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I

TOM McALINDON

What is a Shakespearean tragedy?

‘Double, double toil and trouble . . .’
(*Mac.* 4.1.10)

I

An eminent Shakespearean scholar famously remarked that there is no such thing as Shakespearean Tragedy: there are only Shakespearean tragedies. Attempts (he added) to find a formula which fits every one of Shakespeare’s tragedies and distinguishes them collectively from those of other dramatists invariably meet with little success. Yet when challenging one such attempt he noted its failure to observe what he termed ‘an essential part of the [Shakespearean] tragic pattern’;¹ which would seem to imply that these plays do have some shared characteristics peculiar to them.

Nevertheless, objections to comprehensive definitions of ‘Shakespearean Tragedy’ are well founded. Such definitions tend to ignore the uniqueness of each play and the way it has been structured and styled to fit the particular source-narrative. More generally, they can obscure the fact that what distinguishes Shakespeare’s tragedies from everyone else’s and prompts us to consider them together are not so much common denominators but rather the power of Shakespeare’s language, his insight into character, and his dramaturgical inventiveness.²

Uneasiness with definitions of Shakespearean tragedy is of a kind with the uneasiness generated by definitions of tragedy itself; these often give a static impression of the genre and incline towards prescriptiveness, ignoring the fact that ‘genres are in a constant state of transmutation’.³ There is, however, a simple argument to be made in defence of genre criticism, namely that full understanding and appreciation of any piece of literature requires knowledge of its contexts, literary as well as intellectual and socio-political: in its relation to the author and his work, context informs, assists, stimulates, provokes. Thus knowledge of generic context helps us recognize not

only what authors inherit but also what they invent and intend. So, too, familiarity with Shakespeare's tragedies as a whole enhances understanding of the meanings and the special nature of any one of them.

As practised in Renaissance England and in classical Greece and Rome, tragedy is an intense exploration of suffering and evil focused on the experience of an exceptional individual, distinguished by rank or character or both. Typically, it presents a steep fall from prosperity to misery and untimely death, a great change occasioned or accompanied by conflict between the tragic character and some superior power. It might be said, therefore, that conflict and change – the first intense if not violent, the second extreme – together constitute the essence of tragedy.

In his seminal account of the subject, Aristotle (fourth century BC) said that the success of a tragedy depends on its capacity to excite pity and fear, thereby effecting a catharsis of these emotions (*The Poetics*, chap. 6). Twentieth-century commentators have interpreted this as referring to the contrary responses of attraction and repulsion: pity draws us sympathetically to the protagonist, regretting his or her suffering as unjust or disproportionate; fear denotes an attitude to the protagonist of dissociation and judgement and acknowledges the rightness of what has happened. What Aristotle meant by catharsis has been the subject of much disagreement, but in contemporary usage the term usually implies a state of mind in which the powerful and conflicting emotions generated by the spectacle of great suffering are reconciled and transcended through artistic representation, so that a condition of exultant but grave understanding remains.

This rephrasing of Aristotle in conflictual terms may be ascribed to the fact that since the nineteenth century, when the nature of tragedy began to be studied as never before, the overriding emphasis has been on conflict, and the concomitant notions of contradiction, ambivalence, and paradox, as the genre's major characteristic. It is an emphasis which has been due entirely to the philosophers G. W. Hegel (1770–1831) and F. Nietzsche (1844–1900). According to Hegel, the characteristic conflict in tragedy is not between ethical right and wrong but between the personal embodiments of a universal ethical power, both of whom push their rightful claim to the point where it encroaches on the other's right and so becomes wrongful. The (usually violent) resolution of this conflict restores a condition of natural justice and confirms the existence of a just and divine world order.⁴ Nietzsche rejected the idea of such an order, but he too saw 'contrariety at the center of the universe' and tragedy as a process involving the conflict and reconciliation of opposites: for him, these opposites are Apollo and Dionysus, the first symbolizing reason, control, and art, the second, passionate destructive energy, orgiastic abandon, and the self-renewing force of life itself.⁵ Both thinkers

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were inspired by the pre-Socratic philosophers (sixth to fifth centuries BC) who held that the natural world is a system of 'concordant discord' animated by sympathetic and antipathetic forces personified as Love and Strife (War).⁶ Despite substantial differences between their theories of tragedy, both Hegel and Nietzsche were prompted by their attraction to pre-Socratic cosmology to locate tragic events in a natural dialectic of destruction and renewal, and so to emphasize an ultimately positive dimension to tragedy. Perhaps, however, because they were so obsessed with Greek tragedy and Greek culture generally, both philosophers failed to discover that the essentially paradoxical view of nature fathered by the pre-Socratics was embedded in all Shakespeare's tragedies and was central to the intellectual inheritance of his contemporaries.

A. C. Bradley (1851–1935) rightly criticized Hegel for underestimating the action of moral evil and the final sense of waste evident in most tragedies;⁷ but he concurred with him by making conflict a major theme in his own hugely influential account of Shakespearean tragedy. He contended, however, that the distinguishing feature of Shakespearean tragedy is not conflict between the tragic hero and someone else, or even between contending groups, but rather conflict within the hero, who is a man divided against himself. Bradley also adapted Hegel's dualist metaphysics, arguing that Shakespearean tragedy demonstrates the existence of an ultimate power which reacts violently against evil but in the process contradictorily and mysteriously destroys much that is good as well.⁸

In later versions of the conflict theory, tragedy (both Shakespearean and non-Shakespearean) has been identified as a genre which projects mutually incompatible world views or value systems;⁹ and then again as one which exposes 'the eternal contradiction between man's weakness and his courage, his stupidity and his magnificence, his frailty and his strength'.¹⁰ Shakespeare's tragedies have been seen as characterized by a disturbing conjunction of the lofty and the comic–grotesque, something which emphasizes the coexistence in the hero of nobility and pettiness and reinforces a largely pessimistic view of the way in which nature produces and destroys greatness.¹¹ The tragedies of both Shakespeare and his contemporaries have also been read in the light of Marx's materialist Hegelianism as embodying the contradictions and incipient collapse of feudalism and heralding the bourgeois revolution of the seventeenth century.¹²

