain we learn that there has been open rebellion and internal turbulence in the country. But even as we learn this, and most importantly before Macbeth makes his entrance, we are told that order has been restored and Macbeth is largely responsible for its restoration. He has killed Macdonwald, vanquished the Thane of Cawdor, and has brought victory to Scotland. Duncan's kingdom is at relative peace and, with its king, is enjoying a "great happiness" (I. ii. 58) when Macbeth disrupts it by killing Duncan. Thus to maintain Dollimore's thesis, we would have to maintain

that Macbeth is dislocated by his encounter with the witches and his confrontation with his wife. But doing so would mean denying that Macbeth had ever contemplated the ~~idea~~ of murdering Duncan before he meets the witches² and before he is tempted by Lady Macbeth; it would mean denying that the witches and Lady Macbeth have nothing to do with the subsequent murders; and it would mean denying that the world of Macbeth, at the beginning of the play, contains a king, beloved by all, who "Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been/ So clear in his great office" (I.vij. 17-18) and that it contains brave, loyal subjects, subjects with a strong sense of integrity, like Banquo and Macduff. These factors are too much part of the play to be forgotten. To say that Macbeth's world is formed solely by Lady Macbeth and the witches is deliberately to misread the play. Their respective roles no more than augment the tragic process in Macbeth. Until Macbeth intrudes in and completely shatters his society, that society is quite as pleasant as the air that "nimble and sweetly recommends itself" to Duncan's "gentle senses."

Othello's world similarly contains, in the main, characters that are "well integrated," if that is the expression one should use for the opposite of Dollimore's "dislocated." One cannot ignore Desdemona, Cassio, or for that matter the Duke and his senators in Venice. Although

² Bradley, it seems to me, has proved beyond doubt that Macbeth has contemplated murder before he meets the witches. See his Shakespearean Tragedy, 343-44.

the temptation of Othello is different from that of Macbeth, for Iago not only augments but also initiates the tragic process, nevertheless Iago is not entirely responsible for Othello's fall: to say that Othello is a mere puppet is simply false. Chaos comes into Othello's world when Othello no longer loves Desdemona enough to trust her innocence and purity of heart.

As for what was said about King Lear, Gloucester's description of his society is based on three facts: that Lear has turned against Cordelia, that Lear has banished the noble and true-hearted Kent for his honest outburst of protestation, and that he believes that his own son Edgar plans to kill him treacherously in order to "enjoy half his [father's] revenue." However, the first two facts show, contrary to the notion that Lear is dislocated by a dislocated society, only that it is Lear who creates the dislocation in his society. As for the last fact, Gloucester, like Lear, is guilty of not knowing his children well enough to distinguish truth from falsehood. He too quickly accepts as real what is appearance only. In other words, it is not that a disrupted society causes the disruption in his family:

Gloucester himself is the cause. Edmund's observation that sickness in fortune is "often the surfeits of [one's] own behaviour" (I.ii. 116) describes Lear's and Gloucester's situations perfectly.

Lastly, and unfortunately for Dollimore's theory, even Hamlet does not hold firm as evidence. Hamlet's comment on

the Danish custom of night-time carousing cannot imply a disintegration of society since it is followed immediately by his observation that although it is no more than a flaw in an otherwise well-integrated society, it has the unfortunate effect of, as he puts it, taking "from our achievements, though performed at height, The pith and marrow of our attribute" (I.iv. 20-22). The rising of the Ghost and the "frailty" of Gertrude's nature could well suggest a disintegrating society--a dislocated society that includes not just a treacherous King and a lascivious Queen but also secrecy, duplicity, pretence and hypocrisy as revealed in Polonius and in Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Further, Hamlet's frenzied reactions to the rising of his father's ghost and his mother's "frailty" may indeed be said to anticipate the effect this corrupt society will have on him: his frenzy anticipates a completely dislocated person. However, in both the instances we have noted, that is, the rising of the Ghost and Gertrude's "frailty," what is striking about Hamlet's reactions is that they are much more intensely emotional than what is warranted by the events that have stimulated them. The tone of the words--

O that this too too solid flesh would melt,
Thaw and resolve itself into a dew, . . .

is no different from Shelley's super-sentimental tone in--

I fall upon the thorns of life, I bleed!

It is, therefore, not at all surprising that Hamlet should speak in a "wild and whirling" fashion after his first encounter with the Ghost. Throughout the play he displays a frenzy that is always out of proportion to its immediate cause. Over-reacting to situations is part of Hamlet's nature. It is, thus, not the corrupt situation that is responsible for his dislocation, but something that lies within his nature, a tendency to overdo the emotional response, that dislocates him. A ~~reaction that~~ is in excess of what the situation demands is, in fact, Hamlet's failing--a failing, in other words, that is ultimately the cause of the eruption of tragic circumstances in Hamlet.

Dollimore's contention that man becomes dislocated in a dislocated world, therefore, does not accord with what is found in the four great tragedies of Shakespeare. It is hard to see how they could, for his argument is unacceptable on fundamental grounds: it is too pessimistic to explain the exaltation intrinsic to the resolution of feeling on which the tragedies end. Dollimore therefore provides no guidance through the problem of relationship of the hero to his tragic situation. Fortunately Mason's views on this problem are both sound and productive. The next two chapters will be devoted to an exploration of them.

CHAPTER V

MAN'S FUNCTION IN THE TRAGIC WORLD (2)

According to Mason, man creates his own tragic world by breaking sacred human bonds. That tragedy inheres in the violation of one or more of the fundamental bonds that bind human society together. ~~Is~~ a much more feasible alternative to Dollimore's theory that a dislocated society produces a dislocated hero. Not only do we find evidence for Mason's view in the great tragedies of Shakespeare, but interestingly enough the same feature was recognised as long ago as The Poetics. Aristotle says,

We must now decide what incidents seem dreadful or rather pitiable. Such must necessarily be the actions of friends to each other or of enemies or of people that are neither. Now if an enemy does it to an enemy, there is nothing pitiable either in the deed or the intention, except so far as the actual calamity goes. Nor would there be if they were neither friends nor enemies. But when these calamities happen among friends, when for instance brother kills brother, or son father, or mother son, or son mother--either kills or intends to kill, or does something of the kind, that is what we must look for. (Fyfe, 51)

Aristotle may not attribute to the bonds and their violation an importance as profound as what Mason attributes to them, an importance that Mason underlines by characterizing the bonds as sacred or divinely sanctioned. However, it seems to me that the term "bond" can only have meaning and significance in the human world of action. In the divine realm there can be no distinction between stranger,

acquaintance, friend and family. To say that the bonds are not divinely sanctioned does not, of course, devalue the importance of human bonds. No doubt it becomes necessary to give the bonds a divine interpretation in order that members of a society may adhere to them since they are of immense value for the maintaining of what may be called a social order. Human bonds give man an anchor, so to speak, for the preservation of his psychological and moral well-being. But they are primarily a social phenomenon, and they are only "divinely sanctioned" or "sacred" in a muted sense of "divine" and "sacred."

Notwithstanding his insistence on "sacred," Mason's formulation is both an accurate and productive formulation of what goes on in Shakespearean tragedy. His views, however, do not go far enough, and to pinpoint the focal point of Shakespearean tragedy one must take them a step further. For Shakespeare the sanctity of human bonds is such that their preservation is intrinsic to man's essential humanity. When man violates these precious bonds, he violates his natural state of being. In Shakespearean tragedy, in other words, when the fundamental bonds are violated, the act is felt to be an unnatural one. Othello, for example, recognises with horror that by killing his wife he has lost his status as a human being and has reduced himself to a "circumcised dog" (V.ii. 356), a Turk; an uncivilized being who is little better than a beast. The tragedy of man, for Shakespeare, is that he knowingly violates his own humanity. Far from

being powerless, either in a predetermined cosmic setting or in a world full of dislocating forces that eventually break him, man tragically brings about his own disastrous end. Tragedy reveals that man's tragic act, that is, the act that is the cause of his downfall, is a violation of human bonds and hence of his human nature; and it reveals that man is a tragic figure because he causes his own downfall. However, he is not a fully tragic figure until he also puts himself into the tragic situation of discovering the terrible implications of his self-caused downfall. Clearly, when Mason's views are extended in this way, they bring together the whole theory of tragedy that I have presented so far in this thesis. I will test the validity of Mason's view, and with it the theory I have presented, by looking in detail at one play: Macbeth. In the remainder of this chapter, I will examine the play's tragic act. In the next chapter I will examine its tragic figure.

The tragic act, since it marks the downfall of the protagonist, is the all-important act of any tragic play. For regardless of how the terms hamartia, peripeteia, anagnorisis, fear and pity are interpreted, without the tragic act these terms are rendered meaningless in their tragic context. In other words, there is no tragedy without the tragic act. Few would disagree that the killing of Duncan is the tragic act of Macbeth. And indeed, the act is highlighted in the play and given special emphasis. The

scene of the murder has a dramatic power, an emotional charge and an aura of awesomeness that is almost palpable. Fear, rather than pity, is the dominant emotion evoked:

Macb. I have done the deed.--Didst thou not hear
a noise?

Lady M. I heard the owl scream, and the crickets
cry. Did you not speak?

Macb. When?

Lady M. Now.

Macb. As I descended?

Lady M. Ay.

Macb. Hark!
Who lies i'th' second chamber?

Lady M. Donalbain.

Macb. This is a sorry sight.

Lady M. A foolish thought to say a sorry sight..

Macb. There's one did laugh in's sleep, and one
cried, 'Murther!' That they did wake either other: I stood and heard
them; But they did say their prayers, and address'd them
Again to sleep.

Lady M. There are two lodg'd together.

Macb. One cried, 'God bless us!' and 'Amen,' the
other,
As they had seen me with these hangman's hands.
List'ning their fear, I could not say, 'Amen,'
When they did say, 'God bless us.'

Lady M. Consider it not so deeply.

Macb. But wherefore could not I pronounce 'Amen'?
I had most need of blessing, and 'Amen'
Stuck in my throat.

Lady M. These deeds must not be thought
After these ways: so, it will make us mad.
(II.ii. 14-33)

It is interesting that one other scene in the play has a similar dramatic emphasis, for the same note of terror is struck in the banquet scene:

Len. Here is a place reserv'd, Sir.

Macb. Where?

Len. Here my good Lord. What is't that moves your Highness?

Macb. Which of you have done this?

Lords. What, my good Lord?

Macb. Thou canst not say, I did it: never shake Thy gory locks at me.

Ross. Gentlemen, rise; his Highness is not well.

Lady M. Sit, worthy friends. My Lord is often thus,
And hath been from his youth: pray you, keep seat;
The fit is momentary; upon a thought
He will again be well. If much you note him,
You shall offend him, and extend his passion;
Feed, and regard him not.--Are you a man?

Macb. Ay, and a bold one, that dare look on that
Which might appall the Devil.

