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A study of the principle of poetic justice in the tragedies of the age of Elizabeth exclusive of Shakespeare

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A STUDY OF THE PRINCIPLE OF POETIC JUSTICE IN THE TRAGEDIES OF THE AGE OF ELIZABETH EXCLUSIVE OF SHAKESPEARE

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INTRODUCTION

Poetic justice is by no means a dead issue as a principle of literary criticism. As a problem study, it will always be in existence; its legitimacy as an element of dramatic art has been equally upheld and opposed by both major and minor critics from the very dawn of dramatic criticism to the present day. "Poetic justice" is the title given to that literary doctrine which has to do with the relationship of and the balance between sin and retribution. It is justice made poetic. Man's intense desire to see the hand of a just Providence hovering over the seemingly chaotic and meaningless affairs of his fellows, led him to invent a theory of literature which would put meaning into his life and which would show the ultimate justice and goodness of the unseen Power. To see the wicked punished and the good rewarded, to observe the careful maintenance of a chain of cause and effect, is to experience what Bacon called a "satisfaction to the mind". Poetry should supply for us that satisfaction which the experiences of everyday life fail to provide. In life we see the murderer go unpunished and the good man reap what he

has not sown. As Bacon expresses it, man finds the world "in proportion inferior to the soul", and turns to poetry for the "shadow of satisfaction to the mind . . . in those points wherein the nature of things doth deny it." Poetic justice is justified as a principle of literary art because of man's desire to see good order in all things and because of the nature of poetry itself. "Because true history propoundeth the successes and issues of actions not so agreeable to the merits of virtue and vice, therefore poesy feigns them more just in retribution, and more according to revealed providence . . So . . . it appeareth that poesy serveth and conferreth to magnanimity, morality, and to delectation."[1]

A complete study of the principle would take into consideration other literary types besides the drama, but since, historically, the drama takes precedence over those other types, and since the first important controversy on the subject arose in England in connection with tragedy, I have considered it best to limit the material undertaken here to that form of dramatic art. Further than that, the

[1]Francis Bacon, Of the Advancement of Learning, p. 101.

study will be limited to some of the leading tragedies of the Elizabethan age, excluding those of Shakespeare, for it was the use or misuse of poetic justice in these plays which formed the basis of the famous Dennis-Addison controversy in the early eighteenth century. Poetic justice had become a highly formalized idea by that time, and Addison became a defender of the liberties of the dramatist and insisted that the reputation of English writers of tragedy should not be injured by the enforcement of such an arbitrary rule as Dennis and his fellow critics proposed. Since that time, the field over which the battle of the theory might be waged has decreased in size. Shakespeare is no longer condemned for having brought Desdemona to an unhappy death. The modern, especially, has turned from the old accepted idea of "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall be also reap", and has taken a particular pleasure in turning it upside down. Now we see that there is no planned plot for our lives. The narrow sense of tragedy that once held us when we saw justice overtake him who deserved his fate has given way before another sense of tragedy, one which apprehends that perhaps the greatest tragedy may be founded up-

on the very inscrutability of our lives. We no longer believe in the old dogma of poetic justice. Even so, poetic justice, whether it be modern or ancient, always has the fundamental problem of art with which to contend. That problem is, rightly enough, should it be the purpose of art to please, or to instruct? Dependent upon the answer to this question, is another problem: should the principle of poetic justice be accepted or rejected? Only this much may be said: it seems reasonable to expect that the absolute conformity to a strict form of poetic justice would injure the best interests of art and aesthetics as badly as the absolute violation of the doctrine would affect the conception of morality. A compromise seems inevitable.

CHAPTER I.

HISTORICAL SURVEY OF THE DOCTRINE OF POETIC JUSTICE

Generally speaking, it is unwise to take "art", "morality", and "aesthetics" and stir them up vigorously into a heavy and weighty sort of dissertation. Indulgence in such matters commonly leads to generalizations. However, the mixture of the three is not only inevitable, but also necessary in the consideration of that much-disputed literary dogma called poetic justice. Not less disputed has been the highest form of literary art which is called tragedy. Tragedy has been the keynote of criticism throughout the ages. It is an aristocrat among literary forms; Aristotle has fixed that fact firmly. Further than that, it has been generally conceded that the end and aim of <u>all</u> forms of art, literary and otherwise, is to instruct and to please. Tragedy, then, as an art concerns itself both with moral or ethical principles and with aesthetic pleasure. Whether or not the so-called moral is pointed out by the author, the fact remains that there is always a lesson to be learned from tragedy. It is equally true that pleasure in its deepest sense lies back of the apprecia-

tion of tragedy. Moral principle and aesthetic pleasure are linked inextricably.

As they are linked in tragedy, so are they bound to the doctrine of poetic justice, more commonly known as retribution. To be sure, there are kinds and kinds of poetic justice, or no poetic kind at all, as Professor S. H. Butcher upholds;[1] nevertheless, it should be clear that a study of this disputed doctrine should involve both aesthetics and morality, for the most common idea of poetic justice implies a judgment regarding the morality of action, and that judgment, in turn, implies either the acceptance or rejection of the principle of reward and punishment on the basis of the true aim and end of art. Such a study necessarily admits of a wider range of treatment than can be here attempted.

In the present case it is enough to deal briefly with the historical aspect of the matter. The Greek origin of the doctrine is, of course, of great importance from all points of view. All con-

[1] S. H. Butcher, Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, p. 224. Professor Butcher calls it "prosaic justice, misnamed poetical".

troversies concerning the English basis of poetic justice have their beginning, directly or indirectly in the principles established during the greatest age of activity in Greece. The great writers of tragedy, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and the still greater critics, Plato and Aristotle, gave full expression to the temper of the time, to the theories of the day. Principles were then stabilized which have influenced all art and literature ever since.

Plato was the first to recommend the doctrine of poetic justice. He flourished about forty years before Aristotle, who was his pupil; and he was preceded in Greek literature by that group of distinguished writers mentioned above. Aeschylus had been dead many years before Plato was born, and Euripides and Sophocles died during his early manhood. The glorious age of Greek tragedy was just passing away when he was beginning to formulate his views about philosophy, law, and literature. He was led to write, first, his Republic and, afterwards, his Laws, in defense of an ideal state which should not pass away as did the splendid state of Athens. In this ideal state, as it was set forth in the Republic, Plato re-

quired that poetry should depict the reward of virtue and the punishment of vice, and he would allow no exception to this rule.[1] Poetry, as he found it in Greek literature, failed to satisfy him from the point of view of ethics, since it failed sometimes to indicate what should be the proper consequences of the actions which were portrayed. He was a rigorist in the matter of poetic justice. He made it clear that he could not tolerate the idea of having wickedness triumph in poetical narrative, because it was contrary to his idea of eternal justice. And further than that, he feared that the sight of wickedness triumphant would serve as an incentive to evil for those who might read such a narrative or see it presented on the stage. The idea of justice was very close to Plato's heart. The Republic in its entirety is largely an application of his theory of justice, a definition of which is given in the first part of Book I, but which does not directly concern us here.

From all points of view, the language of Plato is sufficiently strong in favor of poetic justice.

[1]B. Jowett, Dialogues of Plato, III, p. 76.

He will admit of no departure from the practice of rewarding virtue and rendering crime unprofitable. Plato would not only praise the sort of tragedy constructed according to his rule, but he would reject from the realm of poetry any play that would violate the rule; and the author of such a play would be banished from the ideal commonwealth. His requirement is purely an ethical one, having its basis in the idea that society may be harmed or helped by poetic representations. Plato does not deal with the theory of either poetry or poetic justice from the aesthetic point of view. His hostility toward the poets is essentially based on an ethical ideal. He asks most directly, ". . . what will any one be profited if under the . . . excitement of poetry, he neglect justice and virtue?"[1] He makes it clear that the poets in portraying human conduct should strive for an ethical result. Men should be inspired to be virtuous and should be deterred from evil by seeing the ends of justice satisfied in a practical and a popular way. That way should be popular in its appeal to the spectator and practical in the re-

[1] B. Jowett, Dialogues of Plato, III, p. 322.

sults it should achieve. Plato accepted the doctrine of an eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth, and he believed that the sight of a life being taken for a life would be the best remedy for wrongdoing. He would demand, as Thomas Rymer later did, that the poet should represent rewards and punishments completely upon the stage, in full view of the spectator so that the spectator might have his popular sense of justice satisfied. The representation, for instance, of a man put to death for having killed his neighbor would be the most practical and popular way of deterring other men from evil.

Aristotle disagreed. Were a tragedy constructed according to the rule that virtue must be rewarded and vice must be punished, Aristotle would find fault with it. He would say that the pleasure derived from such a play would be proper to comedy rather than to tragedy. In other words, Aristotle, believing poetry to be primarily an emotional delight, did not recognize any direct moral purpose as the primary function of the poet, but rather upheld the aesthetic theory of the aim of poetry. Plato had not been the first to consider instruction as the chief end of poetry. From the days of the great dramatists,

there had been a sort of traditional acceptance of the idea that the purpose of poetry was to teach. Aristophanes, Professor Butcher reveals, especially stressed the idea. Aristotle, however, first formulated the contrary theory. Referring to the Poetics Butcher says:

> Neither in the definition of tragedy (ch. VI. 2), if properly understood, nor in the subsequent discussion of it, is there anything to lend countenance to the view that the office of tragedy is to work upon men's lives, and to make them better. The theater is not the school. Aristotle's critical judgments on poetry rest on aesthetic and logical grounds, they take no account of ethical aims and tendencies. He mentions Euripides some twenty times in the Poetics, and in the great majority of instances with censure. He points out numerous defects such as inartistic structure, bad character-drawing, a wrong part assigned to the chorus; but not a word is there of the immoral influence of which we hear so much in Aristophanes.[1]

The point is, Aristotle was concerned with the aesthetic pleasure proper to tragedy, rather than with its moral or immoral influence. He did not recommend the doctrine of poetic justice as it was supported by Plato. He took note of it only as it referred to a special type of dramatic representation.