II

The models of tragedy which influenced Shakespeare and his contemporaries were not Greek (the great tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides)

but Roman and late-medieval: that is, the sensational and highly rhetorical plays of Seneca (apparently written for recitation), and the narrative verse tragedies popularized in England by John Lydgate's fifteenth-century *The Fall of Princes* and by the sixteenth-century, multi-authored collection known as *The Mirror for Magistrates* (1559). Written in the shadow of the emperor Nero, Seneca's tragedies are characterized by a preoccupation with horrific crimes and the tyrannical abuse of power. His protagonists are driven to murder by inordinate passions such as vengeful rage, lust, and sexual jealousy; most of them, too, unlike most of Shakespeare's heroes, are conscious wrongdoers. But they are driven by passions which seem humanly uncontrollable (ghosts, Furies, and meddling divinities spur them on) and are often cursed by the consequences of evils rooted in the past; thus despite their energies and their wilfulness they seem more the victims than the responsible agents of their fate. Another common characteristic is their compellingly assertive sense of selfhood; this may exemplify the Stoic notion of an indestructible personal identity (as in *Hercules Oetaeus*) but more often it is a perversion of that ideal (as in *Thyestes* and *Medea*). Seneca's tragic heroes and heroines see their crimes as defiant expressions of self and unfold this impassioned selfhood in long and rhetorically elaborate monologues and soliloquies. Like their victims, they regularly hyperbolize their feelings by projecting them on to the 'sympathetic universe' and by calling in rage, grief, or despair for nature to revolt against earth, for primal Chaos to come again.¹³

The *Fall of Princes* narratives shared Seneca's fascination with power and its abuse. Like him too, but far more insistently, they emphasized the insecurity of high places and the rule of fortune or mutability in worldly affairs: indeed, in these narratives the notion of tragedy is almost reducible to that of catastrophic change. Moreover, fortune and its capricious turns are now explained in Christian terms as a consequence of the Adamic Fall, which brought change and misery into the world. Thus the treacheries of fortune are afflictions which everyone is liable to, irrespective of his or her moral condition. The main concern of the *Mirror* authors, however, was political as well as ethical: to show that fortune is an instrument of divine justice exacting retribution for the crimes of tyrannical rulers and over-ambitious or rebellious subjects.

Tragic theory in the sixteenth century consisted mainly of a set of prescriptive rules derived from Senecan and *Fall of Princes* practice. Critics such as Puttenham and Sidney emphasized that tragedy is 'high and excellent' in subject and style, does not meddle with base (i.e., domestic and plebeian) matters or mingle kings and clowns. It uncovers hidden corruption and shows the characteristic conduct and the deserved punishments of tyrants. Dealing

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with ‘the dolefull falls of infortunate & afflicted Princes’, it ‘teacheth the uncertainty of this world, and upon how weak foundations gilden roofs are builded’. It excites feelings of ‘admiration and commiseration’, wonder and pity.¹⁴

Shakespeare’s affinities with Senecan and Fall of Princes tragedy, and with sixteenth-century tragic theory, will be apparent as we proceed. But we must begin by emphasizing difference. Like almost all contemporary playwrights who wrote tragedies for the public stage, Shakespeare departed strikingly from classical practice and Elizabethan theory by his inclusion of comic elements and plebeian characters. This characteristic was due to the influence of the native dramatic tradition (the mysteries and the moralities), which habitually conjoined the sublime and the homely and made its devils and villains either ludicrous fools or mocking comedians. It seems unlikely, however, that Shakespeare’s inclusion of the comic in his tragedies signifies a reluctant pandering to popular taste; although he never overtly justifies this practice, the self-reflexive aspects of his art show that early in his career he reflected deeply on the nature of tragedy and evolved a sound rationale for his mixed practice. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *Romeo and Juliet*, written at approximately the same time, and strikingly similar in style and plot (young love rebelling against patriarchal control), insinuate that in real life the comic is always on the verge of the tragic, and vice versa, and that comedy and tragedy must acknowledge that fact by the controlled inclusion of their generic opposite. Theseus’s reaction to Bottom’s comical tragedy – ‘How shall we find the concord of this discord?’ (5.1.60) – draws attention to the extraordinarily mixed nature of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* itself and implies by its phrasing that justification for the mixed mode will be found in the correspondence of the play’s art to nature – that unstable order of concordant discord (or discordant concord) constituted of opposites (the four elements, qualities, and humours) whose changing relationships are governed by Love and Strife. In *Romeo and Juliet*, what seems like a romantic comedy in the making suddenly hurtles towards tragedy with the violent death of the great jester, Mercutio; for this defiantly unclassical procedure Friar Lawrence’s discourse on the contrarious and paradoxical dynamics of nature offers a lengthy if indirect justification (2.2.1–30).

As well as serving to extend the scope of tragedy beyond anything attempted in Greece or Rome, Shakespeare’s comic element functions as a safety valve forestalling the kind of inappropriate laughter that scenes of great tension and high passion are likely to provoke.¹⁵ Comedy is woven into the fabric of the drama, too, being psychologically consistent with the satiric, mocking, or deranged aspects of the tragic and villainous characters, and

functioning always as thematic variation and ironic counterpoint in relation to the tragic narrative. It may even (as in *King Lear*) intensify the effect of heroic suffering.

A comic safety-valve was particularly desirable, for Shakespeare not only followed Senecan tradition by focusing on passion-driven protagonists but also departed from classical practice by presenting scenes of violent passion onstage instead of confining them to narrative report in the classical manner. Comic incident provided much needed relief from the kind of spectacular scenes in which his plays abound, scenes where rage and hatred, long festering or suddenly erupting, explode in physical conflict and bloodshed. From the beginning (in *Titus Andronicus*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Julius Caesar*), Shakespeare sought to present in the opening scene a state of conflict either between the protagonist and his community, or between two sections of the community (one associated with the protagonist, the other with his chief antagonist); and as Bradley intimated, these conflicts relate to a conflict of loyalties, values, or conscience within the protagonist himself.

Where Shakespearean tragedy seems most obviously related to the Fall of Princes tradition, and to Elizabethan theorizing on the genre, is in the intensity with which it focuses on the phenomenon of change. But change here is not just one of worldly fortunes; it is above all else interpersonal, moral, and psychological change. An essential part of the hero's experience is the horrified discovery that the world he knows and values, the people he loves and trusts, are changing or have changed utterly. He feels cheated and betrayed 'to the very heart of loss'.