Lady M. O proper stuff!
This is the very painting of your fear:
This is the air-drawn dagger, which, you said,
Led you to Duncan. O! these flaws and starts
(Imposters to true fear), would well become
A woman's story at a winter's fire,
Authoris'd by her grandam. Shame itself!
Why do you make such faces? When all's done,
You look but on a stool.

Macb. Pr'ythee, (see there!)
Behold! look! lo! how say you? -
Why, what care I? If thou canst nod, speak too.--
If charnel-houses and our graves must send
Those that we bury, back, our monuments
Shall be the maws of kites. (III.iv. 43-72)

The emotional charge, the sense of awesomeness is almost as

vivid here as it is in II.ii. Both scenes are dramatically intense, and both engulf the spectators and the actors in complete terror.

This dramatic intensity, this emotional charge, is not present elsewhere in the play. Take the sleepwalking scene for example:

Out, damned spot! out, I say!-- One; two: why, then 'tis time to do't.--Hell is murky.--Fie, my Lord, fie! a soldier, and afeard?--What need we fear who knows it, when none can call our power to accompt?--Yet who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him? (V.i. 33-38)

These lines, characteristic of the whole scene, are thought-provoking and hauntingly pitiable, but they do not have the dramatic edge or awesome suggestions of the murder scene or the banquet scene.

On such a basis, I would argue that there is not a single tragic act in Macbeth but a succession of two tragic acts, of two acts of murder. The question to turn to in order to test the validity of the ideas suggested by Mason is whether these murders are conceived of and presented as violations of human bonds and as violations unnatural to man's state of being.

L. C. Knights, in his insightful article on Macbeth, draws attention to the "significant fact that Macbeth contains a very large number of words experiencing the varied relations of life . . . not only 'cousin,' 'children,' 'servants,' 'guest,' 'host,' . . . but 'thanks,' 'payment,' 'service,'

'loyalty,' 'duties,'¹ and that

at the end of the play, when Macbeth thinks of what he has lost, it is not "honour, wealth and ease in waning age" . . . but

that which should accompany old age,
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends.
(V.iii. 24-25)²

In Macbeth, then, human bonds are expressed, as Knights puts it, "with a special insistence," and we inevitably see the murders of Duncan and Banquo in that context.

The duty owed in each bond is greater or lesser depending on the nature of the bond. When a bond is violated by murder, the greater the duty owed to the person killed, the more heinous the crime. Thus the murder of Duncan, since he is king and represents the country, is the most heinous of all.

John Holloway writes:

The nature of Macbeth's conduct . . . [would be] quite misunderstood if he is thought . . . to be an "image of revolt" merely at the level of civil disobedience. The significance of what he does goes deeper . . . That rebellion against the lawful king counted as rebellion against God was a commonplace of the time. (Story of the Night, 60)

The play not only provides abundant support for the notion that "rebellion against the lawful³ king" is the violation

¹ If I may add some more that seem to be particularly significant - "sons," "kinsman," "near in blood," "the fountain of (one's) blood," "dear friend," "wife," "husband," "father," "mother."

² See "Macbeth," Shakespeare The Tragedies, ed. Alfred Harbage, (1965) 98.

³ The insertion of the term "lawful" takes care of the

of the most sacred bond, but also makes it a point to draw the reader's primary attention to it. The play begins with an incantation by the witches from which we gather that the play has to do with a character named "Macbeth." The witches also chant "Fair is foul, and foul is fair" (I.i. 11), indicating that the play concerns the reversal of values. This is immediately followed by Duncan's dramatic opening lines of the next scene:

What bloody man is that? He can report,
As seemeth by his plight, of the revolt
The newest state. (I.ii. 1-3)

The phrase "bloody man," that is, "bleeding man", on the one hand, immediately points to the amount of blood that Macbeth will spill during the course of the play--so much will be spilled that Macbeth, at one stage, remarks

I am in blood
Stepp'd in so far, that, should I wade no more,
Returning were as tedious as go o'er.
(III.iv. 135-37)

Macduff envisions a Scotland where the whole country is bleeding: "Bleed, bleed, poor country!" (IV.iii. 31). On the other hand, "blood" also immediately brings to mind Macbeth himself, for he is often referred in terms of "blood" and "bloodiness" in the course of the play. Donalbain says, with regard to Macbeth, "the near in blood, / The nearer

fact that although the killing of Macbeth is also a regicide, it is not a going-against-God since he is a usurper and not a "lawful king."

bloody" (III.iii. 138-39); and Malcolm says, "I grant [Macbeth] bloody" (IV.iii. 57). But the phrase takes on particular significance when it is considered in conjunction with the term "revolt," and when it is noted both that "bloody man" and "revolt" are in lines uttered by Duncan and that they are the very first lines spoken soon after the witches have informed us with whom and with what the play is concerned. The phrase "bloody man" directly looks forward to the ironical fact that it is he, Duncan, who will be the bloodier man--

Lady Macbeth: "who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him?"
(V.i. 37-8);

Lady Macbeth: "Here's the smell of blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand."
(V.i. 47-8);

Macbeth: "Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood/ Clean from my hand?" (II.ii. 59-60).

And Duncan will bleed much more because the revolt or rebellion against him is the "most bloody piece of work" (II.iii. 126). Discovering the murder Macduff cries out,

Most sacrilegious Murder hath broke ope
The Lord's anointed Temple, and stole thence
The life o' th' building! (II.iii. 66-68)

Duncan and Macbeth, then, are shown to be inextricably linked by the images of blood and revolt right from the very beginning. The victim will be bloody in that he will bleed and the rebel will be bloody in that he will make the other bleed. And both kinds of bloodiness will be profuse. The

fact that Duncan refers to "bloody man" and "revolt" in the very first lines that are spoken (as opposed to the chanting of the witches) makes it possible for us to assert that one of the foremost concerns of the play is this "bloody" link between Duncan and Macbeth. And the whole first scene insists on the idea of rebellion against a lawful king. Rebellion deserves only death: Macdonwald suffers the ultimate disgrace of having his head "fix'd . . . upon [Duncan's] battlements" (I.ii. 23) and "that most disloyal traitor/ The Thane of Cawdor" (I.ii. 53-4) is sentenced to death. On the other hand, loyalty to the king, a mark of worthiness and nobility, is rewarded well: "and with this former title greet Macbeth," says Duncan, soon after sentencing the Thane of Cawdor to death (I.ii. 66-7). The noble Macbeth will soon prove himself to be the worst traitor of all and the scene (I.ii.) draws deliberate attention to this theme.

The kind of supreme significance that the bond between a subject and his king has for every subject is asserted by Macbeth himself. When Duncan remarks to Macbeth that what he owes him is "more than all can pay," Macbeth replies,

The service and the loyalty I owe,
In doing it, pays itself. Your Highness' part
Is to receive our duties: and our duties
Here to your throne and state, children and servants;
Which do but what they should, by doing everything
Safe toward your love and honour. (I.iv. 22-27)

Macbeth is, of course, insincere in his show of affection for the king at this point. But he is earnest in his instinctive

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belief that whatever service he offers his king is merely his king's due, that loyalty and service to one's king is something that is intuitively and generally acknowledged since the bond between a king and his subjects is a sacred one.

It is not at all surprising, then, that Macbeth, even as he murders his king, should be so terribly and so horribly conscious of the heinousness of his crime and that he should utter some of the most heart-rending words that Shakespeare has written:—"But wherefore could not I pronounce 'Amen?'" (II.ii. 30). He realizes that in violating his sacred allegiance to his king he has "Put rancours in the vessel of [his] peace" (III.i. 66) and, as he puts it, "mine eternal jewel/ Given to the common Enemy of man" (III.i. 67-68).

In the light of this special emphasis on duty to one's king, Lady Macbeth's statement, "Had he not resembled/ My father as he slept, I had done't" (II.ii. 12-13) takes on particular significance. Here Lady Macbeth unconsciously reveals that her code of moral behaviour is determined by her feelings, in this case, feelings of affection and compassion for a defenceless old man who looks like another old man whom she loves. In other words, she has no real understanding of human bonds as contracts of a sacred sort or duty bonds, more primitive (as Mason states) than human feeling. Lady Macbeth acts in automatic accordance with what she feels. She cannot bring herself therefore to murder Duncan--not because a sense of duty prevents her from killing

a man who resembles her father but because in the actual presence of the sleeping king, feelings akin to the affection and compassion she would have felt if Duncan had been her father overcome her and momentarily supersede her ambitions for her husband and herself.

"Duty" is not a term that belongs in Lady Macbeth's vocabulary. Her response to Duncan's expression of gratitude is conspicuously different from Macbeth's response to a similar expression of gratitude from Duncan. Whereas Macbeth speaks of "duties"--

Your Highness' part
Is to receive our duties: and our duties
Are to your throne and state, children and servants;--
(I.iv. 23-25)

Lady Macbeth speaks of an exchange of honours for services rendered--

All our service,
In every point twice done, and then done double,
Where poor and single business, to contend
Against those honours deep and broad, wherewith
Your Majesty loads our house: (I.vi. 14-18)

It is significant that Lady Macbeth should want to be filled "from crown to the toe, top-full" with "direst cruelty" (I.v. 42-43), that she should replace one feeling with another in order to bring herself to commit murder. On the other hand, Macbeth adopts an emotionless and objective attitude to do the same. He performs the deed as if it were, as Bradley puts it, some "appalling duty" (STy, 358). That is to say,

Macbeth overcomes one sense of duty, namely, the duty to his king, with a resolution to perform another, an "appalling," duty. Lady Macbeth's reversal of values consists in reversing what is normally considered as "good feelings" with "bad feelings." To her, kindness and compassion are cowardly feelings and wickedness a sign of courage. Macbeth's "milk of human kindness," which she fears might interfere in their ambitious plans, will have to be, she says, chastised "with the valour" of her tongue. Macbeth's reversal of values consists in putting his duty to himself ahead of his duty to his king.

Thus conscience works differently for Macbeth than it does for Lady Macbeth. In the sleepwalking scene Lady Macbeth is haunted by the vision of an old man murdered in his sleep and the thought of the root of love between the Thane of Fife and his wife being so cruelly and savagely severed. The doctor sadly remarks on how her "heart is sorely charg'd" (V.i. 50). Lady Macbeth's conscience works on the level of (warm) feelings, that is, of roots of affection and of compassion. Macbeth, on the other hand, suffers the "rancours in the vessel of [his] peace" not because his heart is sorely charged, but because his soul is charged with the blood of those he has murdered. That is to say, Macbeth's conscience works on the level of fear, the fear of having broken sacred human statutes. That is, his conscience works on the colder level of the "flame that singes not a sleeve."