[1]S. H. Butcher, Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, pp. 208-209.

The passage containing his chief reference to the idea of poetic justice occurs in the concluding part of chapter XIII in the Poetics. It is translated by Professor Butcher as follows:

> In the second rank comes the kind of tragedy which some place first. Like the Odyssey, it has a double thread of plot, and also an opposite catastrophe for the good and for the bad. It is generally thought to be the best owing to the weakness of the spectators; for the poet is guided in what he writes by the wishes of his audience. The pleasure, however, thence derived is not the true tragic pleasure. It is proper rather to comedy, where those who, in the piece, are the deadliest enemies - like Orestes and Aegisthus - quit the stage as friends at the close, and no one slays or is slain.

It should be noticed that this passage contains only a suggestion of what is meant by poetic justice, that suggestion being found in the reference to an opposite catastrophe for the good and the bad. Aristotle did not concern himself with the application of any theory of poetic justice. Pure tragedy, to him, did not involve a reward of virtue; it merely involved an unhappy ending - an ending which above all things should stir the emotions of pity and fear. When he objected to "the spectacle of a perfectly

good man brought from prosperity to adversity."[1] he did so not because it would offend against justice, but because it would be shocking to the spectator; his objection was based solely upon aesthetic grounds, not upon moral. He was not concerned with justice, at all, but only with the means of arousing the emotions of pity and fear. The perfectly bad man was an unacceptable as the perfectly good man for a high tragic figure; neither was human, and the sight of either one in adverse straits would arouse any emotions save those of pity and terror. The spectator could identify himself with neither one, and so the true tragic pleasure of the play would be lost. Aristotle wanted his tragic character to be essentially good, but humanly frail. In contrast to Plato, he decried the thoroughly virtuous man as he did the purely villainous one. Aristotle was not much in favor of giving prominence to the merits of virtue, as Plato was, because the protagonist of the play, who was to come to a pitiable end, was to be not entirely good and just

[1]S. H. Butcher, Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, pp. 208-209.

even though he was essentially noble. Plato would uphold the perfectly virtuous man; Aristotle demanded a flaw in his tragic hero.

The "pity and fear" clause of the Poetics has always been a stumbling block for critics. It is the key clause which establishes Aristotle's position in tragedy, and as such it has been called upon to support the conflicting ideas of different critics. The most radical interpretation is given by M. A. Quinlan[1] who calls upon the German critic, Georg Finsler, to support him. Quinlan believes, in brief, that the word "katharsis" implies essentially an ethical process, not an aesthetic one. The weight of authority, however, is on the other side. Butcher consistently maintains that whatever may be the indirect effect of the purging process of the emotions of pity and fear, Aristotle was not thinking directly of any such remote result. He had in mind the immediate end of art, the aesthetic function it was to fulfill. We carry his idea one step further and believe that he meant the emotions to be not only excited,

[1]M. A. Quinlan. Poetic Justice in the Drama, p. 59.

but also allayed, so that the spectator's tumult of mind might be resolved into a pleasurable calm and the spectator himself might be lifted out of himself and be brought face to face with the universal law of the world.

Whatever there is of ethics in Aristotle's view, it must be reached through aesthetic experience. Plato objected to the agitation of the emotions of pity and fear on the grounds that such intensifying would make men cowards; he wanted those emotions controlled. Aristotle hoped for the accomplishment of the same ultimate effect by the purgation method of arousing these emotions; he felt that the purging of the emotions of pity and fear would strengthen rather than lessen the qualities of the soldier. Morality was aesthetic for him.

After all, the Greeks did, it seems, have a sort of aesthetic morality. Plato exhibited an ultra-puritanical attitude which was somewhat inconsistent with the actual practice of the day. He was vitally interested in the representation of the virtuous man, and he remained so interested until the end of his life. He could not see that art might be consonant with morality without being artificially pressed into a narrow moral mold. It was

Aristotle who took a conspicuous place among those who had a broader and a saner view. Veering from the traditionally accepted idea that the object of art was to teach morals, Aristotle expressed the view that poetry is an emotional delight, having pleasure as its direct end, and only indirectly a moral end by virtue of its kathartic effects. Therein, he reached an aesthetic standpoint. He seemed to be aware that in this world of human affairs the precision of mechanism is impossible. Morality necessarily should be indefinite, for slavery to rigid formulas entails the death of all high moral responsibility. The final justification of Aristotle's aesthetic conception of morality is just this: it opens a wider perspective and reveals loftier standards than does Plato's; it shows that an apparent loss might be a part of an ultimate gain so that harmony and beauty, which a hard and barren duty might destroy forever, can be restored. It does not believe in small didacticism, but rather in a higher form of justice.

Shakespeare always had the wider perspective that Aristotle implies. He was too great an artist to be content with a narrow, precise apportionment

of blame in his plays; the ways of Providence to men were justified on a grand scale, and human virtue, no matter what befell it in the course of the play, was ultimately shown to be its own true reward. Shakespeare's ideas reflect Aristotle's. And Aristotle, it may be rightly assumed, rejected the commonly accepted dogma of poetic justice on the same principle; he believed in a higher doctrine, more poetic, more just. It is Aristotle's attitude rather than Plato's that reflects the ingrained, instinctive spirit of the Greeks. Living was an art to them. They tended to believe that the sphere of ethics was not to be narrowly distinguished from the sphere of aesthetics. The two could be one and compatible.

The Roman view of art, of morality, of aesthetics was different. With them the impulse of art was more limited than with the Greeks. Their practical minds craved precision and definition and avoided the indefinite; they were not aesthetically minded. As Havelock Ellis points out,[1] when Cicero wished to translate a Greek reference to a "beautiful" action, it became an "honorable" action. The Romans were concerned with the morality of ac-

[1] H. Ellis, The Dance of Life, p. 241.

tion rather than with the aesthetics. It was their nature to behave according to the dictates of a well-grounded moral system that there might be no discredit reflected upon their actions. Their genius was practical, utilitarian, matter-of-fact. They exhibited always a tendency to judge a thing by its usefulness or effectiveness; life itself was so judged. They proved rebellious to the Greek idea of living as an art; life was construed in terms of laws and principles which were essentially moral, ethical, and practical. Where the Greek character was visionary, delving into the mysteries of philosophy and art, the Roman character was stable and earth-bound, interested in the intricacies of law, order, and government.

When the Roman empire expanded and established contact with Greek culture, it was forced to adopt a more cosmopolitan air, and it could not help feeling the pressure of the great Hellenic ideas. After 250 B.C., Greek literature was freely translated into Roman, Greek culture was assimilated and absorbed by Roman thinkers, and the Roman temper became increasingly literary, individual, and intellectual. Greece, to a certain

extent, "took captive her rude conqueror". There followed a period of imitation on the part of the Romans, a period in which such dramatists as Seneca, Plautus, and later, Terence, created a Roman dramatic art based on Greek forms. The tragic writer, Seneca, with the true genius of the Roman, carried the balanced organization of the great Greek plays to a mechanical extreme but neglected to adopt that speculative philosophy and that rare poetic feeling which make the Greek plays aesthetically perfect. The Roman dramatist lacking the highest poetic imagination, confined himself to the perfection of technical details and to the expression of a rigorous moral order.

Aristotle, as has been shown, pointed the way to the separation of morals from aesthetics in the drama. He consistently maintained that poetry was a refined pleasure. To be sure, he withdrew, in doing so, from the older and more purely didactic ideas of his master, Plato. He did not allow the moral effect of art to take the place of the artistic end. If a play failed to produce the proper pleasure, it failed in the specific function of its art. It might be good morally, but bad aesthetical-

ly. Aristotle was not readily followed in this way of thinking, however. It was the older and prevailing Greek tradition that poetry should convey ethical teaching, and this tradition was adhered to in the schools of Greek rhetoric until it was assimilated and even more firmly established in the Roman world. The Romans tinged the Aristotelian doctrine with their own highly moral ideas and combined in equal measure the moral and aesthetic effect of a work of art. It was Horace, coming two centuries after Plautus, who reflected the typical Roman attitude by taking the stand that poetry for the education of youth and age should mix the useful with the sweet.

It is this teaching that has been handed down even to modern times. With the rise and spread of Christianity came the added emphasis by the Church fathers and by literary critics upon the ethical consideration of stage plays. Longinus, who belongs to the latter part of the third century and the beginning of the fourth, held strongly for the ethical requirement in poe-

try.[1] His treatise On the Sublime establishes poetry as necessarily religious. Another critic, Fulgentius, in the sixth century, gave prominence to the ethical function of poetry by applying an allegorical interpretation to Vergil's Aeneid.[2] This same principle is followed in the works of Dante and even Boccaccio, for there the allegorical meaning is inherent in the writings. As might be expected, such principles were fostered by the Church. Throughout the middle ages, the drama was always in the shadow of the cross. The fathers of the Church recognized its possibilities for evil, and the Church had discouraged very effectively the writing or acting of objectionable plays. It is not surprising, then, that the revival of the drama took place along religious lines. The morality, mystery, and miracle plays were encouraged by the very spirit which had done so much to retard the growth of the class-

[1] M. A. Quinlan, Poetic Justice in the Drama, p. 26.

[2] Ibid., p. 27.

ical drama. Only such drama as had a good moral effect was tolerated during the Middle Ages. It must be kept in mind that it was under this sort of censorship that the drama began in England.