Hamlet expresses his sense of overwhelming change in eloquently cosmic terms: '[T]his goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory. This most excellent canopy, the air, look you . . . this majestic roof fretted with golden fire – why, it appears no other thing to me than a foul and pestilent congregation of vapours' (2.2.282–6). Based on the four elements, the imagistic pattern here shows that Hamlet construes change in terms of the premodern model of contrarious nature; in consequence, he tends to see change antithetically, from one extreme to the other. And this mode of thinking is entirely characteristic of the tragedies. The great storm passages in *Julius Caesar*, *Othello*, and *King Lear*, where 'the conflicting elements' (*Tim.* 4.3.231) are thrown into wild disorder, function as central symbols for a pervasive sense of violent change and confusion, a technique reinforced by sustained use of elemental imagery elsewhere in each play. Whereas Seneca's tragedies invoked a general correspondence between disorder in the human and the natural world, in Shakespeare's tragedies the instabilities, ambiguities, and contradictions (as well as the fruitful harmonies) of human nature and history are precisely coextensive with those of nature.¹⁶

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The extent to which the principle of polarized transformation affects Shakespeare's tragedies can be gauged if we consider the link and parallels between his first and his last tragedy. In *Titus Andronicus* (4.4.62–8) a comparison is made with the historical hero of *Coriolanus*, and for obvious reasons. In each case Rome suddenly becomes so hateful to its great champion that he joins forces with its enemies. Identified during the Renaissance as the archetypal city of order and civility, and associated specifically with law and oratory, Rome becomes in *Titus* a 'wilderness of tigers' where justice is mocked and the pleading tongue ignored or brutally silenced; and this decline into barbarism is symbolized by the marriage of the Roman emperor to Tamora, queen of the Goths. As in *Coriolanus*, too, it is apparent that the disaster which befalls Rome stems from the fact that its respect for the humane qualities which underpin its civility is no greater than – is in fact dependent on – its famed regard for martial valour. Each play depicts the collapse of an order in which these ethical opposites have hitherto been kept in balance; in the elemental terms used throughout *Coriolanus*, fire, signifying martial rage, eclipses water, signifying pity: 'I tell you, he doth sit in gold, his eye / Red as 'twould burn Rome' (5.1.64–5).

Transformation of the community and its representative hero are intimately and causally connected. But the overriding emphasis is on that of the hero: it is the primary source of that 'woe and wonder' which Shakespeare acknowledges at the close of *Hamlet* to be the characteristic emotional effect of tragedy. In play after play, the extreme and unexpected nature of the change which overtakes the hero is underlined by the bewildered comments of those who know him best. And even the unreflective Coriolanus identifies this personal transformation as a universal propensity in nature. In a world of 'slippery turns', he muses, 'Friends now fast sworn, / Whose double bosoms seem to wear one heart . . . break out / To bitterest enmity', while 'fellest foes . . . by some chance, / Some trick not worth an egg, shall grow dear friends':

So with me.
My birthplace hate I, and my love's upon
This enemy town. (4.4.12–24)

Because the transformed hero is driven to act with the utmost brutality against one or more of those to whom he is bound by the closest ties, some are inclined nowadays to conclude that his alleged nobility is being exposed as superficial or in some sense inauthentic. Such a conclusion implies that the pity, wonder, and fear which the plays provoke in performance are symptoms of sentimental misapprehension on the part of the audience; it rules out the possibility of seeing the fall of the hero as genuinely tragic.

Behind Shakespeare's delineation of the hero's moral fall lies a conviction that 'In men as in a rough-grown grove remain/Cave-keeping evils that obscurely sleep' (*Luc.* 1249–50). One might regard this conviction as an essentialist evasion of such questions as historical contingency and the effects of cultural conditioning on character. Othello's murder of Desdemona, for example, might be explained solely in terms of his own particular make-up and unusual situation: a proud, middle-aged African warrior, married to a beautiful young Venetian lady, socially and sexually insecure, and terrified by the humiliating thought of cuckoldry. But there is quiet play in *Othello* on the relation between the words 'general' and 'particular', and it has the effect of hinting that 'the General' is not just a uniquely flawed stranger ('an erring barbarian') but a representative human being as well; such hints are reinforced by Iago's reminder that 'there's many a beast in a populous city, / And many a civil monster' (4.1.61–2). When the mad Ophelia says, 'We know what we are, but know not what we may be' (4.5.44), she is recalling not only the baker's daughter who became an owl but also the refined prince of noble mind who killed her father and contemptuously lugged his guts into the neighbour room; and who himself had reminded her father that 'it was a brute part' (*Ham.* 3.2.101) of the 'gentle Brutus' (*JC* 1.2.71) that killed his friend in the Capitol. The notion of cave-keeping evils in every human being was one which Shakespeare clearly took for granted.

And the cave-keeping evil can emerge with shocking abruptness. The sheer speed with which Othello's love and nobility are turned to hatred and baseness is sometimes taken as incontrovertible proof that both (if genuine at all) were exceptionally fragile. But with Shakespeare the speed of the hero's transformation is a theatrical device emphasizing both the extremity of the change and the vulnerable nature of all love and all nobility, indeed of all human worth. France observes in amazement that Lear's affection for his favourite daughter turns by way of 'the dragon... wrath' to black hatred in a 'trice of time' (*Lear* 1.1.116, 210); and concerning Coriolanus, suddenly 'grown from man to dragon', Sicinius asks: 'Is't possible that so short a time can alter the condition of a man?' (*Cor.* 5.4.7–8).

III

Shakespearean tragedy is centrally concerned with the destruction of human greatness embodied in individuals endowed with 'sovereignty of nature' (*Cor.* 4.7.35): men who are instinctively referred to as 'noble' (in the moral or characterological sense) by those who know them, even their enemies. However, what constitutes true nobility in action invariably proves problematic for the hero, especially when he becomes entangled in the ethical

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contradictions associated with the notion of 'honour'. Shakespeare habitually exposes to ironic critique a conception of nobility – and so of honour – which is based exclusively on individualist self-assertion and warlike valor; nobility so conceived is implicitly equated with potential barbarism, a denaturing of the self. The tragedies encode an ideal of true nobility that was entirely familiar to his audience. Its origins lie in the humanist notion of an educated aristocracy as delineated in Sir Thomas Elyot's *The Governor* (1531) and Baldassare Castiglione's *The Courtier* (1528); in the chivalric ideal of the knight – especially as interpreted by Chaucer in *The Knight's Tale* – as both valorous and compassionate; and in the classical ideal of the soldier-statesman, everywhere implicit as a standard of judgement in Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romanes* (trans. North, 1579) and embodied in his characterization of Pericles. The common factor in this long and mutating tradition is the assumption that although the nobility as a class are soldiers by profession, the complete nobleman is one who excels in the arts of both war and peace: he is skilful with sword and tongue and unites in his character the qualities we designate as 'masculine' and 'feminine'. Shakespeare articulates this ideal in both 1 *Henry VI* (describing the Duke of Bedford) – 'A braver soldier never couchèd lance;/ A gentler heart did never sway in court' (3.6.20–1) – and *Richard II* (describing Richard's father) – 'In war was never lion raged more fierce,/ In peace was never gentle lamb more mild / Than was that young and princely gentleman' (2.1.173–5). Like Chaucer in *The Knight's Tale*, Shakespeare sometimes associates the dual nature of the aristocratic hero with the myth of Mars and Venus; and he does so because of that myth's well-known interpretation as an allegory of nature's concordant discord. Like Chaucer, too, he likes to play on the social and behavioural meanings of the word 'gentle' as a reminder that a fiery spirit is only half of what is expected in a princely gentleman.