The question arises as to why Shakespeare makes it a point to depict this difference in the two kinds of ways people may be bound together--by means of sacred bonds and by means of knots of feelings. The answer is to be found in the interesting fact that when Macbeth reflects on why he should not kill Duncan, his primary reason is not that Duncan is his king, but rather that Duncan is his kinsman:

He's here in double trust:
First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
Strong both against the dead; (I.vii. 12-14)

Shakespeare places the blood bond ahead of the bond between subject and king and this is odd in view of the acknowledged supremacy of the latter bond.⁴ It is also odd that Banquo's murder should make a more violent impact--with the actual rising of a ghostly apparition--than Duncan's, though the cause seems clear: because Banquo is Macbeth's "dear friend" and someone with whom Macbeth has established a bond of love, his murder understandably affects Macbeth with special horror. In Macbeth, in short, feelings are not relegated to the position of unimportance that Mason affords them. In Shakespeare, they add to the sanctity of duty bonds. They are more natural to man than are human statutes. Human statutes are the result of the evolution of man into a "gentle

⁴ Thus the "bloody" link that is established between Macbeth and Duncan in the first Act seems to anticipate much more than the murder of an anointed king. It points to what may in fact be of greater concern to Shakespeare--that Macbeth will bloodily violate a blood bond, a blood link between himself and Duncan.

weal" (III.iv. 74-81), whereas a lack of love is seen as a lack of the natural touch (IV.iii. 8-9). Macbeth reveals, therefore, that feelings of affection, compassion, trust, and so forth are, contrary to what Mason holds, in fact the more primitive: they are the foundation on which human bonds may be built.

It would seem that according to Shakespeare, a violation of a bond of affection or a feeling bond is as heinous a crime as a violation of a duty bond. Either⁵ or both bring about tragic consequences. Shakespeare proposes that the murder of Duncan is a heinous act leading to tragic consequences, not simply because it is regicide but because it is a violation of a bond of duty that is embedded in a blood tie between the king and his murderer. Shakespeare also proposes that the murder of Banquo is just as heinous, and he presents it as a tragic act since it is the violation of another bond of duty, this time embedded in a relationship of deep affection between Banquo and Macbeth.

The murder of Duncan, then, is a violation of a strong human bond. The murder of Banquo or Macbeth's second tragic act is likewise a violation of a strong bond. Banquo is to Macbeth "our dear friend" (III.iv. 90), as Macbeth is "my noble partner" (I.iii. 54) to Banquo, who is close enough a

⁵ The tragedy of a man who willfully violates a precious bond of love, bringing chaos into his life, is poignantly illustrated in Othello. Hamlet illustrates the tragedy of a man who violates, also willfully, a most important duty bond.

friend to fear that the witches might win Macbeth to his harm (I.iii. 123) and close enough a friend to make no attempt to betray Macbeth, despite his suspicions of Macbeth's guilt.

In the banquet scene (III.iv.) Macbeth suffers a severe attack of conscience--so severe that he completely betrays himself to the Lords that are present at his table. The vision of Banquo haunts and terrorizes the man almost out of his mind. But the appearance of the ghost also results in a painful reflection on why the murder of Banquo should have had this terrible but profound effect. Macbeth muses aloud,

Blood hath been shed ere now, i' th'olden time,
Ere humane statute purg'd the gentle weal;
Ay, and since too, murthers have been perform'd
Too terrible for the ear: the time has been,
That, when the brains were out, the man would die,
And there an end; but now, they rise again,
With twenty mortal murthers on their crowns,
And push us from our stools. This is more strange
Than such a murther is., (III.iv. 74-82)

L. C. Knights comments as follows on the passage:

This is a more profound version of the origins of society than is suggested by the notion of contract or expediency. What "purges" the supposed mere multitude and makes it into a "gentle" common-weal is a decree greater than any law in which it may be embodied, for it is what is dictated by the very fact of being human. ("Macbeth," 96).

This much is acceptable. But Knights also reads the passage as if it implied the claim that "if you accept your humanity then you can't murder with impunity" ("Macbeth," 97)). However, the implications in the passage are less sophisticated than

what Knights assumes. Macbeth is not reflecting on the emotional repercussions of committing murder in itself. He is reflecting on the repercussions of committing a particular kind of murder, or as he puts it, of "such a murder" (emphasis added). Macbeth's terror cannot be the result of simply the fact that he has murdered a man. The murder of two completely innocent men, Duncan's two chamberlains, has had no effect on him at all. Nor does the play give any significance to their murder. Macduff asks Macbeth, "wherefore did you so?" (II.iii. 105), and the incident is forgotten. The reason is that there is a distinct difference between this murder and the murders of Duncan and Banquo. Duncan and Banquo are bound by sacred contract to Macbeth in a way that the chamberlains are not. And the murder of Banquo affects Macbeth in the stark visual way that even the murder of Duncan does not, precisely because Macbeth has violated, as he reflects, a "humane statute" that did not exist "i'th' olden time." He has violated, as Knights puts it, "a decree that is greater than any law . . . dictated by the very fact of being human" or a law that is determined simply by what Knights elsewhere describes as "bonds that tie [a man] to other men" ("Macbeth," 98).

We have so far seen how tragedy inheres in the violation of human bonds. I have earlier argued that for tragedy to occur, however, the tragic act must also be felt to be an unnatural act. The theme of the unnaturalness of man's

violation of human bonds is vividly and profusely illustrated in Macbeth. As L. C. Knights points out, "That the man who breaks the bonds that tie him to other men . . . is at the same time violating his own nature and thwarting his own deepest needs is something that the play dwells on with a special insistence" ("Macbeth," 98).

The play makes it clear right from the very start that it concerns itself with the violation of a natural state of being. Before the action even begins we meet those unnatural creatures, the witches, "That look not like th' inhabitants o' th' earth/ And yet are on't" (I.iii. 41-42), that seem to be women, yet they have beards (I.iii. 45-47), that seem to be real, yet unlike other corporeal objects, vanish into the air (I.iii. 80-82). The stage is thus set for the forthcoming unnatural events. The dramatic imagery implying the unnaturalness of violating one's allegiance to one's kinsman and king moves, as the play proceeds, in a neat and pleasing progression from a simple metaphor at a bodily level to sophisticated metaphors at an emotional level, and finally to symbolic unnatural events in the world at large. The mere thought of murdering Duncan, Macbeth says in the third scene of the play,

. . . doth unfix my hair,
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
Against the use of nature. . . . (I.iii. 135-37)

That is, merely to contemplate the murder of his king causes his heart to function in a manner that is unnatural to its

naturally still state of being. From the physical level of bodily functions, the imagery of unnaturalness moves to a mental or emotional level. Lady Macbeth is determined that Macbeth should murder Duncan so that he can become King. But she is afraid that Macbeth "is too full o' th' milk of human kindness" (I.v. 17) to commit regicide. "Human kindness" can be read either as "the kindness in human beings" or, as Kenneth Muir suggests, as "Humankind-ness", where "humankind" means "human nature" (Arden, 27). Either way "milk of human kindness" implies an inherited feeling of kindness, or it implies gentleness natural to humans, imbibed at the mother's breast. What impedes Macbeth from becoming king, therefore, are his natural feelings of gentleness. In other words, in order that he may kill Duncan, he must replace his natural feelings with something unnatural. Lady Macbeth will see that he does, by pouring her spirits into his ear. (I.v. 25-26). However, she must first unnaturalize her own mental state of being before she can pour them into his ear. She invokes the spirits of evil destruction who "wait on Nature's mischief," that is, those who violate nature, to come to her aid:

Come, you Spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me, from the crown to the toe, top-full
Of direst cruelty! make think my blood,
Stop up th'access and passage to remorse;
That no compunctious visitings of Nature
Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between
Th' effect and it! Come to my woman's breasts,
And take my milk for gall, you murdering ministers,
(I.v. 40-49)

From the level of unnatural emotions, Shakespeare moves to what is unnatural in the world. The night that Duncan is murdered is unnaturally unruly. Lenox remembers,

where we lay,
Our chimneys were blown down; and, as they say,
Lamentings heard i' th' air; strange screams of death,
And, prophesying with accents terrible
Of dire combustion, and confus'd events,
New hatch'd to th' woeful time, the obscure bird
Clamour'd the livelong night: some say, the earth
Was feverous, and did shake. (II.iii. 54-60)

After the murder, a falcon was killed by a mousing owl and Duncan's favourite horses turned wild and ate each other (II. iv. 12-20). Nature herself was reflecting the unnaturalness of killing a king. Then as a last touch, to belie any doubts, the theme underlying the pattern of images is made explicit. To Ross's remark, "by th'clock 'tis day,/ And yet dark night strangles the travelling lamp" (II.iv. 6-7), his companion, an old man, says "'Tis unnatural,/ Even like the deed that's done" (II.iv. 10-11). "'Gainst nature still" (II.iv. 27),⁶ the old man says when told of the suspicions that Malcolm and Donalbain are their father's murderers.

A similar matrix of images marks Banquo's murder also as an unnatural act. Macbeth believes that the appearance

⁶ It is worth noting here that, that sons should murder their father is said to be even more unnatural than regicide in itself. That is, the violation of a blood bond--a bond that implicitly contains the notion of a bond of affection--is said to be even more unnatural than the violation of a bond that does not imply this close tie, even if the latter is the most sacred bond of the one between subject and king. This provides additional weight to the theory that in this

of Banquo's ghost is a message to him:

It will have blood, they say: blood will have blood:
Stones have been known to move, and trees to speak;
Augures, and understood relations, have
By magot-pies, and choughs, and crooks, brought forth
The secret'st man of blood. (III.iv. 121-25)

Kenneth Muir relates the phrase "the secret'st man of blood" to a passage in James I's Daemonologie: "'for as in a secret murther, if the dead carkasse bee at any time thereafter handled by the murtherer, it will gush out of blood, as if the blood were crying to the heauen for reuenge of the murtherer, God having appoynted the secret supernaturall signe, for tryall of that secret vnnaturall crime'" (Arden, 97). The reference reveals that Banquo's ghost is a supernatural sign that points to his murder as an unnatural deed.

The resort to the supernatural is, in itself, another means to the presentation of the theme of unnaturalness. Both the tragic acts are presented in such a way that they are steeped in an unhuman supernaturalism. Macbeth sees a dagger dripping with blood, hanging mid-air (II.i. 33-46) just before he murders Duncan. He hears voices crying "'Sleep no more!/ Macbeth does murther Sleep'" and "'Glamis hath murther'd Sleep, and therefore Cawdor/ Shall sleep no more, Macbeth shall sleep no more'" (II.ii. 34-35, 41-42) as he murders Duncan. Banquo's ghost shakes its gory locks at him after he murders Banquo. The dagger, the voice and

play Shakespeare investigates the justifiability of the postulate that the murder of a lawful king is the most sacrilegious murder of all.

the ghost may no doubt be, as the practical mind of Lady Macbeth suggests, mere fanciful imaginings, the result of thinking "so brainsickly of things" (II.ii. 45). However, the way Shakespeare sets up these scenes, the audience is left uncertain, as it is not about Lady Macbeth's imaginings in her sleepwalking scene, whether they are only figments of Macbeth's imagination.