The larger ideals of Christianity made life a progressive rather than a static thing, yet at the same time imposed restrictions upon man's knowledge. Knowledge became a fixed thing, faith was unquestioned, non-comformity was the unforgiveable sin. No new literature of value except the drama was created during the Dark Ages. There was a great spirit of learning, of spiritual and mental discipline, but the essence of it was a constant tendency to substitute theory for fact. Any problems of man's relation to the Infinite were settled by the precise dogmas of the Church; any problems of natural science or of literary science were referred back to Greece. Horace's observations on dramatic theory, for instance, were taken from the classics and were thought to be indisputably right as to technical details. The Ars Poetica was considered the perfect handbook of dramatic theory, and it exerted a tremendous influence on the writers of later centuries.

It must be remembered that Aristotle's works, themselves, were lost to European culture for many years.[1] The Poetics did not come into great prominence until the beginning of the sixteenth century, and even then critics either misinterpreted it or were indifferent to it. Italy was the first to appreciate it. For a period of some fifty years after the translation in Latin by Valla in 1498, Italians scholars gave the Poetics the attention and study it deserved. The first critical edition was published by Robortelli in 1548. France was fully half a century behind Italy in its critical appreciation of Aristotle, and England was still more backward. Spingarn says that the first reference to the Poetics in England was made in 1570 by Roger Ascham in The Scholemaster.[2]

[1]J. E. Spingarn, A History of Literary Criticism in the Renaissance, p. 16. This observation and the citations that follow are based on Spingarn's analysis of the works of the Renaissance critics.

[2]Ibid., p. 308.

Because of the fact that Aristotle had been lost sight of during the Middle Ages, Horace became the chief authority of classical antiquity, and when Aristotle did come into vogue, it was presumed that Horace was merely his interpreter. The teaching of Aristotle was confounded with that of Horace. Sir Philip Sidney, for example, in his Apologie for Poetrie repeatedly states that the end of poetry is "delightful teaching" or "to teach and delight", without knowing that he is following Horace rather than Aristotle. The view of Sidney was that of the Elizabethan age in general, as it was of the Renaissance. On all sides, poetry was admitted to have a certain aesthetic function; differences of opinion rose only in regard to the question of its moral function, and those differences will always exist, as they have in the past.

The relation of poetic justice to this moral function was variously referred to among some of the outstanding Italian critics of the sixteenth century. Their attitudes[1] lent weight to those of the English

[1] J. E. Spingarn, Hist. of Lit. Crit. These attitudes are fully treated on pp. 68ff.

critics who followed them. Cintio, in 1543, discussed the rules of poetry and concluded that the end of tragedy, as of comedy, was to conduce to virtue. He favored the representation of death on the stage so that the ends of justice might be served and the spectators withheld by fear from imitating vicious actions. Minturno, in 1559, set forth a requirement favoring poetic justice insofar as the wicked were concerned, because he thought that poetry should warn men against the excess of passions. Scaliger, in 1561, upheld views which are fundamentally those for which Rymer and Dennis became famous in England over a hundred years later. He believed the aim of tragedy, as of all poetry, to be purely ethical; the poet's function was to teach character through actions so that the spectator would imitate the good and abstain from the bad. The moral aim of the drama was to be attained directly and indirectly; directly, there was to be the enunciation of moral precepts during the course of the play, and indirectly, there was to be the representation of wickedness ultimately punished and virtue ultimately rewarded.

When Scaliger wrote, English literary criticism

had not yet begun and before that time English tragedy, as we know it, had not been produced. Even so, poetic justice was recognized already as a dramatic requirement for all pays subjected to censorship. As M. A. Quinlan points out,[1] the doctrine of poetic justice was recognized in 1543 by an act of Parliament which attempted to limit the staging of any plays save those which exhibited the punishments of the wicked and the reward of the good. George Gascoigne in 1575 and George Whetstone in 1578 portrayed the same principle in plays they wrote.[2] Sidney made a note of the doctrine in 1583, and Puttenham in 1589.[3] Bacon is credited with a recognition of the principle in his Essay on the Advancement of Learning, published in 1605, and Richard Fleckno's Short Discourse of the English Stage, published in 1664, firmly upholds that the chief business of a play is to illustrate, practi-

[1]M. A. Quinlan, Poetic Justice in the Drama, p. 66ff. These points are fully covered in Chap. II.

[2]Ibid., p. 66.

[3]Ibid., p. 66.

cally, this dramatic law.[1] English thought on the subject was more concerned with the ethics of the drama than with any other considerations. It was the Puritan spirit as expressed by Roger Ascham which was largely responsible for the subsequent development of criticism of the principle of poetic justice. Ascham was one of the most distinguished of the defenders of Puritanism; he attacked the drama on the grounds of immorality and forced its upholders to come to its defense. Because of the opposition with which the drama had to contend, its defenders found it was far more necessary to justify it on grounds of morality than to emphasize its aesthetic function.

It is hardly necessary to observe how important the doctrine of poetic justice was in such a situation. Whatever might have been the effect of a philosophical argument in favor of the aesthetic aim of poetry, it was of such little importance at the time that there is hardly any evidence of it in

[1] M. A. Quinlan, Poetic Justice in the Drama, p. 66.

early English criticism. Critics sought the obvious morality. Tactics became more and more rigorous after the theaters were closed until by the end of the seventeenth century, a vigorous campaign was being made against the ethics of the drama. Fault was found with the most distinguished of the Elizabethan playwrights. Shakespeare, Beaumont and Fletcher, Jonson, and Webster were criticised for not having followed the law of poetic justice. Thomas Rymer was the extremist who held this view. He entered the field of literary criticism in the fullest sense of the word with the publication in 1678 of his The Tragedies of the Last Age. He formulated his idea of the doctrine more fully than had been done before, and he took a most radical position in regard to it. His theory admitted no mercy for the one who was to suffer; it went so far as to demand that suffering be placed upon the stage. It was Rymer who introduced the eighteenth century expression that there should be "no hell behind the scenes." John Dennis was another extremist. He maintained that it was not sufficient to punish the leading characters for their crimes, but that the minor characters, too, must be treated

according to the same strict rule.

It was Joseph Addison who instituted the revolt against this view of poetic justice when, in 1711, he began a discussion of the drama in The Spectator and paid his compliments to both Rymer and Dennis by calling their doctrine "ridiculous". He was critic enough to recognize Shakespeare as one of the world's greatest dramatists and he realized how inadequate such minor rules of morality were in the face of Shakespeare's high achievement. At first Addision stood alone, but rapidly the appreciators of Shakespeare rallied to the revolt and the idea that the drama should be a mirror of life became soundly established.

It is significant that there was no evidence, before Addison, of anyone arguing in favor of the non-observance of poetic justice. Critics had come to accept it as a traditional conception of the function of poetry; it particularly satisfied the ethical requirement of the Puritans. It is extremely significant, however, that certain dramatists had ignored the accepted rule. Their opposition was silent. It would seem from the criticism against such rebel writers that the rules that gov-

ern art are an after-thought in the minds of lesser men.

At any rate, Shakespeare is the outstanding example of a writer who ignored the strict rule of poetic justice. The narrow sense of the term was too confining for his genius. He found life to be both good and evil, and he believed it absurd to show that good must always triumph superficially. The traditional idea of rewards and punishments in tragedy exhibited an optimism too shallow for his art to follow. Some of his leading contempories also avoided a strict following of the rule, in spite of the fact that the Puritan spirit was always strong on the side of cut-and-dried morality.

Because of the censorship placed upon the drama, it would seem wise for the dramatic writers of the Elizabethan age to make the best of a situation and write their plays so that the cause of morality would appear to be served. How they did serve that cause and how successful they were, both ethically and aesthetically, it is the purpose of the second part of this paper to discover.

CHAPTER II.

STUDY OF THE DOCTRINE IN FIFTEEN SELECTED REPRESENTATIVE ELIZABETHAN TRAGEDIES.

A protest against the conventionalities of the "ghost and revenge" drama and a demand for greater realism was made in Arden of Feversham, the earliest extant domestic tragedy, the author of which is unknown.[1] It was acted about 1590 and was first published in 1592. The play relates the history of a murder committed some forty years before, and makes its appeal almost as a melodrama would. The plot, in brief, is this: Alice, the wife of Thomas Arden, becomes the mistress of Mosbie, a countryman of low birth. The two plan to murder Arden, she because of her passion for Mosbie, he because he wants the wealth which Alice would possess upon her husband's death. After several attempts which are unsuccessful, they finally commit the murder, but their crime is immediately discovered and

[1]Ashley Thorndike, Tragedy, p. 109-110.

they and their accomplices are executed.

The cause of morality is very neatly served in this play, inasmuch as in the last two scenes the author definitely points out the errors in the ways of the offending characters. In Scene v, Act V, after the trial, each one implicated in the crime reproaches the other until the sentence is given and all are sent to a speedy execution. The author follows an exceedingly strict form of justice in having all the guilty parties suffer death regardless of the magnitude of their guilt. The author seems to rationalize that guilt is guilt, no matter what the degree, and so all must suffer alike to please the ends of justice. This idea is carried to its extreme when, in the concluding scene of the play, Franklin, the loyal friend of Arden and the only true survivor of the tragedy, enters the stage to deliver himself of an epilogue which takes care to point out the fact that everyone received his own just deserts, even the seemingly wronged and abused Arden. This epilogue establishes the proof that Arden of Feversham is a morally conceived play following the dictates of a theory of justice based upon strict retribution.

