

For the most part the tragedy, outside certain of Shakespeare's, accepts with protesting wonder or with stoical resolution the 'wearisome Condition of Humanity', its insecure progress through vicissitude and confusion to an unjust and ineluctable fate. The sense of the lateness of time, the weariness of spirit, the burden of fruitless experience is heavy in *Measure for Measure*, *Troilus*, *Lear* and *Timon*, as it is intermittently through *Hamlet*, *Cymbeline*, *Philaster*, *The Maid's Tragedy*, *The Duchess of Malfi*, as it remains in *Tis Pity She's a Whore* and *The Broken Heart*.

It is indeed an Embassy of Death at which we assist in this drama, not continuously but recurrently, knowing that at any moment a character may fall suddenly in love with his own death. And that love of death grows, as much as from anything, from the inexplicableness of the world to which the drama has delimited its thought. Paradoxically, it has narrowed down the issue, abandoning the metaphysical universe to limit itself to the palpable and actual that can be pragmatically assessed, only to find itself the inheritor of a host of obstinate questionings, not only the 'blank misgivings of a creature Moving about in worlds not realized' but the half-fretful, insistent, monotonous questionings of destiny, conduct, motive, even his very nature itself. 'Since no man knows aught of what he leaves, what is it to leave betimes?'

It is indeed in this stoic endurance that they come, if at all, to rest. In those parts of their plays that hint a solution, define in any way a tragic conception, the dramatists seem to assume a dual world, sometimes near to Euripides' view of man doomed to destruction by the gods which, less noble than he, are yet stronger, sometimes to that obstinacy of defeat which grew from their growing sense of the futility of man's endeavour, of the doom which waited not upon him only, but upon the civilization he had built. Small wonder that the dramatists, shaken by the impact of the Machiavellian disillusionment and the fading of glory and disintegration of faith and tradition that so amply bore it out, fell back upon an older, overshadowing influence, the Seneca of their childhood.

The Elizabethans had rifled Seneca with glee as great as that with which they had earlier appropriated the pseudo-Machiavellian villain; they looked upon him as a store-house of theatrical themes and tricks, but outside the Senecan play proper they paid little attention to his sentiments or his poetry. The Jacobean, when his resources in this line had been assimilated or transformed by forty years of use, remembered him not as the source which 'let blood line by line', 'will afford you whole . . . handfulls of tragical speeches', but as the moralist whose 'sententiae' and images had fixed themselves in their minds from the pages of their schoolbooks. That the Stoic generalizations they reproduced were not necessarily his, were at least equally those of Cicero, Epictetus, Marcus Aurelius and later European borrowers, was beside the point. Except for a scholar like Ben Jonson the source of the thought was immaterial; it was its aptness to their present need that mattered.

Moreover, in this it was Seneca who came nearest to them; his disillusionment was the greater, his rhetoric the more specious; he lived too far from any golden age to have even their fading memory of its glory, but he shared their vision of a decaying civilization, he opened to them the language of undefeated despair . . . Thus the Jacobean drama, leading, as might be expected, the thought of the nation, arrives first at that point of view which spread later through popular thought--poetry, philosophy, science--separating each in turn from religion.

As the political dangers of the first half of the reign died away and the Stuart dynasty seemed to be settled upon the throne securely enough to avoid civil war, invasion and economic ruin, the tension of the first decade began to relax. Men no longer lived under the shadow of a half-unknown horror or seemed to move upon the very rim of eternity itself. Gradually there passes that sense of living at the world's end: 'In nos aetas ultima venit.' Imperceptibly at first, a more normal rhythm of mind comes back; everyday life resumes its course. . . The cycle has been completed since the first tragedy of Marlowe with Ford, where to look up to heaven leads to the assurance 'Look you, the stars shine still'.

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disillusionment and apprehension in the world from which that drama drew its themes and this, combined with the still living tradition of Marlowe's thought, set up a mood which resembles on one side that of English poetry in the second and third decades of the twentieth century and on another that of Seneca and his public in the first.

This was especially emphasized in the dramatic tradition by a factor which, though partly accidental, is of overwhelming importance, the impact upon the poetic universe of the Elizabethans of the thought of Machiavelli. Nothing could have been more alien to Elizabethan dramatic poetry, as it appears in the early work of Marlowe, Peele, Greene and Shakespeare, than Machiavelli's cold, scientific appraisal of the poverty of man's spirit. Although, in their utter inability to grasp the essentials of his system, they at first twisted his thought into some likeness to their own healthy love of melodramatic villainy, enough of his clear, withering honesty survives the perversion to drive the drama with irresistible force towards the acceptance of a materialist universe.