Lastly, Shakespeare depicts a growing unnaturalism in the character of Macbeth and depicts it so that it is seen as arising as a direct consequence of violating bonds. When Macbeth hears the voice crying "Macbeth does murder Sleep" (II.ii. 35) as he murders Duncan, we are told that sleep is "great Nature's second course" or the "chief nourisher in life's feast" (II.ii. 38-39). The suggestion is that in killing Duncan, Macbeth has also killed life's natural nourishment. Moreover, it is his own natural nourishment that he has killed since, as the voice foretells, "Macbeth shall sleep no more" (II.ii. 42). Then, Banquo's murder is shown to have an effect that manifests itself physically. Reference is made to the unnaturalness of Macbeth's "blanch'd" cheeks as opposed to the "natural ruby" of all the rest after his initial encounter with the murdered Banquo's ghost (III. iv. 114-15). Lady Macbeth proceeds to tell us that Macbeth lacks "the season of all nature's sleep" (III.iv. 140). The suggestion is that whatever is nourishing Macbeth now cannot be natural. The tragic hero is gradually being unnaturalized so that by the time he murders Macduff's

household, he is shown, by implication, to have degenerated into an unnatural creature himself.⁷ For there comes a point when his only consorts are the witches. Macbeth isolates himself from the natural world until he is more a part of the unnatural realm of witches and apparitions. As with the witches, evil and killing become natural to him. The "firstlings of his heart" are to kill, his "thought" is to kill and his acts, he determines, will spontaneously follow his heart and his thought (IV.i. 146-49). He proves his determination with the murder of Macduff's "wife, his babes, and all unfortunate souls/ That trace him in his line" (IV.i. 152-53). Macbeth no longer needs even to consort with other unnatural beings. He is the Unnatural itself. Ultimately the only way in which he can die is unnaturally. He does not "live the lease of Nature" (IV.i. 99) and meets his death in the hands of an "unnatural" man who was "from his mother's womb/ untimely ripp'd" (V.viii. 15-16).

Exploring the themes of violation of bonds and its unnaturalness in Macbeth, then, shows that the tragedy is defined in terms of these notions. Both tragic acts are violations of human bonds, bonds that are duty bonds embedded in bonds of affection. Furthermore, these violations are presented as unnatural acts. Since feeling bonds (or bonds

⁷ Although Lady Macduff and her children are both Macbeth's subjects and his kinspeople--Macduff is his cousin--when Macbeth has them murdered, the act is not presented as the violation of any bond: human bonds no longer have any significance to him as an unnatural creature.

of affection) are natural to man and duty bonds are natural products of man's evolution, violation of human bonds are a violation of man's natural state of being and hence unnatural.

I have proposed earlier, however, that what makes a man a tragic figure is that his violation of bonds brings about his downfall and that he discovers that his downfall is ultimately self-caused. The nature of Macbeth's downfall and the form in which his tragic discovery takes its shape are the subject of the next chapter.

CHAPTER VI

MAN'S FUNCTION IN THE TRAGIC WORLD (3)

Our first concern in this chapter will be to illustrate from Macbeth, how a tragic figure in Shakespearean tragedy is guilty--how his tragic act is a consequence of a moral failing, not a consequence of an attack by Erinyes nor a consequence of an error in judgement. I will show how a tragic protagonist suffers the agony of an internal conflict between the awareness that the act he is about to commit is a morally wrong act and the (ironical) belief that it will be committed in his best interests. I will then show how the protagonist becomes a tragic figure undergoing a process of self-realization in that he discovers that he has committed an unnatural act or violated his humanity in willfully violating a bond or bonds.

To see a tragic hero as committing a guilty act or a willful act of violation is crucial for an understanding of Shakespearean tragedy. The witches in Macbeth immediately pose a problem since it is so easy to construe their role so as to remove responsibility from Macbeth for his tragic acts. Mason, for instance, holds that the role of the witches in Macbeth best exemplifies his theory of guilt-in-innocence (TP, 68). Since Mason has made use of the witches to illustrate his notion of hamartia as Erinyes, we will have to look very carefully at the role of the witches in the tragedy of Macbeth.

Mason tells us that Shakespeare has used the witches as a "vehicle for presenting the inexplicable mystery of the tragic act" (TP, 68). That is to say, the witches have been used for the dramatic purpose of suggesting that "Macbeth committed his crime [partly] in a heavy Scotch mist!" (TP, 68). In one respect Mason is right, in that the witches serve a merely secondary dramatic purpose. But Mason is mistaken in his belief that they are used as the vehicle of a mysterious invading madness that enters the mind of Macbeth to befuddle him. The witches do sometimes appear to generate a sense of mystery, for instance, in the way they disappear into the thin air or in the fact that they seem to "have more in them than mortal knowledge" (I.v. 2-3). However, there is more reason to associate their mysteriousness with the darkness of evil than the kind of inexplicable invading force that Erinyes represents. Banquo tells us how to interpret them. He calls them, "instruments of Darkness" that "win us to our harm" and "tell us truths; / Win us with honest trifles, to betray's / In deepest consequence" (I.iii. 123-26) and there is nothing that is presented to us that would cause us to doubt his interpretation. On the contrary, the dark mystery of the witches suggests the same kind of mysterious evil as the "thick Night" and the "seeling Night" invoked by Lady Macbeth (I.v. 50) and Macbeth (III.ii. 46) respectively. These "secret, black, and midnight hags," as Macbeth calls them (IV.i. 48), add to the "blanket of the dark" that covers the play. That is to say, they add to the

imagery of night and darkness, reflecting the black evil within the protagonist's soul and that pervades the whole play. That the witches are not to connote a mysterious invading madness that befuddles Macbeth is shown most clearly by his ultimate response to Lady Macbeth's temptation. There is no indication of any befuddlement in his final decision to murder Duncan:

I am settled, and bend up
Each corporal agent to this terrible feat.
Away, and mock the time with fairest show:
False face must hide what the false heart doth know.
(I.vii. 80-83)

And true to his word he does hide his false face. Just before he ventures on his "terrible feat," Banquo says, "I dreamt last night of the three Weird Sisters:/ To you they have show'd some truth," (II.i. 20-21). Macbeth's response is to say, "I think not of them" (II.i. 21), when his mind in fact is on precisely what the witches had said about his forthcoming kingship. His mind is quite clear, in other words, at the precise moment at which he chooses the path of murder..

However, this is not to say that his choice is presented as an error in judgement or, as Knights puts it, an "obfuscation of the clear light of reason" ("Macbeth," 95).¹ Although

¹ Knights maintains that a related aspect of evil in Macbeth is the "obfuscation of the clear light of reason." But he also maintains that an "unnatural perversion of the will" is another related aspect of evil found in the play. A person cannot, however, pervert his will and simultaneously

the temptation scene (I.vii.) may seem to reveal an obfuscation of reason and therefore to imply an error in judgement, the soliloquy immediately before the murder scene and the murder scene itself so strongly enact an internal conflict and a perversion of the will that there is little doubt that Macbeth murders Duncan in full awareness of what he is doing. Let us review the evidence in detail.

When Macbeth enters the stage in the temptation scene (I.vii.) he is fully resolved not to commit murder, and his resolution is based on good, solid reasons. He cannot bring himself to violate certain sacred bonds. He tells himself that Duncan is

. . . here in double trust:
First, as I am his kinsman and his subject,
Strong both against the deed; then, as his host,
Who should against his murderer shut the door,
Not bear the knife myself.

Besides, Duncan is good man. He

Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been
So clear in his great office. (I.vii. 12-18)

These reasons hold out too strongly against the deed. For he has "no spur/ To prick the sides of [his] intent, but only/ Vaulting ambition" (I.vii. 25-27).

claim that his light of reason was obfuscated at that time. A perversion of one's will necessarily involves an awareness of that perversion. That is, a perversion of the will is a deliberate going against what a person holds as reasonable. Knights can maintain only one or the other, but not both.

Lily B. Campbell argues that Macbeth's rejection of murder here is not simply a rational one, for underlying the reasoning there is a deeper emotional urge within Macbeth that rejects murder. She holds that this soliloquy reveals a "deep fear of heaven's justice" and the soliloquy is "but the prologue to Macbeth's argument" (Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes, 217). By "Macbeth's argument" she means that Macbeth is a tragedy of fear and not of ~~ambition~~. She is right; but the soliloquy reveals more than just a "deep fear of heaven's justice," and it is this more, rather than the fear of heaven's justice, that is the prologue to Macbeth's argument. First of all, his fear of heavenly retribution is made clear in the lines

. . . we but teach
Bloody instructions, which, being taught, return
To plague th' inventor: this even-handed Justice
Commends th'ingredience of our poison'd chalice
To our own lips. (I.vii. 8-12)

and

. . . his virtues
Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongu'd, against
The deep damnation of his taking-off
And Pity, like a new-born babe,
Striding the blast, or heaven's Cherubins, hors'd
Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye;
That tears shall drown the wind. (I.vii. 18-25)

However, Macbeth also asserts,

If it were done, when 'tis done, then 'twere well
It were done quickly: if th'assassination
Could trammel up the consequence, and catch

With his surcease success; that but this blow
 Might be the be-all and the end-all - here,
 But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,
 We'd jump the life to come. (I.vii. 1-7)

The Arden text provides an excellent little summary by Bethell of these seven lines:

If there were no ill-consequences in this life I should be quite satisfied, for I should ignore the question of a future state. (Arden, 36)

Thus Macbeth claims to fear only earthly reprisals. Yet his argument in the rest of the soliloquy concerns heavenly retribution. The two links between his fear of ill-consequences in this life and his fear of heaven's justice are his beliefs that "we still have judgment here", that is, on earth, and that "heaven's Cherubins . . . / Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye," that is, on earth. Macbeth is, therefore, either guilty of fallacious reasoning, in that he cannot maintain his initial difference between ill-consequences in this life and heaven's justice in a future life; or the earthly reprisals that he is afraid of are his fears of his fear of heavenly retribution. It seems to me that it is the latter that is at work here, and it is this that is the "prologue to Macbeth's argument." Macbeth is terrified of his terror of heaven's justice, that is, he is terrified of the way in which his conscience works. He has already indicated a little of the way his-conscience affects him--it unfixes his hair and his heart knocks at his ribs--and he is afraid of this sort of shaking of his single state of man.