This is the last word of the author:

> Thus have you seen the truth of Arden's death.
> As for the ruffians, Shakebag and Black Will,
> The one took sanctuary, and, being sent for out,
> Was murdered in Southwark as he passed
> To Greenwick, where the Lord Protector lay.
> Black Will was burned in Flushing on a stage;
> Greene was hanged at Osbridge in Kent;
> The painter fled and how he died we know not.
> But this above the rest is to be noted:
> Arden lay murdered in that plot of ground
> Which he by force and violence held from Reede;
> And in the grass his body's print was seen
> Two years and more after the deed was done.
> Gentlemen, we hope you'll pardon this naked
> tragedy,
> Wherein no filed points are foisted in
> To make it gracious to the ear or eye;
> For simple truth is gracious enough,
> And needs no other points of glosing stuff.[1]

The audience is not allowed to surmise that any one escaped justice or was punished unjustly. Shakebag, Black Will, Greene, and the painter are shown to have met death behind scenes. In the case of the painter, although "how he died we know not", still the fact of his death is taken for granted. And lest Arden seem to have been unjustly punished, the author says:

> But this above the rest is to be noted:
> Arden lay murdered in that plot of ground
> Which he by force and violence held from Reede;[2]

[1] Arden of Feversham, Act V., Scene vi.

[2] Ibid., Act V., Scene vi.

In every case the moral seems obviously pointed: The wages of sin is death. The moral import of the play is echoed in Alice Arden's last line:

Let my death make amends for all my sins.[1]

Even though the spectator or the reader may be morally satisfied with Arden of Feversham, there yet remains much to be desired from the artistic view-point. Notwithstanding the protestation uttered in the last five lines of the epilogue, the play is not "naked tragedy" nor does it avoid details which make it "gracious to the ear and eye". It has the accustomed unreal decorations of the contemporary tragedy. Its greatest merit lies in the types. Alice Arden is an unmoral, rather than an immoral woman, for she seemingly has no sense of morality but only an utterly selfish regard for herself. Yet even so, she is not the true villain, for although she is strong in her evil intent at the beginning, she cracks under the strain toward the end and experiences remorse. Mosbie is the true villain who has not even the excuse of passion to condone his crime. Both he, as

[1]Arden of Feversham, Act V., Scene v.

the scheming "bad man" who murders a fellow man for money, and Alice, as the unfaithful wife, get the proper retribution. Arden, however, is rather a victim of circumstances. The author, in the epilogue, as has been noted, tries to show wherein Arden's fate was deserved, but the spectator tends to feel that Arden did not suffer death because of a tragic flaw. One can no longer imply that tragedy, like Providence, distinguishes the just from the unjust, nor is such a play to be searched, like the ways of Providence, for such a perfect discrimination. To a modern it would have seemed more fitting and more tragic had Arden's fate remained undeserved and had the end of poetic justice remained unserved. Arden of Feversham is an imperfect play, neither tragedy nor melodrama. The hero faces no great conflict, he does not die tragically, in the true sense of the word, nor does he "come out on top" as the hero of a melodrama should. Furthermore, the play is weakened aesthetically by the forcing of a moral.

Thomas Kyd's, The Spanish Tragedy, published in 1592, was probably acted in 1588.[1] It is a play

[1]Ashley Thorndike, Tragedy, p. 100.

of crude and cumbrous effects, full of absurdity and bombast, yet not wholly powerless in its presentation of the struggle of the human will against evil and destiny. The main theme of the play is revenge of a father for the death of his son. The idea of the vengeance of the gods or of Providence or of Fate, what you will, being carried out by man is especially strong. What happens to all the important characters of the play is told by the ghost in Act IV, Scene v:

> Horatio murder'd in his father's bower;
> Vile Serberine by Pedringano slain;
> False Pedringano hang'd by quaint device;
> Fair Isabella by herself misdone;
> Prince Balthazar by Bellimperia stabb'd;
> The Duke of Castile and his wicked son
> Both done to death by old Hieronimo;
> My Bellimperia fall'n, as Dido fell,
> And good Hieronimo slain by himself:

Of all these, Lorenzo, Balthazar, and the Duke of Castile are the real villains who deserve their fate, who reap what they sow. Serberine and Pedringano, as accomplices, also deserve their deaths. Horatio, Bellimperia, Isabella, and Hierinimo seem to be victims of circumstance. Horatio is undeservedly slain at the instigation of the Machiavellian Lorenzo. Isabella, a perfectly innocent victim enmeshed by the inscrutable and unjust ways of

life, goes mad, and in her insanity commits suicide. Bellimperia and Hieronimo are the agents of revenge, and, after fulfilling their duties, bring their own fates upon themselves deliberately through suicide. They punish themselves for having killed other people; they are their own poetic justice. Bellimperia is of little importance as a character; she is a mere peg upon which Kyd hung sentimentalized love and revenge speeches. But the character of Hieronimo, rudely drawn though it is, cannot be said to fail in subtlety of conception. He is naturally good and noble, meditative by temperament, driven to melancholy and madness by the responsibility forced upon him by crime. When faced by the necessity for revenge, Hieronimo truly faces a conflict; he has to contend both with his own hesitation and the intrigues of the villain. He very nearly approaches the character of the true tragic hero. Kyd, however, did not allow himself to concentrate his energies to that end. Kyd was not attempting to penetrate the mystery of life in this play. He was writing for the theater, not for literature; he was not sincere and honest in expressing a true view of life, for

his characters do not rise above the level of puppets that may be shoved through their parts. The result is that there is no true tragic motive at the bottom of all the trouble in The Spanish Tragedy. Kyd turned moralist at the end of the play, after having given his audience a mixture of classical hocus-pocus and veiled meaning, and completed his "people's play" with a definite attempt at showing the law of poetic justice at work. Revenge says to the Ghost:

> Then haste we down to meet thy friends and foes:
> To place thy friends in ease, the rest in woes;
> For here though death hath end their misery,
> I'll there begin their endless tragedy.[1]

Tamburlaine is the first tragedy worthy of study from all points of view. It meant something to Marlowe, and to art as well. Strictly speaking it is not a tragedy, but a "success" play, showing the lust and desire for power which was a prominent aspect of the Renaissance. It was acted as early as 1588.[2] Marlowe discarded the old conception of tragedy which dealt only with life and death, with reversal of fortune, or with bloody

[1] The Spanish Tragedy, Act Iv., Scene v.

[2] Ashley Thorndike, Tragedy, p. 89.

crime, and substituted for it the conception of a great personality struggling heroically against an inevitable defeat. Tamburlaine hardly can be said to have been overwhelmed by an inexorable law of poetic justice, for Marlowe has him die rather tamely for all the evils he has done. There is no expression of a well-ordered doctrine of poetic justice in the play, since Marlowe was never a conformist; nor is there, on the other hand, a high tragic expression of the inscrutable workings of Providence. As Thorndike says, "Tamburlaine's death is merely the end of the play, not a tragic catastrophe."[1] Nevertheless, there is an unmistakable representation of the irony of life. Tamburlaine, the great, through his successful conquests has come to believe that he has attained the highest happiness, that of freedom from limitations. Then Zenocrate dies, undeservedly, from the point of view of a retributive dogma, and Tamburlaine is as bewildered as he is grieved. When he realizes that he, too, must yield to death as the strongest conqueror, he

[1]Ashley Thorndike, Tragedy, p. 91.

realizes with a shock that instead of controlling fate, he has been its plaything. Death becomes the only check to his egotism; it overcomes him as it overcomes everyone. Although death is the inevitable defeat which Tamburlaine as a great personality must face, it is not enough, from the standpoint of poetic justice, that he merely dies of a fever. Marlowe errs on the side of aesthetics, and so ultimately on the side of ethics, by not making Tamburlaine bring his own fate upon himself. There is no close relation of cause and effect. And even the greatest sceptic will agree that there should be some unity between what a man does and what happens to him as a result. What happened to the hero of Tamburlaine certainly is not enough to class that play as a poetic justice type.

In The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus, Marlowe has given us a more nearly tragic character and has lived up more fully to his idea of tragedy. That is, Dr. Faustus is the dominant figure, essentially good and noble, yet having a tragic flaw of character which is an uncontrollable passion for knowledge. The wealth of Faustus' personality is

the measure of the greatness of Marlowe's play. He has that touch of sublimity of soul which the great Greek characters had and for which a penalty must be paid. The penalty that is paid, the justice that is awarded to Faustus is of a peculiar sort. Open-eyed and clearminded, he drives a bargain with Mephistopheles involving his soul, knowing the fate which inevitably lies in store for him. His choice of the power of magic instead of his soul leads him toward apparent success, then past the opportunity for repentance to final remorse and damnation. The final soliloquy of Faustus and the terrific climax of the play reveal the suffering, the internal conflict, which the hero brought upon himself in a retributive manner. The most carefully planned sermon could scarcely hope to exceed in religious force the depiction of Faustus' fearful struggles with conscience and the unspeakable horror of his remorseful departure. Reflective soliloquies appear more frequently in this play than in Tamburlaine, a significant fact since it shows the increased importance given to inner conflict. The moral tone of the play is set by some of Faustus' soliloquies in which his over-ruling passion

struggles with his conscience. The opening soliloquy is a dramatic foreshadowing of his fate. In part he says,

> The reward of sin is death. That's hard. If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves, and there's no truth in us. Why then, belike we must sin, and so consequently die.
>
> Ay, we must die an everlasting death.[1]

Once he has made the decision, "this night I'll conjure tho' I die therefore", and once he has signed his soul away, there is no turning back for Faustus; body and soul, he is to be damned. He ignores all opportunities for repentance; and although in his last soliloquy he becomes remorseful, there is no hope of redemption; the catastrophe is total. This raises a question as to the aesthetic effectiveness of the end of the play, because Marlowe includes no element of hope in Faustus' downfall. Faustus is not reconciled to his fate. In the greatest tragedies, particularly in those of Shakespeare, there is always a high feeling of hope, of reconciliation, in the final scene. Faustus loses everything, even his soul; that is black pessimism. And, as a modern critic has said, "to lose the world but to gain

[1]The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus, Scene I.

one's soul, this is the profit of tragedy, as both history and art bear abundant witness. And the greater the victory, the greater the tragedy. For tragedy is life that plucks victory from the very jaws of defeat."[1]

Faustus is thoroughly punished. Marlowe bows to the demand for poetic justice and closes the play upon the moralizing of a chorus:

> Cut is the branch that might have grown full straight,
> And burned is Apollo's laurel bough,
> That sometime grew within this learned man.
> Faustus is gone; regard his hellish fall,
> Whose fiendful fortune may exhort the wise
> Only to wonder at unlawful things,
> Whose deepness doth entice such forward wits
> To practice more than heavenly power permits.[2]

The most popular of Marlowe's plays in the eyes of the Elizabethan audience was The Jew of Malta, acted about 1589.[3] As in Tamburlaine and Dr. Faustus, the interest in characterization centers in the main protagonist, the Jew is this case. He is the source of all evil in the play, utterly without conscience. With his accomplice, Ithamore,

[1]Philo Buck, Jr., Literary Criticism, p. 283.