While the Machiavellian villain appealed to Kyd and to many of his public only as a theatrical figure apt for promiscuous villainy (which would have had relatively little lasting effect), Marlowe was concerned with the real system that lay behind this farrago of preposterous melodrama, and came to a limited understanding of Machiavelli himself. . . For Machiavelli, although easily misrepresented, was no mean force. One of the greatest, in some ways the most independent of assessors of human values, deeply civilized, trained to the highest point of sagacity and scientific precision, honest as few men are honest, Machiavelli offered to the mind that could grasp him with any completeness a compact, unshakeable interpretation of civilization based frankly upon the assumption of weakness, ingratitude and ill-will as essential elements of human character and society, upon the acceptance of religion only as the means of making a people docile to their governors, upon the open admission of cruelty, parsimony and betrayal of faith as necessary (if regrettable) instruments.

Moreover, the Machiavellian theory of society, in the hands of its more serious students such as Marlowe, reached English drama in a peculiarly vicious form, again partly as the result of an accident. Lacking the background of Machiavelli's experience (a country invaded by foreigners, given over to civil conflict between State and State for which there seemed no remedy in the ordinary course of political event), they missed the motive upon which the writing of *The Prince* at least depends. The dramatists, without a single exception, pass by without perceiving in it the burning vision of the great sixteenth-century vision of Italia Redenta--redeemed by the one thing that could unite it, the dominance of a just, firm, ruthless leader. By omitting the corner-stone of his thought, this vision of national union and liberation, by isolating from their context the most startling of his individual statements on religion, war and government and by appealing directly and indirectly to current sixteenth-century superstition and sentiment, it was easy for the popular purveyors of the tradition to display his books as the grammar of a diabolic creed, inculcating a policy of self-seeking and cynical aggression.

The figure of the self-seeking 'politician', with no object beyond his own supremacy, though full of melodramatic promise is actually unrealizable, and Marlowe himself perceived its insufficiency as soon as he examined it closely. But the unreal and fantastic figure of the Machiavellian continued to attract, with a curious, sinister fascination, both dramatists and public until well into the second decade of the seventeenth century. Shakespeare alone of all the major dramatists appears to escape; he followed Marlowe's conclusion and rejected the pseudo-Machiavellian villain as a figure psychologically contradictory and so, ultimately, dramatically valueless. But he does not seem to accept, either directly or indirectly, the Machiavellian scale of values whose oppressive influence can be traced, to greater or less degree, in most of the succeeding tragedy. Marlowe remains, then, the main channel by which this interpretation of life entered the Jacobean drama; Kyd it is true anticipates him, but the others derive from him. . . .

IV

In the world of chaotic thought behind the Jacobean drama, the visible is no longer either the image or the instrument of an invisible world, but exists in and per se as an alternative truth in conflict with the other and offering a rival interpretation of phenomena. . . This is a necessary corollary of the development of Jacobean tragedy. . . there is hardly a tragedian of standing in whom the basis, implicit or explicit, of his tragic conception is not this sense of the loss of a spiritual significance from within the revealed world of fact and event. And as the world has become two, of which the dramatists have chosen for their province the immediate, so knowledge has become dual and what is valid in the one is meaningless in the other; there is crime and suffering, but no hint of the classical Greek resolution of evil through the education that suffering brings. If there is any comment it is at most a thin, wavering doubt, a wandering scent blown for a moment on the tempest across the dark action of the final catastrophe. . . .

With Shakespeare, though perhaps only in *Lear*, this other illumination penetrates the 'deep pit of darkness' in which 'womanish and fearful mankind dwell(s)' and there is a momentary indication of what may lie beyond, the realization 'I have thought too little of this' with the sequent education by suffering of the people that share the central experience. . . .

All this, most noticeably, is not a literature of escape from, but a road to life; a way into reality by imaginative experience strictly related to, though no mere reproduction of, the experience of every day. Above all it is a literature of radiant comedy and of tragedy (and it produced very little genuine tragedy outside *Faustus* and *Romeo and Juliet*) Of the five or six plays of major interest in the tragic form some (*Edward II*, *Richard III*, *Richard II*) are primarily histories with their main interest in problems of state, government and kingship, while others (*The Spanish Tragedy*, *The Jew of Malta*), though they end in catastrophe, have not the mood of poetic tragedy that is present in *Faustus*, *Romeo and Juliet* and their Jacobean successors. still breathless from its first contemplation of the magnitude of fate.