Campbell is right in her contention that Macbeth's failing is not ambition, although it might be objected that Macbeth wants to be king and that whether he is fearful or not, without his ambitious intentions there would have been no murder of a king. The objection is valid, although it must be borne in mind that the play implies that ambition, in itself, is not wrong. Banquo is also ambitious. But, as Macbeth says, there may be "much he dares" but he has "a wisdom that guided his valour/ To act in safety" (III.i. 50, -52-3). In other words, ambition or the desire to win, in itself, is not unworthy, although playing false and wrongly winning is. This would make it seem as if Macbeth's tragedy, if not ambition, is an ambition that wrongly wins. However, this is not Macbeth's tragedy either. There is no doubt at all that he is ambitious and that he resorts to ill-begotten means to win his kingship. Macbeth is an unworthy man. But it is not the evil in him that is the cause of his downfall. Macbeth could have merrily walked into Duncan's room, murdered the man with no second thoughts, blamed Malcolm and Donalbain for the murder and become king himself quite cheerfully. Apart from having to fight Malcolm in one or more battles, in which he might have won or lost, Macbeth would have ruled as an unlawful king and died as a unlawful king. There would have been no tragic downfall. What causes his downfall, that is, his fall in the eyes of men, including his own, and the eyes of God, is his tendency to terrible fear. His moral spirit lacks the courage that his soldier's spirit so well

executes in physical combat. It is the fear of his own fears that is at the bottom of what happens in the temptation scene.

At the end of the soliloquy in the temptation scene (I. vii.), then, Macbeth is resolved not to carry out his murderous intentions. And so when Lady Macbeth enters, her mind tense and busy with tremendous plans for the night, scolding him for leaving the King's side as he supped, he tells her flatly, "We will proceed no further in this business" (I. vii. 31). He does not explain his real reasons, but he says enough to make her understand that his conscience will not allow him:

. He [Duncan] hath honoured me of late; and I have bought
Golden opinions from all sorts of people,
(I. vii. 32-33)

Lady Macbeth, expecting that something like this might happen, has already steeled herself with "direst cruelty" so that she may chastise him with the valour of her tongue. Completely confusing conscience with cowardice she proceeds to berate him furiously for his cowardice:

Art thou afeard
To be the same in thine own act and valour,
As thou art in desire: Would'st thou have that
And live a coward in thine own esteem,
Letting 'I dare not' wait upon 'I would,'
Like the poor cat i'th' adage? (I. vii. 39-45)

Smarting in the heat of his wife's fury Macbeth forgets his conscience and remembers only his fear.² Instead of justify-

² After all, fear of the "horrid deed" has formed a part

ing his earlier statement, "He hath honoured me of late," he remembers only his agonizing fear and immediately becomes defensive. "I dare do all that may become a man," he objects, aggrieved (46). Lady Macbeth sweeps on:

And to be more than what you were, you would
Be so much more the man. (I.vii. 50-51)

And, she cries, what is more, I am more the man:

I have given suck, and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me:
I would, while it was smiling in my face,
Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums,
And dashed the brains out, had I so sworn as you
Have done to this. (I.vii. 54-59)

We believe her, and so does Macbeth. Strongly affected by the vision of his wife plucking her nipple from the boneless gums of her smiling babe and dashing its brains out--for as a soldier, Macbeth has performed worse deeds than unseaming people "from the navel to the chops"--he makes an error in judgment. He confuses the terrors he feels in his conscience with soldierly cowardice. His pride, a fault that every Shakespearean tragic hero suffers from, is badly hurt. The

of his determination. Bradley asserts that Macbeth "has never . . . accepted as the principle of his conduct the morality which takes shape in the imaginative fears" (STy, 357). I would not go so far as saying that he "never" does this. He has, and it is revealed in the soliloquy we have just considered. But under pressure, he loses his capacity to formulate and articulate his thoughts. For Macbeth is even more afraid of his tendency to fear than of the fears themselves; he only remembers what he feels in his "imaginative fears." Hence, he is made to wince under the pain of having been reduced to so commonplace a thing as a "poor cat i'th' adage."

damage is done and Lady Macbeth wins. Yet still he is afraid. He protests weakly, "If we should fail?" (59). "We fail?" comes the astounded retort. The question is unthinkable, and Lady Macbeth knows that it is merely an excuse. Inflamed, she tells him roundly,

But screw your courage to the sticking-place,
And we'll not fail. (I.vii. 60-61)

She swiftly lays out her plans, explicit and bold, completely convinced and completely convincing of success. She is magnificent. Macbeth is spell-bound and in great admiration declares

Bring forth men-children only;
For thy undaunted mettle should compose
Nothing but males. (I.vii. 72-74)

He has screwed his courage and no longer hesitates. He only wants to make certain that there are no loose ends in their plans:

Will it not be received,
When we have marked with blood those sleepy two
Of his own chamber, and used their very daggers,
That they have done't? (I.vii. 74-77)

"Who dares receive it other," (I.vii. 77) is the arrogant response. Macbeth is "settled" in his mind. He is unafraid and in control.

There is, then, an important point at which Macbeth does commit an error of judgment. However, it is not this that is ultimately responsible for the act of murder. That

is to say, the point at which he makes his error in judgment is not the moment of his fall. In fact, it would be rather odd to call it a "fall". For from the moment Macbeth confuses his feelings of error in his conscience with soldierly cowardice, there is a "rise" or an upward movement in the scene--a movement which begins with a man who is afraid and defensive and ends with a man who is unafraid and in control. A fall, on the other hand, requires a downward movement, as when Macbeth, allowing the image of the "poor cat i'th'adage" to affect him so powerfully, forgets that his decision not to murder Duncan is based on his fear of retribution. Remembering only what he feels in his "imaginative fears" he is conscious only of his weakness, that is, of his tendency to be fearful, and in this case, of the terrors that fear of retribution hold for him. From being a strong man completely resolved not to murder Duncan he suddenly becomes a weak person, feeling he has to defend his valour.

A tendency to be fearful is Macbeth's weakness, and the conflict that rages within him just before the murder is a conflict between his conscience and his fear of his "imaginative fears." Conscience in the sense of remorse is a natural and healthy element of any moral being. But the terror that conscience effects in Macbeth is peculiar to Macbeth. When fear is activated in the workings of his conscience, his imagination runs riot.³ As the moment

³ It is worth noting that it is not conscience in itself that causes an explosion in his imagination. In the soliloquy

approaches, the thought of murdering Duncan activates the imaginative fears of his conscience. To his horror the kind of fear he has referred to starts to take effect. He sees a dagger before him. But this is the terror that he is determined to overcome. He wonders if it is a

A dagger of the mind, a false creation,
 Proceeding from the heat oppressed brain?
 (II.i. 38-39)

The terror will not pass. He still sees the dagger, "in the form as palpable" as the one he draws (II.i. 40-41). He tells himself, "Mine eyes are made the fools o'th'other senses" (II.i. 44); but his terror has too firm a grip on him, for, worse than ever, he sees "gouts of blood" on its blade and dudgeon (II.i. 45-46). However, Lady Macbeth's words are still ringing in his ears. He draws courage from exactly the kind of thing she might have said; even resorting to her matter-of-fact language,

There's no such thing.
 It is the bloody business which informs
 Thus to mine eyes. (II.i. 47-49)

of resolution (I.vii.) for instance, although Macbeth talks of his fears, he does not feel fear. His conscience works here the way anybody else's would. If he had actually felt the fear then he probably would have imagined gory details of himself roasting in a sulphurous hell. Nor is it fear, in itself, that causes his imagination to run riot. When he outlines his fear of Banquo, Macbeth displays no evidence of the way his conscience-related fear works either soon after the murder of Banquo or just before the murder of Duncan.

Then a sort of calm sets in. He reflects in strange objectivity on the wickedness of the deed:

Now o'er the one half-world
Nature seems dead, and the wicked dreams abuse
The curtain'd sleep: Witchcraft celebrates
Pale Hecate's off'rings; and wither'd Murther,
Alarum'd by his sentinel, the wolf,
Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace,
With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design
Moves like a ghost. (II.i. 49-55)

He knows that what he is about to do is completely evil:

Thou sure and firm-set earth,
Hear not my steps, which way they walk for fear
Thy very stones prate of my where-about,
And take the present horror from the time,
Which now suits with it.. (II.i. 56-60)

But the terror of committing this evil deed has him so strongly in its hold that he must fight it with equal strength.

Tragically for Macbeth, he believes that he can fight his moral weakness with a soldier's courage. "I go, and it is done," he says simply (II.i. 62), as if he is about to do the easiest thing in the world. A bell rings. It is his cue. A firm determination forces him to move and he goes, like a stubborn child quietly determined to overcome his fear of darkness by resolutely walking into a dark room. Like the child again, Macbeth is almost paralysed by fear; but a sheer stubbornness compels him forward and he walks almost as if he were in a trance. Macbeth's dark room, however, unlike the child's, is a place he ought not to enter, and he knows that he ought not to be walking into it. Little

thinking that the bell is his own knell as well as Duncan's, he says,

Hear it not Duncan; for it is a knell
That summons thee to Heaven, or to Hell.
(II.i. 63-64)

He is in a dream-like state. However, it is an internally imposed state of being⁴ and not, as Mason contends, an externally caused compulsion. Throughout the carrying out of the murder he is fully conscious of what he is doing: he hears accusing voices, real or imaginary, crying, "Murther!" (II.ii. 22), "Sleep no more!/ Macbeth does murther Sleep," (II.ii. 34-35), "Glamis hath murther'd Sleep, and therefore Cawdor/ Shall sleep no more, Macbeth shall sleep no more!" (II.ii. 41-42). Only a man who is conscious that he is doing evil will be so intensely and painfully aware, as Macbeth is, of the Being that he believes he is sinning against:

One⁴ cried, 'God bless us!' and, 'Amen,' the other,
As they had seen me with these ~~hangman's~~ hands.
List'ning their fear, I could not say, 'Amen,'
When they did say, 'God blēss us.' (II.ii. 26-29)

Duncan's murder is thus a guilty act, committed, not in part in innocence, but as a result of Macbeth's great failing, his fear--a terrible earthly fear, so to speak. Macbeth is afraid of being a coward and so he kills his king. This

⁴ A state of being that arises out of a determination to concentrate and focus all one's mental faculties on one single objective.

same failing drives him to commit his other murders. He murders the grooms for fear of being discovered and murders Banquo for fear that his power will be wrenched away from him and his descendants. Fear is again the cause behind his complete betrayal of himself to his thanes at his banquet. Although the last, most senseless murder, the murder of Lady Macduff and her children seems to be simply a case of murder for murder's sake, since Macbeth has absolutely nothing to gain from this last act of villainy, it is once again fear that initiates it. Macbeth hits out at Macduff's family in terror of Macduff because he cannot lay his hands on Macduff himself. For, despite feeling that he need no longer "beware Macduff," since he has been told that "none of woman born/ Shall harm Macbeth" (IV.i. 80-81), he wants to "make assurance double sure" that Macduff "shalt not live" (IV.i. 83, 84). All Macbeth's murders, then, are guilty acts caused by fear and committed in the complete awareness that they are immoral acts. It would be entirely wrong to impose, as Knights does,⁵ a compulsiveness on either the murder of Banquo or the murder of Lady Macduff and her children. It is a shrewd, hard, cunning and calculating man that contemplates and plans the murder of Banquo. The same shrewdness and cunning are evident when he remarks, most probably contemplating

⁵ Knights asserts, "most readers have felt that after the initial crime there is something compulsive in Macbeth's murders" ("Macbeth," 102).

his next murder,⁶ on Macduff's absence at the banquet, "How say'st thou, that Macduff denies his person, / At our great bidding?" (III.iv. 127-28). He has placed a spy in everythane's house (III.iv. 130-31). Apart from fear, the impetus behind the murder of Macduff's "wife, his babes, and all unfortunate souls / That trace him in his line" (IV.i. 152-53) is spite and a revengeful lust-for-blood fury that Macduff has dared escape him. To hold that something compulsive in Macbeth drives him to commit these murders is to close deliberately one's eyes to this man's despicable nature. Commentators tend to extenuate Macbeth's evil, perhaps in order to give a reasonable explanation for the deep pity for Macbeth that overcomes the reader or spectator near the close of the play. But this is precisely Shakespeare's point--that no man is so unworthy as to deserve a tragic misfortune. Macbeth's failing is his fear, his moral cowardice, which reveals itself for the last time as he fights for his life. Oddly enough he never realizes what drove him to commit his tragic acts. His inability to distinguish between moral courage and soldierly courage remains with him to the very end. A recognition of his moral failing never forms part of his self-realization, a fact that brings us to the subject of tragic discovery in Macbeth.