[2]The Tragical History of Dr. Faustus, Scene XIV.

[3]Ashley Thorndike, Tragedy, p. 89.

he executes all manner of evil deeds in the true Machiavellian manner; once his lust for gold is thwarted, he drives himself through a series of villainous triumphs, killing everyone who opposes him, until at the end an ironic death overtakes him. He dies horribly, as he should, for all the horrible things he has done. Barabas is an inhuman monster; Marlowe could not do otherwise than bring him to a spectacular and well-deserved end. Ithamore, as the crafty counterpart of the Jew, also deserves his death. The majority of the minor characters, however, do not properly earn their fates. They seem to be the more or less innocent victims of the Jew's cunning machinations. They are not awarded a poetic justice. Marlowe, of course, was not particularly interested in minor characters, and so he merely sketched them in his plays without attempting a sustained delineation. They are only nine-pins which the Jew can knock down as he plays his game of evil intrigue.

Marlowe knew well how to delight his audiences, how to please their sense of justice. When Barabas, Ithamore, Bellamira, and Pilia-Borsa are

all proclaimed dead, Ferneze remarks to the Vice-Admiral of Spain,

> Wonder not at it, sir, the Heavens are just;
> Their deaths were like their lives, then
> think not of 'em.[1]

Such a remark is designed to impress the audience with the justice that overtakes the schemers. Barabas recovers from the death he feigned, but he does not escape from justice, for he is plunged finally into a cauldron of burning oil, and the audience experiences a double delight "for 'tis the sport to have the enginer Hoist with his own petar." In all likelihood the downfall of Barabas was greeted by tremendous applause. None the less, the play is not a legitimate type of tragedy. It lacks that greatness which Aristotle demanded of tragedy when he said, in deciding what was proper for tragedy.

> Nor, again, should the downfall of the utter villain be exhibited. A plot of this kind would, doubtless, satisfy the moral sense, but it would inspire neither pity nor fear; for pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune, bear by the misfortune of a man like ourselves.[2]

[1] The Jew of Malta, Act V., Scene i.

[2] S. H. Butcher, Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, p. 43.

In Bussy D'Ambois, acted about 1600 to 1604[1], George Chapman centered the interest of the spectators upon a story of ambition, conspiracy, and adultery, the hero of which is the powerful and insolent D'Ambois. Emphasis is placed upon literary figures and rhetorical philosophizing, not upon strong character portrayal or upon a careful following of the doctrine of poetic justice. Whatever there is of poetic justice order is included by implication in the lines Chapman has placed in the mouths of his characters. To be sure, Bussy D'Ambois receives just punishment for his pride in power and his arrogance in expecting to seduce Tamyra without fear of reprehension. He is given an opportunity to avoid his fate when Behemoth, the spirit, warns him in one of the final scenes that he will come to death through the hands of his mistress. Even so, D'Ambois exercises his will freely, knowing that his disregard of the fair warning might cost him his life. Tamyra, the unfaithful wife, does not pay the usual and accepted Elizabethan penalty of death for infi-

[1]Ashley Thorndike, Tragedy, p. 144.

delity, but is merely exiled from her husband. Her husband, Montsurry, with his friend, the Duke of Guise, goes scot-free for the intrigue and murder he caused. The ends of justice are not strictly served. It is significant, however, that this play was followed by another from the pen of Chapman, called The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois, in which, it may be implied, some attempt was made to avenge more justly the death of D'Ambois. Apparently, Chapman felt the necessity of portraying a more complete and proper retribution.

Some of Chapman's lines, as was mentioned, imply his point of view toward retribution, a point of view that is very Shakespearean in some of its suggestive power. D'Ambois' first line is this:

> Fortune, not Reason, rules the state of things . . .[1]

and it is followed by another fateful line:

> Man is a torch borne in the wind; a dream but of a shadow . . .[2]

Still later, comes this:

> Man's first hour's rise is first step

[1] Bussy D'Ambois, Act I., Scene i.

[2] Ibid.

to his fall.[1]

Tamyra echoes this belief in an external force which drives men to their actions when she confesses,

> It is not I, but urgent destiny,
> That (as great statesmen for their general end
> In politic justice, make poor men offend)
> Enforceth my offence to make it just.[2]

Tamyra also sounds the depths of tragic feeling when she asks,

> When will our human griefs be at their height?
> Man is a tree that hath no top in cares,
> No root in comforts; all his power to live
> Is given to no end, but t' have power to grieve.[3]

And the shadow of the Friar replies,

> It is the misery of our creation.[4]

Undoubtedly, the speech that reveals Chapman's attitude most clearly is the one delivered by Monsieur:

> Yet, as the winds sing through a hollow tree,
> And (since it lets them pass through) let's
> it stand;
> But a tree solid (since it gives no way
> To their wild rage) they rend up by the roots;

[1] Bussy D'Ambois, Act I., Scene i.

[2] Ibid., Act III., Scene i.

[3] Ibid., Act V., Scene iv.

[4] Ibid,, Act V., Scene iv.

> So this whole man,
> (That will not wind with every crooked way
> Trod by the servile world) shall reel and fall
> Before the frantic puffs of blind-born chance,
> That pipes through empty men and makes them
> dance.[1]

Although Chapman catered to the dictates of his audiences by revenging the death of D'Ambois in the second play, yet one feels that at heart he thought it true that Nature works at random, that there is no well-ordered rule of poetic justice in life.

Sejanus, His Fall, by Ben Jonson is a thoroughly moral play and at the same time is thoroughly ineffectual in strong tragic appeal. Jonson tried to enforce on the public stage what he regarded as the essential rules of tragedy, but he "o'erleaped himself" in striving for a classical effect with the result that his work smells too much of the lamp. Besides that, Sejanus is weakened from the artistic point of view by its abundant moral. Jonson classifies himself with the defenders of poetic justice when he concludes the argument of the play as follows:

> This do we advance, as a mark of terror to all traitors, and treasons; to show how just the heavens are, in pouring and thundering down a weighty vengeance on their unnatural intents,

[1] Bussy D'Ambois, Act V., Scene ii.

> even to the worst princes; much more to those, for guard of whose piety and virtue the angels are in continual watch, and God himself miraculously working.[1]

There is no doubt as to the intent of the tragedy. Sejanus, in his desire for power in the Roman Empire, stoops to inhuman acts and is brought to his death through the very man against whom he is conspiring. Sejanus himself is not a strong character; he is neither a good hero nor a bad villain. Also, the senators opposing him are weak. The result is that there is no strong conflict in the play, especially no spiritual conflict. Sejanus struggles neither with his conscience, since he does not seem to have one, nor with his antagonists, who oppose him only passively. Jonson shows no splendour of conflict, only the vice and meanness among men. Sejanus' downfall may be said to come about as a result of his arrogance toward the gods. He denies the power of Fortune, and Jonson, in the old classical tradition, has him punished for such a denial. As is customary with the majority of the Elizabethan plays, little attention is paid to the working out of the fates of the minor characters. The moral is cen-

[1]W. A. Neilson, Chief Elizabethan Dramatists, p. 248.

tered upon the fall of Sejanus. When it is all over, Jonson cannot refrain from calling the last attention of the audience to the lesson to be learned. He has Terentius say, as an epilogue,

> Let this example move the insolent man
> Not to grow proud and careless of the gods.
> It is an odious wisdom to blaspheme,
> Much more to slighten, or deny their powers:
> From whom the morning saw so great and high,
> Thus low and little, 'fore the even doth lie.[1]

In 1603, a play of domestic distress called A Woman Killed With Kindness, by Thomas Heywood, was popular on the stage.[2] Its theme is the common one of adultery and revenge, but the conclusion is in the nature of a surprise to the Elizabethan audience. John and Nan Frankford are but shortly married when John's friend, Wendoll, forces his love upon Nan. She becomes his mistress, albeit an unhappy one. When Frankford uncovers the situation, he berates Wendoll and banishes Nan from his life. Nan is so thoroughly repentant for her evil deed that she starves herself to death. Frankford forgives her before she dies. Wendoll leaves England to wan-

[1] Sejanus, his Fall, Act V., Scene x.

[2] Ashley Thorndike, Tragedy, p. 140.

der on the continent.

Penitence is strongly stressed in the play and the moral lesson is constantly enforced. Nan is the repentant sinner for whom the audience feels pity because of her punishment, even though her banishment seems just. Her sin is treated in a novel way, inasmuch as her husband refuses to take vengeance on her. His actions are contrary to all those expected of good, righteous, strong Elizabethans whose traditional ideas of adultery were invariably accompanied by ideas of vengeance. Nan does not get full retribution in their eyes, although we moderns are somewhat satisfied to accept penitence and remorse as sufficient suffering.

Wendoll is the villain who escapes the law of poetic justice. He utters a few words of sorrow over the whole affair, but he neither suffers greatly nor dies for his crime. He is a weakling, incapable of great nobility or suffering. Webster has put fine lines into his mouth but they do not sound sincere; his mental suffering does not wreck his soul.. He goes entirely unpunished.