But already Marlowe's decisive genius had made a significant modification in the field of experience to be drawn on by the drama, had defined the underlying mood that was to be a main factor in the development of English tragedy and in so doing had delimited indirectly the mood and field of its comedy. . . The full effect of his emphatic decision does not show itself immediately and might indeed never have done so had not much else in the fortunes and experience of the Jacobean age been propitious, but, coming when he does, the first explorer of tragic thought in English drama, he imposes something of his interpretation, contributes at least to the force and direction of its progress. For in Marlowe we find, earlier than in any of his contemporaries, the significant schism between the ideal or spiritual world and the world pragmatically estimated by everyday observation, which seems, in one form or another, to be an essential part of any tragic conception of the universe.

Marlowe in this is less an innovator than a thinker coming at the climax of a movement, defining what has long been implicit and, in so defining, giving to it a fresh direction, a modified or intensified significance. The beginnings of this movement may be traced in the separation of drama from the medieval Church and the slow process of secularization which has occupied some three hundred years. But because of this act of separation, in spite of the retention of doctrinal and traditional themes, the drama seems to have grown beneath the surface during that interval into the least ecclesiastical art. It was at the hands of Marlowe that the Church finally lost the drama, but his attitude of religious atheism would not have been enough alone to separate the world of the drama from the complete universe still contemplated by many of his contemporaries if it had not been for the part played by Church and drama in their mutual misinterpretations of each other and of that universal whole.

For, partly through the accident of Marlowe's leadership, the dramatists arrive earlier than the body of their contemporaries at a uniform rejection of the element of religion which habitually plays so large a part in the evolution of drama and so small a part in its full development. For outside the drama we can still meet in Marlowe's contemporaries of the late sixteenth century either a simple piety or a philosophic interpretation capable of beholding the apparent conflict as two aspects of a single world, capable of dwelling in this single world, this true universe where the seen is only an image of the unseen, of passing easily and without anxiety from contemplation of one aspect to that of the other. . . There is no doubt as to the relations of the spiritual world and the world of observed fact, nor as to the validity of man's judgment in supposing the seen to be the image and instrument of the unseen. . . .

It is, then, this unity, this acceptance of both the outer and the inner world, the seen and the unseen, the evidence of observed fact and the intuition of a spiritual universe, which Marlowe rejects and the drama after him is for a time powerless to recover. The denial of dogmatic theology gives a momentary freedom to the range of thought, a sudden and immense increase of stature and dignity to the figure of man who thus becomes the significant deity, at once priest and victim, of his own universe. For a time with Marlowe himself the stirring of this freedom, like a dark wind of thought, moves him to an exultation higher than the contemplations of his contemporaries whether in poetry or in drama. But even in him the mood dies down and the gigantic figure of Faustus, archetype of man's defiance in defeat, shrinks in Mortimer 'to a little point, A kind of nothing'.

III

The sinking of the clear exaltation of Elizabethan dramatic poetry into the sophisticated, satirical, conflicting mood, deeply divided, of the Jacobean drama has many concurrent causes other than Marlowe's rejection, after Faustus, of that 'wonder which is broken knowledge'. There were far-reaching political and social changes consequent upon the death of Elizabeth and the changing of the dynasty and these were felt by anticipation some years before that death actually happened. The apprehension, regret and disillusionment inevitable to the conscious passing of a long period of high civilization were not in this case unfounded, and those who had known the great age, even those who had only grown to manhood during its latest years, were touched by them, often without being able to define their loss in what had passed. Moreover, the literature, and especially the drama, had reached a stage of its development in which some transition from wonder and discovery to assessment and criticism was inevitable; this would have happened had Elizabeth been immortal. As it was, the phase, within the drama itself, of testing and questioning the findings and methods of the earlier age coincided with a period of

few of the political reasons which help to account on that side for the mood of misgiving, apprehension and uncertainty which spread through the thinking world, and is reflected with particular clearness in the drama, during ten or twelve years.