⁶ Kenneth Muir interprets "How say'st thou" as follows: "Banquo being dead, Macbeth is driven towards the next murder" (Arden, 97).

The notion of anagnorisis goes hand in hand with peripeteia. That is to say, the tragic hero eventually discovers or realizes that what he believes to be for the best, results in consequences opposite to what he has expected and has an — unthinkable and painful significance for both his emotional and physical well-being. Macbeth may seem to present this formulation of anagnorisis with the same problems that Leech argues it does Aristotle's formulation. Leech suggests that Macbeth does not take his act of murder to be for the best and hence it is not an act that results in consequences opposite from what was expected. He holds that "Macbeth 'falls,' but he knows well enough from the start that his killing of Duncan is a dangerous act, and long before the play's ending he is aware of the uselessness of the kingship he has won" (T, 63). Both his points are true: the first is attested to in the soliloquy in which Macbeth resolves not to kill Duncan (I.vii.) and the second is attested to in Macbeth's acknowledgement that by killing Duncan he has given his "eternal jewel" to "the common Enemy of man" in exchange for an empty sceptre and Banquo's issue (III.i. 60-68). Macbeth's knowledge of the dangers of killing Duncan, however, and his awareness of the uselessness of his own kingship are no more than intimations of what he eventually discovers.

Consider the second point first. Macbeth may realize early in the play that killing Duncan has brought him only an empty sceptre, but by the end of the play he realizes that

not only is his kingship useless, but life itself is of no consequence. The oft-quoted passage must be quoted once again.

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
 Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
 To the last syllable of recorded time;
 And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
 The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
 Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,
 That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
 And then is heard no more: it is a tale
 Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
 Signifying nothing. (V.v. 19-28)

Now these lines have sometimes been interpreted as a general existentialist statement about life. "Macbeth knows that death does not change anything, that it is just as absurd as life. No more no less . . . , " Jan Kott writes, commenting on these lines. "He has realized that every choice is absurd, or rather that there is no choice" (Shakespeare Our Contemporary, 76-77). By saying "Macbeth knows" (emphasis added), Kott implies that it is Shakespeare who is expressing an existential philosophy in the lines. However, in the play taken as a whole, Shakespeare places too much value on truth, goodness and beauty to be able to relegate all existence to a state of meaninglessness⁷ here. As Duncan enters Macbeth's castle he remarks on the night air:

⁷ The concepts of meaninglessness, on the one hand, and truth, goodness and beauty, on the other, are empirically and factually, if not logically, opposed to each other.

This castle hath a pleasant seat; the air
Nimbly and sweetly recommends itself
Unto our gentle senses. (I.vi. 1-3)

Banquo responds,

This guest of summer,
The temple-haunting martlet, does approve,
By his loved mansiony, that the heaven's breath
Smells wooingly here: no jutting, frieze,
Buttress, nor coign of vantage, but this bird
Hath made his pendent bed, and procreant cradle:
Where they most breed and haunt, I have observ'd
The air is delicate. (I.vi. 3-10)

"Heaven's breath" that gives the air its sweetness and lightness and delicacy and the "temple-haunting martlet" form the image, as Knights so beautifully puts it, "of life delighting in life" ("Macbeth," 99). Life is beautiful. It is only when tragic circumstances occur that a meaninglessness is infused into the world, only, indeed, when tragic circumstances of a particular kind occur: when life cannot delight in life any longer because man has made it so foul and so evil that there is no hope of beauty and goodness touching him, either in this life or "the life to come." The implicit truth claim in Macbeth is not that existence in itself is meaningless but that from its natural state of meaningfulness, existence can become meaningless when certain conditions obtain. Macbeth attests to the tragedy of man: man brings the state of meaninglessness upon himself by violating the "milk of human kindness,"⁸ by violating the goodness that

⁸ See I.v. 17 and its footnote in Arden edition, 27.

describes his humanity.

John Holloway's interpretation of the same passage helps to clear up this problem. He writes, "Macbeth's cynicism is general: it is not his own life, but Life, which has come to have no meaning" (Story of the Night, 119). The passage thus expresses the cynicism of a tragic figure. However, a protagonist is not a tragic figure unless he recognizes the fact that his tragic circumstances are self-created, that he is solely responsible for his state of meaninglessness. Anagnorisis is not merely a discovery of a truth of life but a discovery of a truth about oneself in life--a self-discovery or self-realization. If as Holloway says Macbeth's cynicism is general then Macbeth's discovery cannot include a realization that his tragic circumstances are self-created. One cannot accept responsibility for one's state of meaninglessness if one believes that existence itself is meaningless. A careful reading of the "sound and fury" passage, however, will show that his discovery is indeed a self-discovery. One must read the passage within its context: Macbeth has just received news that Lady Macbeth has died. There would have been a time, Macbeth muses, when the word "death" would have had meaning (V.v. 18). And this would have been a time which would have contained "Honour, love, obedience, troops of friends" (V.iii. 26). But now life is only a meaningless matter of "Curses, not loud, but deep, mouth-honour, breath,/ Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not" (V.iii. 27-28), and he can

only look forward to a series of such meaningless tomorrows. Death is significant only when life has meaning. Now that death no longer has any significance, it matters little whether Lady Macbeth dies now or in one of the many tomorrows. Macbeth concludes that "Life's but a walking shadow" because "death" has become a meaningless term, and it has become a meaningless term because his own life has so little significance. He refers to a player who "struts and frets" and "is heard no more" and to a tale that is "full of sound and fury." These expressions do not describe the life of any or every individual. They describe one particular player and one particular tale. Macbeth, who has strutted and fretted so dramatically that his name is on the lips of all, will soon be heard no more. The tempestuous events of his life, so tremendously noisy and so full of fury, have become "a tale/ Told by an idiot . . . / Signifying nothing." Hence the cynicism contained in "Life's but a walking shadow" stems from his recognition that the sound and fury of his individual life, his strife to win and maintain the kingship, have no significance whatsoever.

Thus Macbeth's discovery is that his life has become meaningless, not that life itself is meaningless. For if his cynicism were general, then he would also believe that whatever course he had followed would not have mattered since it would have led to the same meaningless conclusion; but the choices he made in life do matter to Macbeth, for he continues, even after this declaration that life is but a

walking shadow, to feel the pain of an old guilt. When he meets Macduff in battle he says,

Of all men else I have avoided thee:
But get thee back, my soul is too much charg'd
With blood of thine already. . (V.viii. 4-6)

In these words, spoken just before he dies, he makes clear that he accepts he is a guilty man and in that sense that he is responsible for his tragic state. Accepting responsibility for his tragic state means that in this moment he also accepts that he is a damned soul and cannot escape the life to come. He is afraid to die. "I'll not fight with thee," he declares, on learning that Macduff is the man who is not of woman born (V.iii. 22). "Then yield thee, coward," cries Macduff (V.vii. 23). As usual, accusing Macbeth of cowardice is like holding a lit match to dry straw. It is the old story again. Once again the doomed hero tries to overcome his fear of heaven's justice with soldierly courage. "I will not yield," he cries back. "I will try the last" (V.viii. 27 and 32).

Macbeth's early intimations of the uselessness of his kingship, then, do not prevent him from discovering later that what he believed to be for the best had unthinkable and painful consequences opposite to what he had expected. The same is true of his intimations that killing Duncan is a dangerous act. Macbeth may have an inkling of some of the spiritual effects of the act, but he has no idea of its dangerous physical consequences and its unexpected and

dangerous emotional consequences. On the physical level, Macbeth's soliloquy in I.vii. does not at any point reveal that he expects to be discovered and thus expects to die so soon after being crowned king or that he expects to be deserted by the whole of Scotland, except for a handful of frightened servants, his army having to comprise "Kernes, whose arms/ Are hir'd to bear their staves" (V.vii. 17-18). Nor does he expect Lady Macbeth to suffer from "a mind diseas'd" (V.iii. 40) and to take, as it may be presumed from the cry of women, her own life. Macbeth initially believes, as Lady Macbeth does, that

This night's great business . . .
Which shall to all our nights and days to come
Give solely sway and masterdom. (I.v. 68-70)⁹

Macbeth expects the great business to give him more honours than what the king has heaped on him: he expects to be king himself and he expects more than just golden opinions from people. Far from receiving what he expects, however, he loses even the honours and opinions he already has. He loses everything--"Honour, love, obedience and troops of friends" (V.iii. 25). Macbeth discovers, as Holloway puts

⁹ A note in the Arden edition of the text implies that Macbeth's response to this, "We will speak further" (I.v. 71), is a refusal of assent (Arden, 33). This may be so. But it is a refusal to proceed with "this night's great business" rather than a refusal to acknowledge the truth of the sole "sway and masterdom" in their "nights and days to come" that the murder of Duncan will bring them.

it, that "what looked as if it would endow life with the greatest meaningfulness has deprived it, in the end, of all meaning. What seemed like the beginning of everything was in fact the end of that and the beginning of nothing" (SN, 119). Macbeth's losses occur gradually, during the course of events that take place after the murder of Duncan. His friends desert him one by one as they suspect and finally realize who is responsible for Duncan's murder. Likewise, he pushes Lady Macbeth more and more into the background of his life, losing her strong support and her capacity to keep his fears at bay.