The villain-hero of *Richard III* is by his own admission a man only 'half made up', framed by nature for 'Grim-visaged war' and not for love (1.1.9–21); the other tragic protagonists have passionate natures capable not only of heroic wrath and striving ambition but also of great love, and consequently of intense suffering: symptomatically, the first of them (Titus) is a grieving father who 'hath more scars of sorrow in his heart / Than foeman's marks upon his battered shield' (*Tit.* 4.1.126–7).¹⁷ The hero's fall involves a self-betrayal or loss of identity which constitutes a breakdown in the balance of a richly endowed nature, one in which feeling is so powerful that it is never far from the point of destructive excess. It is this nature which gives rise to the notion that what makes the tragic protagonists great is also what destroys them; 'strengths by strengths do fail', says Aufidius, struggling to understand Caius Martius Coriolanus (*Cor.* 4.7.55), the man who has the

god of war and wrath inscribed in his name. Others may give these characters prudent advice on how to avoid impending disaster, but Romeo's answer to such advice is telling: 'Thou canst not speak of what thou dost not feel' (3.3.64).

Loosely speaking, then, anger and ambition (including pride, a sense of honour, and the desire for glory) and, on the other hand, love and grief, are the passions whose overflow brings disaster; and it should be stressed that the first pair are to be seen initially in as positive a light as the second. Following the Stoic philosophers of old, Elizabethan moralists defined anger as a brief madness; but the 'noble anger' which Lear invokes (2.4.269) is a traditional feature of the hero, being symptomatic of courage and a sense of both justice and personal worth. The concept of noble anger also points to the affinity between tragic and epic or heroic literature: 'the wrath of Achilles' is the subject of Homer's *Iliad*, it drives the action of Seneca's *Troas* in the person of Achilles's avenging son Pyrrhus, and Pyrrhus is a character with whom Hamlet consciously identifies; indeed Reuben Brower has claimed that 'all tragic heroes in European literature are measured against Achilles'.¹⁸ As for ambition, the dangers to society which its unbridled forms constituted was a familiar subject in Shakespeare's England; but equally commonplace was the notion that 'ambition [is] the soldier's virtue' (*Ant.* 3.1.22-3; cf. *Oth.* 3.3.355).

In these attitudes to passion we are confronted with a mindset, characteristic of the period and well fitted to tragedy, which greatly admires and greatly fears excess: where a soldier can be praised because 'his captain's heart . . . burst[s] the buckles on his breast' (*Ant.* 1.1.6-8) and condemned because he 'cannot / Buckle his distempered cause within the belt of rule' (*Mac.* 5.2.15); where lovers who defy society are indicted of blind folly and honoured as 'pure gold' because they show that love of its very nature transcends limit (*Rom.* 2.1.175-7, 5.3.298). Othello's claim that he was vulnerable to Iago and his message of hatred because he 'loved not wisely but too well' has been viewed with disdain by many critics. If it merits disdain, however, so too does the claim of Timon, the great philanthropist whose boundless kindness undoes him and turns his love of his fellow-men into a raging hatred: 'unwisely, not ignobly, have I given'. But a cynical response to Timon's claim is precluded by the compassionate exclamation which his change inspires in his long-suffering steward: 'Poor honest lord, brought low by his own heart, / Undone by goodness!' (4.2.37-8).

Along with extreme feeling comes extreme action. The violent acts of Shakespeare's noble heroes can be linked generically to the monstrous crimes of ancient myth rendered familiar in the Renaissance through the tragedies of Seneca and the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid. They may therefore have seemed

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rather less astonishing to a contemporary than they do to a present-day audience. However, beginning with Titus, the noble Roman who kills his son and daughter, Shakespeare seems to invite the charge of implausibility by stressing the shocking nature of these violent deeds. Othello's suffocation of Desdemona in her bridal bed is hardly more terrible than the way Brutus – 'the noblest Roman of them all' – bathes his hands exultantly in the blood of the friend he has stabbed to death. And yet Shakespeare will always re-emphasize the fallen hero's nobility, his greatness of heart. Sometimes the contradiction located in such characters is expressed in boldly paradoxical terms: 'You have deserved nobly of your country, and you have not deserved nobly' (*Cor.* 2.3.78–9; cf. *Ant.* 5.1.30); but the more typical emphasis, implicit or explicit, and one which helps to make such behaviour credible, is on the inherent frailty of all humans, including the finest: 'a noble nature / May catch a wrench' (*Tim.* 2.2.204–5; cf. *Ant.* 5.1.31–3).

Shakespeare seeks to render the brutal actions of the noble hero plausible and potentially forgivable in other ways. First of all, there is the continuous reminder of an intrinsically unstable natural order in which things can rapidly 'decline' to their 'confounding contraries' (*Tim.* 4.1.19). More obviously, the fatal act is often unpremeditated and rash, the product of an unbearable access of passion, or of temporary madness or something close to madness. Or the hero may be the victim of some self-deception which enables him in his own mind to accommodate the fatal act to his moral sense, so that what he does seems to him both just and necessary, even a ritual sacrifice performed for the good of the community. Or he has the pure misfortune of being faced with the one challenge that his nature and experience do not equip him to deal with.

He may also be the victim of one or more artful manipulators who know him better than he knows himself: close associates or seeming 'friends / Who can bring noblest minds to basest ends' (*Tim.* 4.3.465–6). The figure of the manipulator in Shakespeare's tragedies is descended by way of the morality Vice from the devil of Christian mythos, the tempter who deploys the arts of the orator and the actor in making evil seem good to his deluded victim. The manipulator is granted heroic status in the devilish protagonist of *Richard III* ('the wonder at a capacity greater than one would expect is the feeling most often inspired by the heroic');¹⁹ but his characteristic role is the secondary one of an *agent provocateur* who operates on the passions of the hero and also, it may be, on others whose susceptibility to his wiles confirms the hero's representative nature. The manipulator sets about changing the hero in full consciousness of what he or she is doing and may even observe the ongoing process with scientific detachment: 'Work on, / My medicine work!' (*Oth.* 4.1.42–3; cf. *JC* 1.2.308–10).