These things then were the heritage of the Jacobean drama on the threshold of its growth: spiritual uncertainty springing in part from the spreading of Machiavellian materialism emphasized by Marlowe's tragic thought and in still greater degree from the cause which has reproduced it today for us, fear of the impending destruction of a great civilization. The greatest plays of the years 1600-12 form a group reflecting this mood in one form or another: *Troilus and Cressida*, *Hamlet*, *The Malcontent*, *All's Well that Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure*, *Volpone*, *Lear*, *Macbeth*, *Timon of Athens*, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, *The Tragedy of Byron*, *The Alchemist*, *The Atheist's Tragedy*, *The Chaste Maid in Cheapside*, *The White Devil*. Through all these runs, besides the sense of spiritual emptiness or fear, a growing tendency to hold more closely to the evidence of the senses and of practical experience, to limit knowledge to a non-spiritual world of man and his relations with man. . . . tragedy, the form of drama responsible for interpreting to man the conditions of his own being, becomes satanic, revealing a world-order of evil power or, if it attempt excursions beyond man's immediate experience, bewildered and confused. This, passing through the work indicated above, finds its fullest expression in the unremitting satanism of Tourneur and, belatedly, in the scientific detachment of Middleton.

After the spiritual nadir of the middle years of the period a slow return to equilibrium sets in. The great age has gone, but so has the age of brooding, Senecan apprehension. , , so that the inexplicable fate of a generation born for destruction, is no longer the instinctive expression of their perplexity. Satanism and a revived Senecanism go hand in hand for a time, but gradually they give place to a mood that is sometimes serenity, sometimes indifference, but, in either case, that of an age that has ceased to live in touch with catastrophe. The resolution is complete in Shakespeare's latest plays, it breaks through imperfectly in incidental touches in *The Duchess of Malfi*, more strongly in the later plays of the Middleton-Rowley group, and is supreme in Ford: 'Look you, the stars shine still.' They do, indeed; but the whole gamut of tragic experience lies between Greene or Peele at the beginning and Ford at the end of the period, like as their moods and cadences sometimes are, and the severity, the increasingly undramatic continence which is the most marked feature of Ford's development, shows that a phase is closing, that he is the last spokesman of a dramatic period that, from the first plays of the early Elizabethans to his latest work, had been one continuous sequence in three clearly defined movements. It is with the last two of these that this study is primarily concerned, but something must be said first of the earlier, from which the later originated.

II

The double life of the age, the outer life of event and action and the inner of reflection and thought, stored in the drama, finding a high imaginative interpretation in theme, in commentary and, perhaps most fruitfully, in incidental and revealing imagery, is markedly different in the first two phases of the period, the Elizabethan proper and the early Jacobean. The notable changes that came with the turn of the century and the last years of Elizabeth form, in poetry as in social and political life, a division between the world of the 'nineties now past and the age we call Jacobean, set in before the actual accession of James. In drama especially, the second grew out of the first, was in fact so directly fathered by it that the relationship between them forms the most fitting introduction to the later growth.

In the earlier drama, the Elizabethan, the qualities most marked are clarity and exhilaration, the material chosen the tumultuous event of war and conquest or the romance of fairytale, myth or love. It reflects, as great poetic drama must, rather the desires of its audience than their normal lives, gathering together the moments of heightened experience in which they have lived most swiftly rather than the normal alternating of rapid event and inertia. The imperishable instinct for horrors that chill the blood and raise the hair is satisfied simply, lustily, childishly (almost, in the case of Kyd, gaily), with a gusto as healthy as high winds in spring; the plays of this phase do not so much represent the average effect of Elizabethan daily life as reveal a hearty, credulous love of straightforward bloodshed, murder and mutilation uncontaminated by sophisticated skill of setting.

The average man's eager preoccupation with politics foreign and domestic finds its account in a whole world of historical plays and a host of chronicles given over wholly or in part to the exploration of problems of government, of the nature of kingship, the king-becoming virtues, the evolution of the common Elizabethan's idea of a state. And beside this vivid mirroring of event are the plays of fantasy and romance, the delicate myths of Lyly, the diaphanous joy and humour of Peele's *Arraignement* and *Old Wives' Tale*, the straightforward tenderness of Greene's romantic scenes, their descendants in the early romantic plays of Shakespeare. Scattered throughout this drama are reflections of speculative thought carried out in the same mood of bold exploration, more amply revealed in the prose and metaphysical verse, but never with more depth of implication than in *Tamburlaine* and *Faustus*.