On an emotional level, Macbeth's loss is even greater. He expects to conquer his fear by courageously compelling himself to murder Duncan. Instead his fears get worse and worse, and each time he has to confront them he further betrays himself. The repercussions of Duncan's murder take immediate effect. Insanely terrified of discovery, he murders the chamberlains in an act that arouses Macduff's suspicions. One tragic act leads to another. His fear that he may lose his crown to Banquo's issue results in Banquo's murder. The consequences of this murder, totally unexpected, prove to be even more dangerous than the consequences of Duncan's murder. Macbeth's "single state of man" is completely wrecked by the time the "imaginative fears" aroused by the vision of Banquo's ghost at his banquet are finished with him. This, in turn, results in his betraying himself to his guests so that there is no longer any doubt

at all in anyone's mind as to who is responsible for the murder of Duncan. His fears push him further and further into murder, so that he feels that he has waded so far into blood that he has to keep going. The "imaginative fears" of his conscience wrack him and in sheer terror of the future he seeks out the witches. Thus with the gradual increase in the intensity of his capacity for fear, which seems to pervade his whole living hours, we find that he is also becoming an unnatural being. Killing is becoming a natural part of his life and is less and less a matter of going against his conscience. Finally, he commits what was for Shakespeare a monstrous atrocity: he slaughters, for no reason, an innocent woman and her children. What Macbeth has not foreseen is that his wrongly won kingship leads not only to further ambition and further fear, not only to a physical alienation from everything and everybody he believes he will enjoy as a king, but also to an alienation from all that is natural including his own natural single state of man.

It is thus that the consequences of Macbeth's tragic act are the opposite from what he expects before he commits the tragic act. He may have recognised that his conscience would plague him, but what he had feared to be earthly reprisals takes on a much worse turn than he had expected. He did not foresee that he would arrive at a stage when his conscience no longer functions and repentance is out of his grasp altogether.

These far-reaching consequences that the violation of bonds has for Macbeth's soul are made obvious even as he commits his first tragic act. The moment he stabs his king, he feels the loss of the grace of God. At a time when there is not a moment to be lost if all signs of being implicated in Duncan's murder are to be removed, his bewildered mind pathetically revolves around one question only: "But wherefore could not I pronounce 'Amen'?" (II.ii. 30). The significance of this sad little question becomes clear as the play progresses. A man who has just shown us how the ghost of someone whom he has murdered can drive him to the verge of insanity, who has shown us, that is, how his guilty conscience can terrorize him, makes the most puzzling remark--

I am in blood
Stepp'd in so far, that, should I wade no more,
Returning were as tedious as go o'er.
(III.iv. 135-37)

However far one may be stepped in blood the tenets of Christianity leave room for a "return" by means of genuine repentance. And yet Macbeth accepts that "returning were as tedious as go o'er" as if it is the most matter-of-fact truth in his life. It may seem at first that in these lines Macbeth is declaring that the path of genuine repentance is as tedious as burdening his soul with further guilt. However, I find it very difficult to believe that someone who feels the effects of his guilty conscience as terribly and deeply as Macbeth does will also express a perverse refusal to repent.

That Macbeth does feel the need to return to God's grace is made evident in the scene of Duncan's murder. "But wherefore could I not pronounce 'Amen'?" he says, "I had most need of blessing" (II.ii. 30-31, emphasis added). Why can he not say "Amen"? Because "'Amen'/ Stuck in [his] throat" (II.ii. 31-32). In Macbeth's case, deliberate violation of sacred bonds has the tragic effect of putting him into a situation where he is unable to repent, even when he is about to die and confesses that his "soul is too much charg'd/ With blood" (V.viii. 5-6). Our protagonist has no idea when he reflects in his soliloquy (I.vii.) on the heinousness of killing Duncan that he will make the unthinkable discovery that he has dehumanized himself to the extent that repentance will stick within him--that "Amen" will stick in his throat at a time when he feels the most need to say it. One can barely imagine the horrors that must pass through the mind of this frightened, tragic man in the last moment of his consciousness.

CONCLUSION

We have seen in Macbeth how profoundly tragedy is felt to reside in the unnatural violation of the deepest bonds between people. Indeed the two are so much a part of each other in Macbeth that one might ask whether the unnatural violation of bonds defines the particular tragedy of Macbeth much more than it defines tragedy as Shakespeare conceives of it in general. For, as Holloway points out in Story of the Night,

In Macbeth . . . the action . . . takes in the environment of Nature within which [the doings of men] occur, and from which in the end they seem to derive their quality. (107).

In each of the other great tragedies, however, the unnatural violation of sacred human bonds is no less pervasive or profound a presence that it is in Macbeth.

In King Lear both the notion of violation of bonds and the notion of the unnaturalness of this violation are introduced in quick succession right at the very start. The first scene not only introduces all the bonds that the play is concerned with but also makes it clear that its main concern is the theme of human bonds. "I love your Majesty/ According to my bond," says Cordelia in her famous speech to her father (I.i. 91-92). She goes on to say,

Happily, when I shall wed,
That lord whose hand must take my plight shall carry
Half my love with him, half my care and duty:
(I.i. 99-101)

Thus Cordelia introduces the bonds between child and parent and between wife and husband. Soon after this Lear introduces and violates--and thereby commits his tragic act--the reciprocal bond between parent and child:

Here I disclaim all my paternal care,
Propinquity and property of blood. (I.i. 112-13)

In Kent we see the kind of bond that exists between subject and king:

Royal Lear,
Whom I have ever honour'd as my King,
Lov'd as my father, as my master follow'd,
As my great patron thought on in my prayers,--
(I.i. 138-41)

Hence the scene reveals both the violation and the preservation of human bonds. The reader or spectator is taken into the heart of the tragedy in the very first scene. The tragedy of Lear consists not only in breaking sacred bonds but also in willfully closing his eyes to the way Cordelia and Kent, despite the evil consequences his act will have for them, preserve the sanctity of their respective bonds to Lear.

The very next scene (I.ii.)--explicitly asserts that violating a human bond is an unnatural act. Gloucester says,

These late eclipses in the sun and moon portend no good to us: though the wisdom of Nature can reason it thus and thus, yet Nature finds itself scourg'd by the sequent effects. Love cools; friendship falls off; brothers divide: in cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond crack'd 'twixt son and father . . . the King falls from bias of nature; there's father against child. (I.ii. 100-109)

Gloucester's opening lines reveal that the "doings of men" in King Lear also "take in the environment of Nature . . . from which in the end they . . . derive their quality." The role that Nature plays in King Lear is, however, different from its role in Macbeth. Nature itself comprises both "the good" and "the bad." But what is natural to man is the preservation or the nurturing of goodness in man. Thus, for instance, in Macbeth, Hecate is part of the unnatural (IV.i.) and "night" symbolizes what is unnatural (II.iv. 6-10); but Lear will swear both by "the sacred radiance of the sun" (I.i. 108) as well as "the mysteries of Hecate and the night" (I.i. 109). In one sense, King Lear proffers a more sophisticated relationship between man and nature. One must not forget that nature not only contains temple-haunting martlets and nimble, delicate airs (Macbeth, I.vi.) but also dust and rude winds (King Lear, IV.ii. 30).

It is clear, then, that not much argument will be required to demonstrate that the tragic act in King Lear is presented to the reader or spectator as a violation of human bonds and as an unnatural act. The same fact defines the tragic principle in Othello's tragedy as well. Othello also speaks of duty bonds in the very first Act. Desdemona's observations on the boundaries of duty are almost identical to Cordelia's:

My noble father,
I do perceive here a divided duty:
To you I am bound for life and education,
My life and education both do learn me
How to respect you, you are lord of all my duty,
I am hitherto your daughter: but here's my husband:

And so much duty as my mother show'd
 To you, preferring you before her father,
 So much I challenge, that I may profess,
 Due to the Moor my lord. (I.iii. 180-89)

This time, however, the tragedy revolves around the bond between a husband and his wife rather than the bond between father and child. The notions of natural and unnatural with respect to the bonds is again, as in King Lear, quickly introduced. Brabantio vehemently suggests that the bond between Othello and Desdemona is an unnatural one:

and she, in spite of nature,
 Of years, of country, credit, everything,
 To fall in love with what she fear'd to look on?
 It is a judgement maim'd, and most imperfect,
 That will confess perfection so would err
 Against all rules of nature, and must be driven
 To find out practices of cunning hell,
 Why this should be; I therefore vouch again,
 That with some mixtures powerful o'er the blood,
 Or with some dram conjur'd to this effect,
 He wrought upon her. (I.iii. 96-106)

But Othello convinces the Duke and us that the bond, on the contrary, is most natural. His story of courtship is quite simple and there is no evidence of any mixtures or drams ever being "wrought upon" Desdemona. He tells us

She lov'd me for the dangers I had pass'd,
 And I lov'd her that she did pity them.
 (I.iii. 167-68)

And we believe him. Desdemona, being the loving, generous person that she is, and Othello being the noble, passionate person that he is, it is not at all surprising that, once they had met, these two souls should come together. The tie

is so natural that to break it would be unnatural. Othello himself ironically recognises this when he says "and when I love thee not, / Chaos is come again" (III.iii. 92-93). But unhappily for the world and tragically for Desdemona and himself, despite the recognition, he violates his most precious bond and brings about his tragedy. In throwing away his pearl (V.ii. 348), he commits the terrible unnatural act of killing "the fountain, from the which [his] current runs" (IV.ii. 60) and reduces himself to the less-than-human state of, as he puts it, a "circumsised dog" (V.ii. 356).

The violation of bonds is similarly crucial to the tragedy of Hamlet--although there is a major difference between Hamlet and the other three tragedies. Hamlet reveals the somewhat startling truth that a breaking of bonds does not necessarily involve a physical act of violent severance. In Hamlet, contrary to the other tragedies, the protagonist violates a bond by not killing. This play, so easily dismissed by T. S. Eliot as bad art, is probably the most intellectually stimulating of Shakespeare's tragedies. It opens with certain bonds having already been broken. Brother has killed brother in what is referred to as a "foul and most unnatural murder" (I.v.25), and a woman has broken her marriage vows by committing adultery. The idea that a violation of bonds is unnatural is reinforced in Hamlet's words later in the play:

Soft, now to my mother.
 O heart, lose not thy nature; let not ever
 The soul of Nero enter this firm bosom:
 Let me be cruel, not unnatural: (III.iii. 253-56)

Hamlet's tragedy is that he violates a filial duty or a bond of obedience, and as a result violates his bond of duty to his position in the community as "Th' expectancy and rose of the fair state" (III.i.146). His tragedy, in other words, is that he violates his princely duties. The revenge that the Ghost proposes is a revenge not for the sake of revenge, but for the sake of Denmark, that is, to purge Denmark of evil. The Ghost commands:

Let not the royal bed of Denmark be
 A couch for luxury and damned incest. (I.v. 82-83)

The violation of both the filial and the princely bond is presented in the play as unnatural: the Ghost says to Hamlet, "If thou hast nature, in thee bear it not" (I.v.81). The word, "nature," carries implications of filial affection,¹ but in the main it has the same significance as the natural does in King Lear: naturalness in human beings is related to the nurturing of the goodness in nature. For the Ghost tells Hamlet that if he did not stir in this matter, that if he does not rid Denmark of its evil, then

... duller shouldst thou be than the fat weed
 That rots itself in ease on Lethe wharfe.
 (I.v. 32-33)

¹ See the note on this line in New Cambridge edition, 109.