In Seneca's tragedies there is usually a companion figure who warns the protagonist against the dangers of succumbing to passion; the Chorus too sometimes moralizes on the Stoic ideal of emotional detachment and control. Some of the protagonists' victims, and in the case of Hercules, the protagonist himself, meet death with an equanimity which exemplifies the Stoic ideal of constancy in the face of the worst that fortune or tyranny can offer. Partly because of Seneca, but partly too because it was deeply embedded in Christian thought and Renaissance culture, Stoicism impinges on the passionate world of Shakespearean tragedy in a number of ways. There are counsellor figures such as Friar Lawrence, John of Gaunt, and Menenius, who plead for patience and restraint (Iago appropriates this role with demonic skill). And there is the figure of Horatio, more an antique Roman than a Dane in his attitude to suicide and in the impression he gives of being one who 'in suffering all, suffers nothing'.

The hero's attempts at self-control are often evidence of his pre-tragic self: Romeo as 'a virtuous and well-governed youth', Hamlet as 'the soldier's, scholar's eye, tongue, sword', Othello as the imperturbable leader in the thunder of battle. These attempts serve also to emphasize by contrast the explosive power of the emotions which have begun to rack him. He may oscillate between moments of Stoic calm and passionate rage and grief; or his rages may hover uncertainly between the kind of rational, heroic anger approved by the Stoics and blind, vengeful fury. Hamlet dwells repeatedly on the conflicting values of impassioned, 'honourable' action on the one hand and rational control and Stoic resignation on the other (critics disagree on whether this dialectic is resolved in the end or not). Blending Stoic and Christian virtue, Lear proclaims that he will 'be the pattern of all patience and say nothing' in response to the cruelty of his daughters; but he has to pass through madness before the great rage subsides in him, and even then the calm is shortlived. The *Lear* world is one whose 'strange mutations' repeatedly shatter the armour of patience.

Shakespeare unquestionably admired much of the Stoic inheritance, but he also exposed the inadequacy of its more extreme attitudes to emotion. Thus Brutus's Stoic *apatheia* makes it possible for him to suppress his natural tenderness and murder his friend. *Hamlet* hints at a profoundly subversive point made by the Duchess of Gloucester in *Richard II* when Gaunt tells her they must wait patiently for God to exact justice on Richard: 'Call it not patience, Gaunt, it is despair' (1.2.29). Anger and lust tear the nation and its two leading families apart in *King Lear*, yet the posture of Stoic detachment self-consciously adopted by the grievously wronged Edgar is quickly rendered irrelevant by a recognition that the human heart, with its capacity for both love and hate, pity and rage, is the source of all that is

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best as well as all that is worst in human nature; thus the detached Edgar in the end enters the lists (both literally and metaphorically) and demonstrates his fitness for rule by virtue of his just anger and his compassionate love. It is not Coriolanus' ability to subject his notorious wrath to the claims of reason that saves Rome and redeems (and destroys) him, but an access of that natural gentleness which his mother's extreme version of Roman culture precluded. The symbolic geography of *Antony and Cleopatra* emphasizes a cultural clash between control and passion, Stoic and Epicurean. At one level, Rome and what it stands for triumphs over Egypt; but at another level the clash is resolved in a synthesis which proclaims the partiality of each set of values: that synthesis being the suicidal marriage of the Roman general and the Egyptian queen.

IV

The combination of truthfulness and formal perfection with which the spectacle of suffering and evil is presented in great tragedy is one reason why we derive both pleasure and satisfaction from what should in theory depress us. Another reason is the fact that most great tragedies, and Shakespeare's in particular, concur with the maxim that 'there is some soul of goodness in things evil, / Would men observingly distil it out' (*H5* 4.1.4-5). The ending of *Antony and Cleopatra*, with its note of triumph and exultation, is an extreme example of this aspect of Shakespeare's tragic practice. Varying greatly in degree of importance from one play to another, the positive aspect of tragic events manifests itself in several ways. Most obviously, there is the restoration of social order, with an emphasis on reunification and reconciliation. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the feud that divides the city and destroys the lovers is visibly ended with the mutual embrace of their remorseful fathers. In *Hamlet*, the enemy of the state becomes its saviour; in *Lear*, Albany changes sides and helps instal the virtuous Edgar as king; in *Macbeth*, the alienated nobility are reunited with their ruler, who gives 'thanks to *all at once*, and to *each one*' (5.9.41). In *Timon of Athens*, Alcibiades makes peace with the Athenians whom both he and 'transformèd Timon' grew to hate, declaring, 'I will use the olive with my sword / Make war breed peace, make peace stint war, make each / Prescribe to other as each other's leech' (5.5.19, 87-9). In the major Roman tragedies, the enemy of the dead hero is magnanimous in victory and acknowledges his nobility; a kind of reconciliation.

More important altogether are the reunions and reconciliations achieved by the protagonists themselves. Like Antony and Cleopatra, Romeo and Juliet are bonded in death, triumphing over those forces within and without which threatened to divide them. Hamlet exchanges forgiveness with Laertes

and dies at one with his mother; the repentant Lear and Gloucester are forgiven by their wronged children; Othello begs and receives forgiveness from his wronged friend, Cassio, and dies 'on a kiss' beside Desdemona; Coriolanus takes his mother's hand and so forgives and is forgiven by Rome. Timon, however, dies solitary and unforgiving, making

his everlasting mansion
Upon the beachèd verge of the salt flood,
Who once a day with his embossèd froth
The turbulent surge shall cover.

(5.2.100-3)

Yet Alcibiades suggests that nature forgives Timon, and he signals for others to do likewise when he looks at the dead hero: 'rich conceit / Taught thee to make vast Neptune weep for aye / On thy low grave, on faults forgiven. Dead is / Noble Timon' (5.5.80-5). The reconciling process entails confirmation of the hero's nobility as well as forgiveness for his rash and ignoble acts.

The most important distillation from the experience of things evil is understanding, or what in Aristotelian terminology is called 'recognition'. The journey of Lear and Gloucester from blindness to vision foregrounds a spiritual process which affects most of Shakespeare's tragic characters in some degree; it includes even Macbeth, who realizes that the crown which he coveted cannot compare in value with love and friendship lasting into ripe old age. Perhaps we should feel uneasy about Hamlet's insistence that Rosencrantz and Guildenstern are not near his conscience, and his public assertion (contradicting what he said in private to his mother) that it was not he but his madness that killed Polonius. Is he in this respect somewhat like Brutus, who dies failing to perceive that the killing of his friend for the crime that he *might* commit was profoundly wrong? We may be on surer ground when we note Hamlet's recognition in Act 5 (based on a new-found belief in Divine Providence) that it is not for him to choose the time for justice; a recognition which ultimately allows him to die at peace with himself. Othello's recognition of error and guilt is so great that he refuses divine mercy and commits suicide in the conviction that he merits the torments of Hell. Some have accused him, however, of essential blindness at the end, noting his failure to see that even if Desdemona were guilty of adultery it would still have been wicked to kill her. However valid in itself, the point is of doubtful dramatic relevance; to argue thus is to introduce a kind of mundane calculus which seems out of place in a tragedy of titanic emotion. On the other hand, the failure of the tragic hero to achieve complete recognition need not constitute a limitation in the play itself; the understanding which matters is that which the playwright enables the audience to achieve. But

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such understanding characteristically involves an awareness that there is no univocal answer to some of the questions – moral or metaphysical – raised by the tragic action.