The Roots of Jacobean Tragedy in the Elizabethan Age

I

THE mood of the drama from the early Elizabethan to the late Jacobean period appears to pass through three phases and each reflects with some precision the characteristic thought, preoccupation or attitude to the problems of man's being of the period to which it belongs. That of the Elizabethan Age proper, the drama of Greene, Kyd, Peele, Marlowe and the early work of Shakespeare, is characterized by its faith in vitality, its worship of the glorious processes of life, an expansion and elation of mind which corresponds directly to the upward movement of a prosperous and expanding society. This robust gusto appears directly in the comedies of Shakespeare and only less directly in *Romeo and Juliet*, as instinct with the sense of the nobleness of life; it is there in the vigour of Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy* no less than in the tenderness of Greene or Peele's tremulous response to loveliness.

But already within this age another movement sets in, paradoxically, it might seem, were it not that one age always overlaps another and thought is for ever anticipated in germ. Marlowe, the leader of the earlier age in tragic thought, already points it towards the sense of defeat that was so marked a characteristic of the Jacobeans. For all his strength, for all the desperate valour of his aspiration, the final position of each play in turn is an intimate defeat of aspiration itself. Marlowe's keen spiritual sense sees through the delusion of prosperity that intoxicates his contemporaries as a whole and anticipates that mood of spiritual despair which is its necessary result and becomes the centre of the later tragic mood. And this position is reached by Marlowe through one section of his experience which is, in its turn, an epitome of the experience that touched a large number of the Jacobean dramatists after him, his exploration of the system of Machiavelli.

The impact of this system came obliquely to the Elizabethans, through the preposterous stage figure of the pseudo-Machiavellian villain, which presented truly neither Machiavelli's individual precepts nor the balance of his thought as a whole. Yet, because of the perversions suffered by his thought in transmission, what was received by the Elizabethan drama brought with it not only the withering breath of matter-of-fact materialism proper to his method, but a more bitterly cynical individualism than he had ever implied. This, touching some of the playwrights immediately (while others it almost missed), spread gradually over the habit of tragic thought, reinforced by the tradition of Marlowe's study of spiritual defeat.

It was reinforced still more effectively after the turn of the century by the apprehensions and the disillusionment that spread through political and social life with the death of Elizabeth, the accession of James, the influence of his court and the instability of the first years of his reign. This mood, culminating as it did in about 1605, took the form for public and private men alike of a sense of impending fate, of a state of affairs so unstable that great or sustained effort was suspended for a time and a sense of the futility of man's achievement set in. One immediate corollary of this is a preoccupation with death where the Elizabethans had been in love with life. Even when the actual threat was removed, those who survived found the great age gone and themselves the inheritors of poverty of spirit. This period of despondency or anxiety appears to last, in one form or another, from some four or five years before the death of Elizabeth, to some five or six years after the accession of James; the causes were similar though not identical throughout the period.

The sense of instability in the latter years of the reign of Elizabeth came mainly from the memory of the crises of the past three accessions and of the series of plots to assassinate the Queen throughout her reign combined with the knowledge that there was no obvious heir to the throne at her death. The threats of invasion by the Catholic power of Spain culminating in 1588 were still fresh in men's memories, as was the knowledge that Pius V had exempted Elizabeth's Catholic subjects from their oath of allegiance in 1570. The larger the number of her possible and the more level their claims, the more likelihood was there of civil war breaking out at her death and of the intervention of foreign power. The situation reached its crisis in the rebellion of Essex on February 7, 1601, and was to some degree alleviated by his defeat and execution. But the shock of the fall of so great and brilliant a figure had in itself an effect second only to the relief at the collapse of the political menace. By the following year it was generally recognized that James Stuart, already James VI of Scotland and son of Elizabeth's long time problematic cousin, Mary Queen of Scots, was the probable heir.

The short period of relief that followed his accession in 1603 gave way almost at once to a feeling of uncertainty and danger even greater than that of the last years of Elizabeth. His personal unpopularity as a sovereign went some way to bring this about. The lowering of standards in the court was immediate; slackness of discipline, loss of dignity and increase of expense combined to produce at once dissatisfaction and a feeling of unsteadiness. Plots to depose him broke out again almost at once; Cobham's in November 1603 involved Raleigh, a man who still represented the Elizabethans in the eyes of some of his contemporaries, and the Gunpowder plot in November 1605, which only just missed its mark, would have left the country deprived at one blow of all its leaders, temporal and ecclesiastical, and all the machinery of state. The constant plotting of the Jesuits against James went on for some time after the failure of the plot in 1605. These are of course only a