Thus human nature lies in opposition to a plant-like oblivion. When Hamlet later chastises himself for his inaction he wonders if it could be "bestial oblivion" (IV.iv. 40) that prevents him from performing his duty. Though beasts and rotting weeds, then, are part of the natural world, bestial and weed-like qualities are the opposite of what has been nurtured as natural in man. Thus in violating his filial bond and his bond to his country Hamlet has reduced himself to the unnatural level of beasts and rotting weeds.

Man's tragedy in Shakespeare, then, is his unnatural violation of bonds. I originally derived my hypothesis, that this unnatural violation of bonds defines tragedy, from a consideration of a play that seems to exemplify Greek tragedy--Oedipus the King.² The way Shakespeare treats the subject, however, is significantly different from what is found in Greek tragedy. Shakespeare is much more specific than the Greek playwright. Shakespearean tragedy deals with human bonds that are violated, and violated in the play. Greek tragedy, although also revolving around the notion of human bonds, deals with this notion in a more general way. In Antigone, for example, Antigone's tragic end is brought on by her refusal to violate a bond; or in Oedipus the King, the violation of bonds lies outside the play. In Greek plays, it would seem, it is not so much that tragedy consists in violating a bond as that the notion of human bonds and

²See Chapter I, 7 and 23-24.

their violation, or non-violation as the case might be, is a central element in a tragic play.

Shakespeare's tragedies, then, revolve around the concept of violating bonds and its intrinsic relationship with the concept of unnaturalness. This does not mean of course that they, as Roland Barthes might say, all tell the same story. The circumstances surrounding the act of violation are entirely different and give rise to a variety of tragic truth claims. Macbeth reveals the kind of hopeless and meaningless existence man can tragically create for himself. King Lear tells us that to ask why there is tragic suffering is a meaningless question. Suffering is avoidable but when it is not avoided then one accepts it as a necessary learning process; for sometimes it is only through suffering that man can learn true compassion and humility. At the same time King Lear shows the kind of horrible, senseless suffering that comes about as a result of man's pride and heartlessness, and it shows that such suffering can, and should, be avoided.

Othello expatiates on the idea that there are two kinds of bonds--duty bonds and feeling bonds. The coldness of Othello's magnificent sense of honourable duty to his position is contrasted with the warmth and richness of Desdemona's sense of duty to her husband. Othello's tragedy is caused by a misconception of what honourable duty is, a misconception that results from a sense of duty that is too "cold." Othello is unable to comprehend fully the warmth of feeling bonds--

especially a love bond that calls for an implicit trust in the person he loves. This inability, which leads to a contorted sense of duty, is ultimately the cause of his downfall. The implicit claim in Othello may lack the philosophical sophistication of the claims contained in the other tragedies. But in its simplicity and its humanity it touches an aspect of our day-to-day living which is perhaps of deeper significance than philosophical sophistication.

Finally, there is Hamlet--complex, exasperating and fascinating--a play that affords so much for the mind to contemplate, that it is impossible to sum up all its questions and all its claims in one neat bundle. It does seem, however, that one of the most important issues it touches on is the question of the morality of inaction. In Hamlet we see that not to act when one's honour is at stake is morally reprehensible even if to act means an act of killing. By "honour" we must understand the honour of a soldier and a prince, the kind of "honour" that Macbeth and Othello refer to. An act of honour to a soldier is a fulfilling of one's duty to one's king and country. The act of honour that Hamlet is called on to perform is a fulfilling of his duty to his country, a duty especially binding because he is a prince and his is the family from which kings are so often chosen. When one's duty as a prince and soldier involves killing, then any pity or compassion that prevents one from fulfilling one's duty becomes only false pathos. As Hamlet knows, compassion has to be subdued if he has to carry out his duty. "Do not look

upon me," he says to his father's ghost, "Lest with this piteous action you convert/ My stern effects" (III.iv. 126-28). Yet this self-righteous man stalls, letting a bestial oblivion impede his action. However, on seeing Fortinbras's twenty thousand men, obediently marching towards their honourable deaths, Hamlet has a flash of profound self-realization. What has he realized? More than two thousand years before Shakespeare another soldier-prince faced a similar dilemma. In the Indian epic, Mahabharata, Prince Arjuna of the Pandavas has to fight his cousins the Kauravas, the usurpers of his kingdom. Gazing across the battlefield at the enemy army, he sees his kinsmen: uncles, grand-uncles, cousins, nephews and even his own teacher. Filled with pity he lays down his bow and arrow. He will not kill. Lord Krishna, his charioteer, sadly asks him, "Why have you driven me away from my temple, my home?" Arjuna, startled, replies, "I have not driven the Lord who is my soul away from me." The Lord Krishna then tells Arjuna that as a prince, a warrior in the world of action, his most sacred duty is to his kingdom and to himself, not as a simple being, but as the lawful prince of his kingdom. His place is to fulfill his duty and not to wonder about results. In denying his duty he denies himself, and in denying himself he denies his Lord. Nothing makes the tragic dilemma of Hamlet clearer than these words of Lord Krishna.

In whatever part of the world they are born, Shakespeare and other story-tellers like him, no matter the language

they speak--empirical, rational or metaphysical--touch the secret springs of our lives. All the great tragedies of Shakespeare tell us about the sanctity of those deep bonds underlying all human life, and how, in violating these bonds, man goes against his natural state of being. However, the richness of Shakespeare's tragedies is such that each tragedy maintains its individual significance, a significance profoundly important to the play, and at the same time, each play communicates what is tragic in man's existence. In Macbeth, man becomes a tragic figure when he empties his life of all meaning; in King Lear we see how men subject themselves and their fellow-beings to senseless suffering; Othello shows us how man can bring about his tragic disaster when he does not or cannot understand the simpler, more fundamental loyalties of life; and Hamlet shows us how inaction in our world of action can culminate in tragedy for man. In every instance man is depicted, not as a powerless being in his cosmic setting, nor as an unfortunate being sometimes overcome by an incomprehensible and an invading madness, but as bringing about his own tragic circumstances. Shakespearean tragedy, whose defining principle puts its finger on one of the most important truths in life, affords some of the greatest insights into human nature and human existence.

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APPENDIX I

In the end, it is doubtful whether Mason does indeed succeed in getting away from Aristotle's error in judgement theory. To say the cause of Agamemnon's tragic act is wild ate in his understanding, put there by Zeus, moira and Erinyes, is to say no more than that Agamemnon was deluded in his judgement when he committed his tragic act and that this delusion was caused by wild ate. In his The Iliad of Homer Books XIII-XXIV M. M. Willcock explains the Homeric concept of ate as used in this context. He says,

If a man acts in an inexplicable and self-damaging way, it was deduced that something external to himself had taken over his decision-making faculty. This outside force is commonly said to be sent by Zeus, because Zeus is ultimately responsible for everything. (273-74)

All that Mason seems to have done is expand on the notion of error of judgement saying that ate causes an error of judgement which in turn causes the protagonist to commit his tragic act.

APPENDIX II

The mention of a tragic character who is destined for "good fortune or ill"¹ points to an interesting difference between the Greek notion of tragedy and Shakespearean notion of tragedy. In Shakespeare, we assume that the tragic character is always destined for ill fortune and thus the change of fortune is always one from good to bad. According to Aristotle, on the other hand, the change of fortune in (Greek) tragedy is not necessarily from good to bad: it could be either good to bad or bad to good. (His definition of peripeteia similarly asserts only that there is a change of situation and thus allows the implication that the change could be either good to bad or bad to good.) Now it could be argued against Aristotle that his mention of a third element in a tragic plot, that is, "calamity," which is a "destructive or painful occurrence, such as a death on the stage, acute suffering and wounding and so on" (Fyfe, 43) immediately narrow the scope of both peripeteia and anagnorisis. Tragic peripeteia now becomes a change from good to bad fortune only and tragic anagnorisis, a discovery which "produces" hate in the one destined for ill fortune. It could be further argued that we are justified in narrowing the scope of the two terms concerned because we are also told that tragedy is that which rouses pity and fear (Fyfe, 23) and that "two of the most important elements in the emotional effect of tragedy" are "'reversals' and 'discoveries'"

¹ Fyfe, 41.

(Fyfe, 27). It is more normal to assume that something which is an effective means of arousing pity and fear is also something which involves a change from good to bad rather than a change from bad to good and a discovery that "produces" hate in the one destined for bad fortune rather than love in the one destined for good fortune. And it could be argued that Aristotle at one point even makes an explicit assertion about a successful plot being one where "the change must be not to good fortune from bad but, on the contrary, from good to bad fortune" (Fyfe 47).

Nevertheless Aristotle's definitions can stand as they are. A study of a random selection of Greek tragedies will reveal that the Greek term "tragedy" describes anything of serious content. That is to say, the term describes anything that is not entirely comic, where "comic," following Aristotle's definition of comedy in The Poetics, refers to a ridiculing of "unworthy" qualities in people. Tragedy, then, must be something that contains calamities that involve a falling of men who are "better rather than worse" into misfortune so that when discoveries are made and changes of fortunes occur, pity and fear are aroused. But it is also something that does not necessarily have a disastrous ending. Thus what we call tragi-comedies now, for example, Shakespeare's Measure for Measure, would be deemed tragic, especially as opposed to the comic. Iphigeneia in Tauris provides an excellent example of a discovery that arouses pity and fear, that is, the discovery that one was about to sacrifice one's

own brother, and at the same time "produces" love and involves change from bad fortune to good. In fact, at one point, Aristotle even holds that this kind of tragedy, that is, one where the protagonist is about to commit a tragic act in ignorance, but a discovery made just in time prevents him from doing so, has the most skilful action. "Best of all is the last," he says. By "the last" he means the series of examples he provides to illustrate the "most skilful action":

. . . in the *Cresphontes*, for instance, Merope intends to kill her son and does not kill him but discovers; and in the *Iphigeneia* the case of the sister and brother; and in the *Helle* the son discovers just as he is on the point of giving up his mother. (Fyfe, 53)

The one place where it is specifically asserted that the change must be from good to bad seems to indicate no more than an insistence that tragedy, if it is to be tragic, must contain the tragic process of a change in fortune from good to bad, even though eventually the fortunes of the hero may undergo another change and reverse to good fortune.

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