Frankford is a nearly noble character who suffers severely because of his wife's infidelity and

who has done nothing himself to deserve the breaking up of his home. The Elizabethans thought him to be a kind man since he did not punish Nan with violence. The modern tendency is to be sceptical of his kindness, since his banishment of Nan from her home and children seems a greater cruelty than sudden death would have been. He, of course, forgives her at the end, but the forgiveness comes too late and she dies.

The doctrine of poetic justice is not carried through to its ultimate end. The guilty wife dies, but the villain escapes, and the husband suffers through no fault of his own. There is enough of morality, however, to satisfy the Puritan idea of having the drama teach a lesson. On three different occasions, Nan says,

> This maze I am in
> I fear will prove a labyrinth of sin.[1]
>
> Oh! what a clog unto the soul is sin![2]
>
> . . .when you tread awry,
> Your sins like mine will on your con-

[1] A Woman Killed With Kindness, Act II., Scene iii.

[2] Ibid., Act IV., Scene iv.

science lie.[1]

The characters of the sub-plot also preach their little lessons although they themselves are not so involved in tragic circumstances. Sir Francis says,

> . . . these troubles
> Fall on my head by justice of the heavens.[2]

And Susan remarks at the close of the play,

> Alas, that she should bear so hard a fate!
> Pity it is repentance comes too late.[3]

Heywood's tragedy is not great because the characters themselves are not great, nor is there any driving motive, any overwhelming conflict, in the play. It is not conceived on a grand scale. In its realism, it is not the strict poetic justice type of play, yet it serves the cause of morality by pointing out that sin is wicked.

The Maid's Tragedy, written about 1609-1611 by Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, is one of the most representative works of these two popular

[1] A Woman Killed With Kindness, Act IV., Scene v.

[2] Ibid., Act V., Scene iv.

[3] Ibid., Act V., Scene iv.

dramatists. The plot is highly ingenious and complicated, its main purpose being theatrical effectiveness. The scenes lead from one suspense to another always at a high pitch, until the final climax or catastrophe is reached. There is no subtlety of characterization, no depth and complexity of human nature, no attempt at great moral purpose, no nobility of conception.

Amintor gives up Aspatia to marry Evadne, who unknown to him is the King's mistress. When this is revealed to him, he becomes melancholy and tells his trouble to his friend Melantius, who decides to carry out a suitable revenge. Melantius persuades Evadne to kill the King; she also kills herself. Aspatia, disguised as her brother, challenges Amintor to a duel and is killed by him. When he discovers whom he has killed, he stabs himself and dies in remorse.

With the exception of Melantius, who suffers keenly from the loss of his friend, all the main characters get a violent death as retribution. The King dies for seducing Evadne; she dies for her villainy and crime; Amintor dies for killing his true love; and Aspatia is the indirect cause of her own death

although, strictly speaking, she does not deserve to die. It is her tragedy; she is the innocent victim. She and Melantius are the only figures who win sympathy from the audience. She is pitiable for the plight in which she finds herself; he is made noble through his strong and loyal friendship for Amintor.

Beaumont and Fletcher serve the cause of practical morality by concluding:

> May this a fair example be to me
> To rule with temper; for on lustful Kings
> Unlookt-fo sudden deaths from God are sent;
> But curst is he that is their instrument.[1]

But there is, in this play, in spite of the pointed lesson, no sense of an inevitable justice.

Before 1614, John Webster wrote one of the most impressive and important of the tragedies produced on the Elizabethan stage. In The Duchess of Malfi, Webster transformed the old blood-for-blood revenge play into an outstanding work of art and closely approached the genius of Shakespeare in his recognition of a high moral value. In construction, it is weak and crude, but in spirit, it is supremely poetic.

[1]The Maid's Tragedy, Act V., Scene iii.

The plot has its foundation in a story of villainy. The Duchess of Malfi is a widow, forbidden by her brothers, Ferdinand and the Cardinal, to marry again. They desire to be her only heirs, and appoint Bosola to spy upon her. She, however, loves and secretly marries Antonio, her steward. Bosola reports this to Ferdinand, and the Duchess is pursued, captured, tortured, and killed. Antonio is killed by Bosola by chance, and the Cardinal by Ferdinand. Ferdinand goes mad and dies at the hands of Bosola, and Bosola, the last survivor, dies from a wound the Cardinal gave him. The play ends on a hopeful note, however, since the Duchess' son by Antonio is to be restored in his mother's right.

As in Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy, the requital in this play is bloody and melodramatic. The deaths are as frequent as in the old tragedies and even more horrible. But the villainy seems more plausible, the suffering more intense, the characters more true and noble. The Duchess is especially strong, brave, noble and dominant of will. She says to her brother, Ferdinand, ". . . know, whether I am doom'd to live or die, I can do both

like a prince", and both she and Antonio feel of their love that the game is worth the candle, the punishment is worth the prize. They are both innocent of wrongdoing and in no sense do they deserve the fate that overtakes them. Nor does Cariola, the Duchess' servant, deserve her death. The pitifulness of the suffering and the horror of the evil in the play are so intensely dramatized that the spectator agrees with Webster that there is no justice in the ways of Providence, that the prevailing vview of life is bitter and cynical. The only relief is through respect for fortitude and conscience. Innocence may suffer from the cruelty of the wicked, but it dies heroically and nobly, and retribution awaits the violators of moral law. In the case of the Duchess, Webster rouses painful, pitiful feelings and does not calm them at the end. Her death shows no law of human destiny that connects suffering with previous action. The result is that the catastrophe that overcomes the Duchess strains the heart with pity, rather than with the fear that accompanies the spectacle of tragic guilt being punished. Ferdinand and the Cardinal reap the reward of vice, but they

have no qualities of the tragic figure. Bosola has some tragic struggle with himself, some redeeming features. He repents having played the part of a villain; he has some goodness but no real greatness of soul; he is not noble enough for a tragic hero. His death speech is a cry against the injustice of life and at the same time is a justification for a belief in the essential goodness and nobility in living. He moans,

> O, I am gone!
> We are only like dead walls or vaulted graves,
> That ruin'd, yields no echo. Fare you well!
> It may be pain, but no harm, to me to due
> In so good a quarrel. O, this gloomy world!
> In what a shadow, or deep pit of darkness,
> Doth womanish and fearful mankind live!
> Let worthy minds ne'er stagger in distrust
> To suffer death or shame for what is just:
> Mine is another voyage.[1]

The villains all die, but so do the good. There is no distinction made between the deaths of the good and the bad. Webster does not follow the rigid rule of poetic justice. He satisfies a higher morality, however, in his recognition of true values. The note of hopefullness, of reconciliation, at the end of the play recalls the ethical appeal of Shakespeare:

[1]The Duchess of Malfi, Act V., Scene v.

> Let us make noble use
> Of this great ruin . . .
> . . . I have ever thought
> Nature doth nothing so great for great men
> As when she's pleas'd to make them lords
> of truth:
> Integrity of life is fame's best friend,
> Which nobly, beyond death, shall crown
> the end.[1]

Webster's The White Devil shows this same point of view and these same characteristics to a slightly lesser degree. Like The Duchess of Malfi, this play is complicated in plot and has a strong revenge motif. Brachiano kills his wife, Isabella, and Vittoria kills her husband, Camillo, so that they might be free to love each other. Their crime is discovered and they are arraigned by Francisco and Monticello, Isabella's brothers. Vittoria and Brachiano are allowed to escape by Francisco, who has wicked plans for their punishment and who follows them to their hiding place. Brachiano is strangled, Vittoria is stabbed by the avengers sent by Francisco, but they in turn are betrayed and die all together.

All the wicked are punished; as there are no truly noble characters in the play, no one is pun-

[1] The Duchess of Malfi, Act V., Scene v.

ished undeservedly. The form of justice is followed and the good are shown to be triumphant. The moral that is pointed lies in the last two lines:

> Let guilty men remember, their black deeds,
> Do lean on crutches made of slender reeds.[1]

There is no proportional justice carried out, since all the villains die, as they did in Arden of Feversham, regardless of the enormity of their crime. Vittoria is wicked, but her enemies are more so. She is driven by Fate; they by revenge. She discloses the part Fate had in her downfall by two speeches:

> Oh, my greatest sin lay in my blood;
> Now my blood pays for it.[2]

> My soul, like to a ship in a black storm,
> Is driven, I know not whither.[3]

The power of Fate is given great importance by Webster. He exhibits a bitterness and a cynicism that is both searching and sincere. He believes with Flamineo that "Man may his fate foresee, but not prevent", and that "We cease to grieve, cease to be

[1] The White Devil, Act V., Scene vi.

[2] Ibid., Act V., Scene vi.

[3] Ibid., Act V., Scene vi.

fortune 's slaves Nay, cease to die, by dying." Death overcomes everyone alike. Even so, Webster is not pessimistic; he is only somber. He punishes the wicked all alike, but he knows such punishment to be only narrowly moral. The game he plays is as large as life itself. He discovered life to be complicated, not a regular chessboard of black and white.

Thomas Middleton and William Rowley collaborated in the writing of The Changeling which was produced as early as 1623. The play resolves itself upon the usual theme of villainy, murder, and revenge. Beatrice, in order to avoid a distasteful marriage with Alonzo, causes him to be murdered by De Flores whom she looks upon as a menial. De Flores demands her love as his reward, threatening to divulge the murder if she refuses him. She is led into an entanglement with this man she loathes, meanwhile marrying Alsemero whom she really loves and for whose sake she became implicated in murder. Alsemero finally learns the truth and casts Beatrice off. De Flores is arrested, but rather than fall into the hands of justice, he stabs Beatrice and then himself.