By far the most positive aspect of Shakespearean tragedy is the final restoration of the protagonist's nobility, shown by the manner in which he meets death. The quality usually involved here is that of constancy, which signifies truth to self and one's values: a spiritual triumph over the forces of change. Exemplified in the deaths of Senecan characters such as Hercules and Polyxena, and in that of the historical Cato (Brutus's father-in-law), constancy was the supreme virtue in Stoic and neo-Stoic thought. But religious persecution gave it a special significance in the sixteenth century, as both the Protestant and Catholic martyrologies of the time vividly indicate. A notion of great importance in the long tradition of the noble death is that of dying 'like oneself'; and 'like a man' as distinct from a beast, upright and unflinching, with the kind of self-conscious decorum imputed to the first Thane of Cawdor: 'Nothing in his life / Became him like the leaving it' (*JC* 5.4.25; *Mac.* 1.4.7–8).

In its most extreme form, constancy involves suicide, signifying a calm refusal to submit to a superior force and live in misery, dishonour, or disgrace. Brutus and Cassius are obvious examples, but the cases of Romeo and Juliet and Antony and Cleopatra are more truly Shakespearean, since they locate personal identity in the human bond and emphasize the dual nature of the self. Hearing of Juliet's death, Romeo stoically defies the stars and decides to join her; his conduct here contrasts vividly with the adolescent and indeed bestial frenzy of his first reaction to bad news, and marks his attainment of manhood. And Juliet, having already overcome her terrors of isolation in the tomb in order to be true to Romeo, is no less 'manly' and decisive than Romeo in taking her life beside him. Hinted at here is an idea which is fully developed in the suicides of Antony and Cleopatra, each of whom learns from and imitates the other in death; suicide thus symbolizes a union of opposites by means of which the full potential of the noble self is disclosed. Othello's hell is that he is eternally separated from Desdemona; yet his dying on a kiss carries the suggestion of an 'atonement' (see 4.1.230) coextensive with the reintegration of self achieved by acknowledging and punishing the erring barbarian that he had become.

The theatricality of all these suicides, especially Othello's, is part of the Stoic style and can be matched in Seneca by, for example, the spectacular deaths of Astyanax and Polyxena, the second of which actually takes place in an open theatre where 'every heart / Was struck with terror, wonderment, and pity'.²⁰ Claims that we should take the theatricality of Shakespeare's suicides as self-deceiving egotism ignore not only the Stoic tradition in pagan

literature but, more importantly, the Christianized Stoicism exemplified in the political executions, martyrdoms, and martyrologies of the sixteenth century. As their accompanying woodcuts vividly indicate, the narratives of execution in John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* are as theatrical in conception as anything in Seneca; so too was the carefully studied manner in which Mary Queen of Scots and many other persons of high rank met their end on the scaffold in Tudor England. It was an age which gave substance to the observation, 'More are men's ends marked than their lives before' (*R2 2.1.11*).

V

Far more important than the composed ending in Shakespearean tragedy, however, is the central experience of suffering and distress. 'Is there no pity sitting in the clouds/That sees into the bottom of my grief?' asks Juliet in despair (*Rom.* 3.5.196-7). As early as *Titus Andronicus*, Shakespeare gave much attention to scenes where the protagonist cries out in anguish to human or divine witnesses of his or her misery, emblemizing thus the relationship between the play itself and the audience whom the dramatist seeks to fill with woe and wonder. Shakespeare conceives of his tragic characters as individuals to be remembered less for their errors and misdeeds than for the sufferings and griefs they endure in consequence. Prompted in this by Seneca's rhetorical bravura, but vastly surpassing it in dramatic intensity, Shakespeare's eloquence expends itself with astonishing bounty and ever increasing poignancy on the lament of the lacerated heart. Even Macbeth, the relentlessly clear-eyed murderer, utters cries of unassuageable pain which ensure our compassion: 'Canst thou not minister to a mind diseased,/Pluck from the memory a rooted sorrow . . .?' (*5.3.41-2*).

The causes of suffering in Shakespeare's tragedies are diffuse and seem to involve large abstract forces as well as human error, weakness, and malice. His characters frequently invoke fortune in such a way as to grant her the status of a mysterious supernatural being with a cruelly unpredictable personality. In addition, his plots are sometimes informed by a principle of ironic circularity which seems to testify to the presence of the capricious goddess and her famous wheel. Unlike the authors of the Fall of Princes narratives, however, Shakespeare usually intimates that the changes which are imputed to treacherous fortune are of human origin, and more precisely that her inconstancy corresponds with that of mutable human nature. The case of Richard II is exemplary: his fall from power (symbolized by his voluntary descent to 'the base court') is preceded by a scene in which he swings up and down repeatedly between wild optimism and total despair.

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Accident – Richard’s delayed return to England, the mistimed encounters in *Romeo and Juliet*, Emilia’s discovery of the handkerchief – may contribute to the advancement of the tragic plot, but it would not have the malign impact it does without the characters being what they are. In that sense, character is fate: one’s own character interacting with that of others.

Fate, in the sense of a predetermined order of events, is less frequently invoked but sometimes powerfully suggested. In *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet*, an impression of impending disaster is established by ominous occurrences which provoke fearful speculation in the dramatis personae. What is most notable about such speculation, however, is that it initiates a continuing process of inquiry and interpretation focused mainly on the uncertain significance of what certain individuals mean or intend. Even as Cassius intimates to Casca that disorders in the natural and the supernatural world prefigure what Caesar will do to Rome, thoughtful spectators will respond to his ‘But if you would consider the true cause... Why all these things change from their ordinance... To monstrous quality’ (1.3.62–8) by answering that he himself is in process of effecting such a change in Rome and Romans. In *Macbeth* ‘the weird sisters’ who contrive the hero’s downfall merely point him in the way he was already inclined to go (like the ‘fatal’ dagger); moreover, their treacherous double-talk matches the doubleness in his own and in all nature: ‘Double, double toil and trouble’.