The play points a moral and so satisfies the

ethical requirement that is expected of all Elizabethan tragedies, but it does not rise through tragic intensity to an aesthetic perfection even though it contains a nearly tragic character in the person of Beatrice. She remains noble of heart even in her degradation and retains the sympathy of the audience. She is caught in a web of circumstances and is compelled to subscribe to the bargain she makes. In a minor way, she is a pawn of fate. She dies for her sins in a mood of heroic reconciliation saying,

> Forgive me, Alsemero, all forgive!
> 'Tis time to die when 'tis a shame to live.[1]

De Flores, who stabs Beatrice, is the direct agent of his own punishment. He is a clear-headed, powerful villain, who stops at no crime in order to advance himself and who prefers to die by his own hand when his game is up rather than at the hands of the avenging accusers. Both he and Beatrice die in the interests of justice.

Alsemero, who is innocent of any crime, endures suffering for his repudiation of Beatrice and so is made in a slight way, the cause of that suffering. Alonzo is entirely a victim of circumstances; he is

[1] The Changeling, Act V., Scene iii.

murdered because he happens to be in the way of De Flores. Diaphanta also comes to death as a victim of circumstance, although a moral justification of her death might be found in the fact that she was a willing deceiver of the innocent Alsemero. It is unprofitable and unwise to search a character carefully for some act or weakness that might explain his fate. Middleton and Rowley intended to show only the necessary justice, to point out only the obvious moral. Once this is done, they are willing to forget it all. The remaining characters of the play are inclined to the same manner. Vermandero says,

> Justice hath so right
> The guilty hit, that innocence is quit
> By proclamation, and may joy again.[1]

And Tomaso echoes him:

> Sir, I am satisfied; my injuries
> Lie dead before me; I can exact no more . . .[2]

The wicked are punished, the offices of justice are served, and the play ends.

Sometime before 1633, John Ford's two tragedies, The Broken Heart and 'Tis Pity She's a Whore were

[1] The Changeling, Act V., Scene iii.

[2] Ibid., Act V., Scene iii.

popular on the Elizabethan stage.[1] They are quite in accord with the prevailing modes of the drama.

The Broken Heart has for its theme, love and revenge. Penthea, who loves Orgilus, is forced by her brother, Ithocles, to marry the rich Bassanes. Ithocles later repents of his actions, after having fallen in love with Calantha. Orgilus, however, who has sworn vengeance for his blighted life, pursues his revenge in spite of an apparent reconciliation, and kills Ithocles just before he and Calantha are to be married and just as Penthea dies of madness and starvation. Calantha receives this news, along with that of the death of her father, while she is dancing at court, but she hides her grief until later. When her court duties are accomplished and her judgment of death is passed upon Orgilus, she allows her sorrow to overwhelm her and dies of a broken heart.

Calantha is a truly noble figure with heroic, Spartan virtues. She has done nothing for which she deserves punishment. The strain and the suspense preceding the fate that overtakes her are excellent-

[1]Ashley Thorndike, Tragedy, p. 227.

ly portrayed by Ford. There is no justice in her doom; she simply seems fated for it. Penthea, also, suffers unjustly. She is a pathetic heroine who is imposed upon by a hard but well-meaning brother. She suffers so from her thwarted love that she becomes mad; she is another example of virtue punished by the inscrutable ways of Providence. Orgilus is justly sentenced to death by Calantha, and works out a poetic justice upon himself in dying by his own hand. He is noble in his death and reconciled to his fate. He recognizes the justice of his doom when he says,

> O, Tecnicus, inspir'd with Phoebus' fire!
> I call to mind thy augury, 'twas perfect;
> Revenge proves its own executioner.[1]

And he realizes, as Shakespeare always did, the irony that man often is his own fate and causes his own disaster. He dies upon the words, "So falls the standard of my prerogative in being a creature."

What happens to Ithocles is excellent example of a retributive justice at work. He suffers from the very thing that caused his sister to suffer. He learns love's power and understands how cruel it is

[1] The Broken Heart, Act V., Scene iii.

for lovers to be separated. He asks Penthea's forgiveness, which is granted, and ends his scene with sincere, remorseful, self-reproaches:

> Mad man! why have I wrong'd a maid so excellent![1]

That he should die is not so important to the aesthetic beauty of the play as that he should suffer. Deep suffering and restrained passion are more tragic in effect that mere death. Barabas died, but the audience felt no sympathy, nor pity, nor fear. Great tragedy is concerned with the mystery of human suffering, and it is suffering such as Ithocles undergoes, such as Penthea wilts under, such as Calantha succumbs to, that tears at the heart of the spectator. It is the modern idea, of course, which upholds that death is not the only tragedy. We are morally satisfied to see the wrongdoer suffer mentally while seeming to go unpunished. The Elizabethans thought differently. With them retribution was treated in a formal manner; the punishment of the wrongdoer was physical and inevitable.

Suffering is made much of in The Broken Heart. It rises out of Ford's belief in fatality.

[1]The Broken Heart, Act III., Scene ii.

There are innumerable references in the play to the part fate takes in human life. Ford believes, it seems, that man cannot control his destiny, and that the ultimate power is not necessarily just and kind. Man cannot control his destiny because he is human, and so, frail. The ultimate power is not just and kind, as Ford sees it, for it slaps at the innocent and brings the virtuous to ruin. Man is doomed to fight in the dark. Tecnicus, a philosopher, warns Orgilus:

> Tempt not the stars; young man, thou canst not play
> With the severity of fate.[1]

In spite of this, however, Ford does not paint small characters on a small canvass. He gives his characters strength and passion and the will to act nobly despite fate. He believes, with Shakespeare, that a tragic character must have a touch of sublimity to come to a great disaster. It is the irony of life that the noble hero suffers from his noble qualities. Ford does not make his characters puny in The Broken Heart. It is this fact which accounts for the awfulness of the tragedy that comes upon

[1]The Broken Heart, Act I., Scene iii.

them. Ford presents tragic passion with an intensity and truth that is possible only to dramatic genius. He is far from being moral-minded, in the sense of pointing out a lesson, yet he draws upon the strongest ethical power by justifying the ways of Providence to men on a grand scale. One feels, in the final scene, that virtue, no matter what has happened to it on the stage, is its own true reward. Even Orgilus, in the throes of planning "swift deceits", says,

> Mortality
> Creeps on the dung of the earth, and cannot reach
> The riddles which are purpos'd by the gods.
> Great arts best write themselves in their own stories;
> They die too basely who outlive their glories.[1]

To be sure, the scenes in which tragic intensity is most commendable do not occur frequently. There is much that is worthless, conventional, and melodramatic. In fact, in 'Tis Pity, the theme of which is highly forbidding, there is only one scene worthy to be mentioned for its sincere dramatic intensity. It is the final party scene between brother and sister, in which Giovanni kills Annabella because he

[1]The Broken Heart, Act I., Scene iii.

loves her. He is the agent of the retribution she deserves as he was the cause of her sin. The scene is characterized by a finer restraint than is shown in the rest of the play and it establishes the only evidence of nobility in the entire work. Giovanni's supreme love for Annabella causes him to say, "Fair Annabella, How over-glorious art thou in thy wounds, Triumphing over infamy and hate." His belief in her essential goodness is unshaken. He then goes forth to face the avengers of the crime he and Annabella were guilty of, and forcing them to attack him, he welcomes death courageously. Both he and Annabella die justly for their unnatural love. Soranzo, Annabella's husband, becomes involved unwittingly to some extent, but he deserves the death that overtakes him for his weaknesses; he is not an essentially noble character. Vasques, a crafty, despicable villain, is merely banished for his evil deeds. Hippolyta, a minor character, receives an ironic justice in which a usual device is used; she is poisoned by wine intended for Soranzo whom she desired to kill. Florio dies undeservedly from the shock of knowing the horrible details of his children's crime and of his daughter's death.

Ford is non-committal on the subject of poetic justice in 'Tis Pity. Some of his characters receive it; some do not. He pretends to believe in it when he has the Friar say,

> . . . . Heaven is angry, and be thou resolv'd,
> Thou art a man remark'd to taste a mischief.
> Look for 't; though it come late, it will come sure.[1]

And also,

> Then I have done, and in thy wilful flames
> Already see thy ruin; Heaven is just.[2]

Yet Heaven is not always just, as the developments of his play later prove. In any case, Ford is not a moralist in practice, whatever he may have been in theory; he does not practice the strict rules of poetic justice by always punishing the wicked and rewarding the good in his plays, nor does he, as many earlier writers did, use his prologue and epilogue for a moralizing purpose. Whatever lesson he teaches comes through the aesthetic effect of certain rare and intense dramatic moments. It is The Broken Heart that approaches, at certain times, the aesthetic morality of a work of art that

[1] 'Tis Pity She's a Whore, Act II., Scene v.

[2] Ibid., Act I., Scene 1.

Aristotle implies and Shakespeare believes is the greater morality.

James Shirley was the last of the series of important poets to contribute to the great period of the English drama. He was the follower# in style as well as in point of time of Massinger and of Fletcher. His play, The Cardinal, follows the tradition of revenge, lust, intrigue, and villainy upon which the now decadent drama was based. The Cardinal himself is a Machiavellian character who delights in revenge nearly as much as Barabas did. When Duchess Rosaura avoids Don Columbo, the Cardinal's nephew, and marries Don Alvarez instead, the Cardinal urges Columbo on to the murder of Alvarez and then protects him from punishment. Hernando, Alvarez' friend, revenges the murder, however, by killing Columbo in a duel. This rouses the Cardinal to a fury and leads the way to the final catastrophe in which all are killed. The Cardinal is served with a truly ironic poetic justice which closely resembles that dealt out to the Jew of Malta. He poisons himself, thinking he is to die in any event from the wounds inflicted on him by Hernando. As he dies, he says, "Then I have caught myself in my own engine."