And yet there is a very important sense in which circumstances conspire to produce a situation in which disaster seems inevitable. Hamlet is trapped in a situation where to do nothing is to encourage the spread of evil and to act is to become part of it: ‘O cursèd spite / That ever I was born to set it right’ (1.5.189–90). In *Othello*, chance contributes uncannily to the fulfilment of a doom adumbrated in a series of ominous or ironic observations at the start of the play; but the most cursed spite of all is that the trusting Othello should have as his confidant a man like Iago, without whom the tragedy is inconceivable. Hamlet offers what looks like Shakespeare’s explanation for the fall of all the tragic heroes when he speaks of noble and gifted men who are born with some vicious mole of nature (‘wherein they are not guilty’ (1.4.25)) that brings ruin upon them; but more often it is arguably their good qualities which, in the given circumstances, prove fatal and become or engender defects. What Iago says of his plan to exploit ‘the inclining Desdemona’ is applicable also to his attack on the nobly trusting (‘free and open’) Othello: ‘out of her own goodness [I will] make the net / That shall enmesh them all’ (1.3.381, 2.3.328–9). Friar Lawrence comes nearer than Hamlet to the causal centre of Shakespearean tragedy when he observes – while philosophizing on the paradoxes of nature – that ‘virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied’ (2.2.21).

In the pagan universe of *King Lear* the gods are continually invoked as participants in the tragedy. Their existence, however, is implicitly called in question by the fact that the good and bad events imputed to them are shown by the immediate dramatic context to be of very human origin. Significantly, the deity who is invoked most solemnly and characterized most fully is Nature, a figure whose generosity and ferocity, kindness and cruelty, accounts for everything that happens in Lear's kingdom. The habit of finding causes for human misery outside the realm of nature is shown here to be part of the confusion in which most of the characters live. Lear points in the right direction when he speaks to the warring elements and asks: 'Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard-hearts?' (3.6.34–5).

In Christian theology, Divine Providence signifies God's ordering of a world rendered imperfect by the Fall, a mode of government which uses all acts and happenings, both good and bad, for an ultimately just and benevolent purpose. In Shakespeare's tragedies and tragical histories with a Christian setting, Divine Providence is invoked with varying degrees of emphasis and conviction. At the end of *Romeo and Juliet* the Friar says that '[a] greater power than we can contradict' has thwarted his plan to use the marriage of the lovers as a means of reconciling the two families; presumably he would agree with the Prince, who adds that Heaven has, instead, used the deaths of the lovers both to punish the feuding families and to end their discords. But the Friar has shown himself to be a natural philosopher rather than a theologian, and a more satisfactory explanation for the tragedy and its outcome can be found in his disquisition on nature's dialectical order, where medicines can prove poisonous and poisons medicinal.

Although saturated with doubt and uncertainty, *Hamlet* comes close to a firm providentialism; puzzlingly so. Horatio believes that 'Heaven will direct' his 'country's fate' (1.4.68) and Hamlet in the last act begins to see the controlling hand of Providence in his rash and bloody deeds. There can be little doubt that many in Shakespeare's audience would have internalized the Hamlet–Horatio understanding of the tragedy (they have been told by the hero and his friend 'what the show means'); but we can be sure that others would have found it strange that after all Hamlet's sufferings and scruples Divine Providence has arranged for Denmark to be ruled by a violent opportunist with no respect for international law or human life. Moreover, the ghost is the most palpable sign of the supernatural realm; and not only is it entirely ambiguous ('from heaven or from hell'), it is driven by distinctly human passions and recruits Hamlet to its cause by invoking two conceptions of nature, one associated with 'foul crimes', the other with filial love. Here, as in the incantations and 'natural magic' (3.2.243–8) of the player Lucianus, whose divinity is witchcraft's Hecate, the supernatural points us back to the

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unpredictable forces in nature; when light comes, Hamlet's 'erring spirit' returns to its habitation 'in sea or fire, in earth or air' (1.1.134). So whatever significance is attached in the tragedies to fortune, fate, the gods, and God, the crucial fact is that these always function in complete consistency with, and can easily be construed as projections of, the workings of nature in the actions of men and women.

Despite its inherent thrust towards violent confusion, nature is implicitly understood as an order; and that order is seen primarily in terms of Time. If it is possible to answer Bradley's question, What is the ultimate power in Shakespeare's tragic world?, the most reasonable answer would seem to be nature in its temporal dimension. In premodern cosmology, time is the measured movement of the elemental world and, like it, discloses a cyclic pattern of binary and quadruple opposites: day and night, spring and autumn, summer and winter. Accordingly, the confusion of night and day is a characteristic feature of Shakespeare's tragic world. Violent action being often nocturnal either in conception or execution, night is conceived as a time of rest and peace violated and as a symptom of chaos: the imagery of *Julius Caesar*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth* involves the mythical identification of Night and Hell (Erebus) as the children of Chaos. More importantly, the deeds which generate the tragic action are untimely or mistimed in the sense that they are dilatory or (much more often) either rash or cunningly swift.

Tragic catastrophes, too, reveal the corrective action of time. It is corrective first of all in the sense that it is retributive: untimely acts, whether tardy or rash, are punished in kind. Richard II 'wasted time' and then took from Hereford and 'from Time/His charters and his customary rights'; and 'now doth time waste' him (2.1.196-7, 5.5.49). Cassius kills Caesar 'in the shell' (before his presumptive crime is committed) and then has to kill himself on his own birthday: 'Time is come round, / And where I did begin, there shall I end... Caesar thou art revenged' (2.1.34, 5.3.23-5, 44-5). There is a comparable sense of symmetrical justice in Macbeth's recognition, 'Time, thou anticipatest my dread exploits' (4.1.143). Various accented, the pattern of Time's justice can be detected in most of the tragedies. However, this is not to imply that there is a neat overall distribution of justice in most of the tragedies. The villains get their deserts, but it cannot be said that the tragic characters are always responsible for what befalls them, nor even that the issue of responsibility is a primary concern. It can be argued indeed that the disproportion in Shakespearean tragedy between culpable error (where there is any) and consequent suffering, and between the sufferings of the noble and the wicked, is so great as to preclude any idea of justice and rationality. But that is surely too simple, however much it might coincide with how we ourselves would interpret the same events. It would be

more appropriate to say that Time – much like Bradley’s undefined ‘ultimate power’ – acts retributively through a convulsive action which sweeps away all but the most fortunate and the most astute.

Time’s action is corrective also in the sense that it is restorative, a force for renewal. The cyclic and dialectical order of nature entails that the positive undertone in Shakespeare’s tragic endings is a necessary and logical counterpart to the negative undertone in his comic endings. Nevertheless, the overall impression in the tragedies is of a world where Time is put disastrously out of joint with terrifying ease, and can only be set right again at huge cost. George Chapman’s aphorism, *The use of time is fate*, is very apt in relation to Shakespearean tragedy, especially if we stress the ominous note in the phrasing.