Hernando is a fairly noble character who, after he has killed Columbo in revenge and has saved the chastity of the Duchess by forestalling the Cardinal, turns his weapon upon himself with the words, "So; now we are even." He is the agent through whom justice is upheld. The Duchess and Alvarez are the more or less innocent victims of circumstance. He is murdered suddenly and without just cause as he is about to take his place in the wedding procession. The Duchess loses her wits and is tricked into drinking poison by the Cardinal. Again, virtue is not rewarded although vice is punished.

None of the characters is strong enough, good enough, or noble enough to warrant this play being called great. They are all accustomed to their world of crime, and they exhibit no great struggle against either good or bad forces. The intrigue and the villainy is what interests the audience. Shirley has made no attempt, as several of his predecessors did, to point a moral either in the prologue or the epilogue. Nor are there any significant lines in the body of the play which might indicate that its purpose was to teach a lesson. Shirley is merely appealing to his audience's love of entertainment and

"good theater"; there is no high ethical tone nor moral insight such as an artist like Shakespeare gives his audience. Shirley's appeal is purely to the box office.

CHAPTER III.

SUMMARY, WITH CONCLUSIONS.

The plays which have been considered here are among the most important and outstanding of those which held the English stage from 1560 to 1642. They are thoroughly representative of the best that was written in tragedy by the contemporaries of the master, Shakespeare. These plays, along with those of Shakespeare, are the ones against which Thomas Rymer argued in 1678. He disapproved of them on the grounds that they did not follow the strict dogma of poetic justice which he believed to be essential for the success of a tragedy. Rymer had cause to argue as he did, for none of these plays, with the possible exception of Arden of Feversham, exhibits the working of the doctrine which upholds the distribution of rewards and punishments in an exact manner. Rymer deplored this fact and implied that the tragedies might have been great had the rigid rule been followed. We moderns feel, of course, that rigidity of form and narrowness of principle alone do not cause a work of art to be great. "Poetical justice", as Rymer conceived it, is not and cannot be proved a practical theory in tragic drama. The representative

dramatists we have studied in connection with this subject consistently avoided it.

Aside from this observation, there are several significant points to notice in the plays just studied. Even though there is no dogmatic "poetical justice" in these tragedies, there is an indication of a common belief in some form of poetic justice as a literary principle, vague and hazy though it may be. With the exception of Tamburlaine, all the plays show some connection between what a man does and what happens to him as a result. The playwrights attempt to follow a law of cause and effect insofar as they are able. The hero or heroine usually deserves in some way the fate that overtakes him. The earlier dramatists stressed this particularly, reserving the epilogue or the closing lines of the play for just this moral. The cause of morality was always well served. Only the realist, like Heywood or Webster, dared to allow a Wendoll to go unpunished, or a Calantha to die undeservedly, or a Duchess to suffer entirely out of proportion to her crime.

Further observation leads to the discovery that while the wicked are generally punished, the good are not rewarded. In several cases, the vir-

tuous character suffers more than the villainous one. While this does not accord with Rymer's scheme of poetic justice, it does accord with the scheme of life. We now believe that the dramatist should attempt to hold the mirror up to life, to show the lack of design and mercy in the way of destiny, rather than to follow the narrow, rigid rules which rise out of man's desire to observe the law and order that he believes should be the aim of Providence. To follow a narrow dogma of poetic justice would be to abolish the mystery of human suffering, the inscrutability of which is the very essence of pure tragedy. The proper proportion of rewards for the good and punishments for the bad might be followed in comedy or tragi-comedy, where the hand of the author may be seen clearly in the act of distribution, but in tragedy, justice cannot be measured in prescribed doses. As writers like Shakespeare and Webster bear witness, the art of tragedy should be concerned with a penetration into Beauty and Truth, that sort of Beauty and Truth which man can approximate not with his logical mind, but only through aesthetic experience. It is only the rare poet, the great genius, who can fulfil such an ideal.

Although the plays studied here reveal that there was little attempt made by the dramatists to teach a lesson through the dogmatic distribution of rewards and punishments, yet they made a definite appeal to man's logical and practical mind. The writers all conformed to the traditional cry for a cut-and-dried morality. In the prologues, epilogues, or in the key-lines of their plays, they pointed out the expected moral of the tragedy. It was the easiest way to please the public and the censors. Few of these Elizabethans had yet realized that it is not the lesson to be learned, not the catastrophe of the play, which is of purest tragic essence, but the inevitable deadlock of conflicting forces that rouses the spectator to tragic ecstacy. It is the sort of ecstacy Aristotle implied when he wrote of katharsis and the pleasure proper to tragedy. If there must be a lesson in art, let it come out of the aesthetic pleasure that seizes the spectator when he views great forces in conflict. Shakespeare, of course, is the artist who did not give us dogmatic conclusions, and his plays carry in them the greatest ethical import. To compare his plays with the ma-

jority of those under consideration in this paper, is to know that the mere satisfaction of the moral sense does not make a tragedy great.

Of the dramatists we have studied, only Marlowe and Webster give evidence of high aesthetic feeling; and they placed their emphasis upon character delineation. The other dramatists also mirrored life, but concentrated upon the deeds of their heroes rather than upon character itself. Their heroes, heroines, and villains were punished for what they did rather than for what they were. In Arden of Feversham, for instance, all the guilty persons were punished for what they had done, regardless of differences in character and in the enormity of their crime. And in plays like Sejanus, 'Tis Pity, and The White Devil, the deeds of the characters are treated melodramatically, are given a spectacular interest. The distinction between action and character is a fine one, it is admitted. Shakespeare believed that action was character. But these dramatists did not delve so deeply into the characters they put on the stage. They romanticized deeds of blood and horror too highly to portray life and character accurately, and again their plays failed of greatness. It seems

to me that the most valuable attitude toward life, its justice and injustice, comes from those writers like Marlowe, Webster, and always Shakespeare, who created for us the concrete figure of a great personality, a Faustus, a Duchess of Malfi, an Othello, and who followed that personality through all vicissitudes to an end that was not bound by mere spectacle or by a narrow and confining dramatic code. If tragedy is to be the aristocrat of art forms, as Aristotle believed it should be, it must raise its head above small deeds and narrow morality, and gaze seriously upon man's choicest possessions, character and responsible freedom.

In the case of Shakespeare and the greater Elizabethan dramatists, such as Webster and Marlowe, character and responsible freedom become the two chief elements of tragic drama. A man's character is his destiny; he carries his doom or happiness within himself. Maeterlinck has said,[1] "Let us always remember that nothing befalls us that is not of the nature of ourselves . . . Whether you climb up the mountain or go down the hill to the valley;

[1]W. L. Courtney, The Idea of Tragedy, p. 88.

whether you journey to the end of the world, or merely walk round your house, none but yourself shall you meet on the highway of fate." This belief that if we suffer, we have earned our sufferings, is an accepted part of tragedy. Poetic justice as a retributive justice, in the sense that a man pays for all his shortcomings, is combined by the greater dramatists with a further idea. That idea is that there is a blind, unreasoning destiny, an inscrutable Fate such as the Greek Nemesis, which brings misfortune both upon the deserving and the undeserving. In other words, there is justice and there is not justice. Because of man's character and his ability to choose certain things freely, he generally earns whatever fate he gets; yet above man's power, there remains an element of chance, of accident, of Providence, of Fate, call it what you will, that rules his destiny. In Shakespeare, it is the combination of these two ideas that gives his plays their power. Marlowe and Webster give indications of the same sort of power, but the remainder of the dramatists do not. Their plays are neither aesthetically beautiful nor morally powerful since their emphasis is put not upon character but upon deeds

and moralizing epilogues.

In the light of the attempt of the Elizabethan dramatists to conform, on the whole to the Puritan idea of an obvious moral, and their failure, in most cases, to write plays that were aesthetically great, it seems possible that there is a close relationship between these two facts. Strict conformity to moral order works against the best interests of art. The true dramatist should recognize that the mere punishing of a wicked man is not a subject large enough for tragedy. A dogmatic rule of poetic justice, a spectacle of sin and retribution, belongs in a penal code, not in tragedy. These playwrights we have studied did not follow strict poetic justice in their plays, but they did attempt to show, each in his own way, that sin is always followed by death; for fear the moral would be missed, they teacked on in various ways the lesson, "the wages of sin is death". This was the justice they were most interested in portraying, as every dramatist is even today, although the modern writer tends to portray no justice at all. It is agreed, however, that tragedies which represent man as the mere plaything of chance, the puppet of a blind Fate,

are not profoundly moving in their effect upon the spectator. They leave one with a feeling of sadness, rather than of hope, and tragedy should, it seems, ennoble and uplift man rather than depress him. Tragedy needs justice ultimately.

The sort of justice tragedy needs is not the "poetical" kind that Rymer suggested, in which the exact distribution of rewards and punishments is carried out to its most exact extreme, but the more truly poetic kind which is broad in its significance. The play that, like Othello, shows virtue and love to be their own reward no matter what happens to them in the course of the dramatic action, is the play of ultimate justice. The picture of a man doomed to fall partly because of his own human frailty, partly because of an outside Fate, is a picture of life, hopeless and inevitable. But treated artistically, that picture of hopelessness is given new significance when out of it comes the strength and value of the human soul. The justification of man's suffering lies not in a narrow morality, in the fact that he deserves what happens to him, but in the great ethical truth that man is made more perfect, more intelligible, through suffering, just

or unjust though it may be. This is justice made highly poetic. Only the greatest dramatists have demonstrated their ability to approach life with such a tragic seriousness. Of the Elizabethans outside of Shakespeare, only Webster, Marlowe, and perhaps Heywood, approximated this ideal. The remainder of the writers, although they were wise enough to avoid the impossible principle to which Rymer gave the name of "poetical justice", fell into the trap of a narrow morality and showed only that man usually gets what he deserves when he violates laws. Their lesson was that in obedience lies safety. In consequence their plays are not great tragedies.

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