VI

Over the centuries, Ben Jonson’s claim that Shakespeare is not of an age but for all time has been continuously endorsed in different ways. Jonson, however, was not denying that Shakespeare addressed the specific concerns of his audience in ways they understood. Historically minded critics rightly remind us that his plays were inevitably shaped to a very considerable extent by the particular experiences, institutions, and ideas of the age in which he lived. One of the many advantages in approaching the plays from the perspective of Tudor–Jacobean politics and ideology is that we begin to perceive just why tragedy flourished to such an extraordinary degree in the period; for at every level, it was an age characterized by conflict and change: intense, heroic, painful, bitter, and violent.

The splitting of Christianity into two hotly antagonistic sects during the sixteenth century had a profound effect on England. The nation was torn between Catholic and Protestant claims to religio-political supremacy, a division which fuelled three rebellions, three attempted invasions, and several assassination attempts on Elizabeth. Moreover, the religio-political division split families and friends, gave rise to cruel personal betrayals, resulted in numerous executions for treason (seven hundred ‘at one fell swoop’ in 1570), and left men like John Donne uneasy in conscience after their pragmatic shift from one faith to the other: ‘O to vex me, contraries meet in one.’²¹

Interconnected with the Reformation was the decline of feudalism, the rise of authoritarian monarchy, and the waning power of the old aristocracy. It has been plausibly argued therefore that Shakespeare’s tragedies reflect ‘a tragic view of the decline of feudalism’ and that his heroes ‘are all living in a new world and are smashed by it’.²² Insecure as well as authoritarian,

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and creating unity by coercion and persecution, the Tudor regime severely reduced the freedoms of all its subjects; it thus created an environment in which the inherited tragic themes of tyranny, injustice, revenge, and the outraged revolt of the alienated individual had special resonance.

If the Reformation brought about an intensification of religious faith for many, the spectacle of two kindred theologies diabolizing each other necessarily generated an overwhelming sense of religious doubt in the minds of others. Moreover, the 'wars of truth' extended into philosophy, political theory, and science, where Montaigne, Machiavelli, and Copernicus boldly attacked ancient convictions. Sir Thomas Browne was surely in tune with the time when in 1635 or thereabouts he recalled that the wisest thinkers 'prove at last, almost all Scepticks, and stand like Janus [the double-faced deity] in the field of knowledge'. Looking back on the period, he saw it as a time of violent and tragic disunity. And like Shakespeare, he appealed to the contrarious model of nature as one way of making some sense of it all: 'this world is raised upon a mass of antipathies' and man himself is 'another world of contrarities'.²³

It is certainly true that we will never approach a full understanding of Shakespeare's tragedies if we ignore their historically specific filiations. The fact remains, however, that the greatness of these plays has been acknowledged for centuries by audiences and readers in diverse cultures who have relatively little knowledge of that kind. And they do so for the simple reason – I conclude by recalling the obvious – that Shakespeare not only engaged with but went through and beyond the contemporary to capture in brilliantly realized characters and deeply moving scenes some of the most persistent aspects of human nature and experience: the strength and the vulnerability, the goodness and the wickedness, of men and women; the desolation and courage of the individual at odds with society; the cruel injustices and the terrifying uncertainty of life itself.

NOTES

1. Kenneth Muir, *Shakespeare's Tragic Sequence* (London: Methuen, 1972), pp. 12, 16.
2. Dieter Mehl, *Shakespeare's Tragedies: An Introduction* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 7.
3. Alistair Fowler, *Kinds of Literature: An Introduction to the Theory of Genres and Modes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), p. 24. Cf. Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1966), pp. 15–46.
4. *Hegel on Tragedy*, ed. Anne and Henry Paolucci (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), pp. 62, 67–71, 89, 237.
5. Friedrich Nietzsche, 'The Birth of Tragedy' and 'The Genealogy of Morals', trans. Francis Golffing (New York: Doubleday, 1956), pp. 19, 33–6, 42, 50, 64.

6. See my *Shakespeare's Tragic Cosmos* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 11, 261–2.
7. *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (1909; London: Macmillan, 1962), pp. 83–4.
8. *Shakespearean Tragedy* (London: Macmillan, 1905), lect. 1.
9. Una Ellis-Fermor, 'The Equilibrium of Tragedy', *The Frontiers of Drama* (London: Methuen, 1948), pp. 127–47. See also Bernard McElroy, *Shakespeare's Mature Tragedies* (Princeton University Press, 1973), pp. 1–28.
10. F. L. Lucas, *Tragedy in Relation to Aristotle's Poetics* (London: Hogarth Press, 1927), pp. 55–6.
11. A. P. Rossiter, *Angel with Horns: Fifteen Lectures on Shakespeare* (London: Hutchinson, 1961), pp. 265–72.
12. Catherine Belsey, 'Tragedy, Justice and the Subject', in *1642: Literature and Power in the Seventeenth Century*, ed. Francis Barker (Essex, 1981), pp. 166–86; Jonathan Dollimore, *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1984).
13. On Seneca and the 'sympathetic universe', see Thomas G. Rosenmeyer, *Senecan Drama and Stoic Cosmology* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: University of California Press, 1989).
14. George Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie* (1589), ed. G. D. Willcock and A. Walker (Cambridge University Press, 1936), p. 26; Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry* (1595), ed. Geoffrey Shepherd (London: Nelson, 1965), p. 118.
15. Roland Mushat Frye, *Shakespeare: The Art of the Dramatist* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1982), p. 116.
16. See my *Shakespeare's Tragic Cosmos*, chap. 1.
17. On passion and suffering as marks of greatness in the hero, see especially Rossiter, *Angel with Horns*, p. 264, and Robert Kirsch, *The Passions of Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press), 1990. See also my 'Tragedy, *King Lear*, and the Politics of the Heart', *Shakespeare Survey* 44 (1992), 85–90.
18. Reuben A. Brower, *Hero and Saint: Shakespeare and the Graeco-Roman Heroic Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 31.
19. Eugene M. Waith, *Ideas of Greatness: Heroic Drama in England* (London: Hutchinson, 1971), p. 106.
20. *The Trojan Women*, lines 1179–80; in Seneca, *Four Tragedies and Octavia*, trans. E. F. Watling (London: Penguin, 1966), p. 203.
21. Donne, 'Holy Sonnets' no. XIX. But see especially no. XVIII.
22. Bertolt Brecht, *The Messingkauf Dialogues*, trans. John Willett (London: Methuen, 1965), p. 59.
23. *Sir Thomas Browne, The Major Works*, ed. C. A. Patrides (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), pp. 144–5, 148.