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Problems of Conscience in Some of the Plays of Shakespeare

Mary Paul Baldwin
Loyola University Chicago

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A. M. D. G.

Problems of Conscience in Some
of the Plays of Shakespeare

Submitted By

Sister Mary Paul Baldwin, C. S. J.

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Problems of Conscience in Some of the Plays of Shakespeare

INTRODUCTION

A study of the Shakespeare criticism of the Eighteenth and the early part of the Nineteenth, Centuries, compared with what may be called the modern method of interpretation, reveals striking contrasts. During the earlier period the interpretation or "appreciation" was almost exclusively esthetic. The plays were taken to mean, not what Shakespeare intended them to mean, but what the interpreters wished them to mean. In the present century, however, the labors of scholars have been employed upon the exact and detailed analysis of the plays, in an effort to discover what was their original meaning,--the one Shakespeare put into them,--as interpreted not only by means of the text of the plays themselves, but by their connection with the history of the Renaissance period, and of the age of Elizabeth in particular.

This change in the spirit of Shakespeare interpretation has been especially noticeable in the field of ethics and moral philosophy. There was room in this field for endless vague and conjectural explanations, of the plays in their entirety and of the characters considered individually. It has been the effort of recent scholars,

in this field as in others, to discover as nearly as possible Shakespeare's own attitude with regard to moral problems, at least as he sets it forth in the plays. Much valuable research has been done along these lines; however, the specific problem of conscience as a guiding factor in man's actions, seemed still to offer many possibilities for fruitful research. It is upon this problem then, that the present study is based.

The first part of the study consists of a general statement of the Elizabethan conception of conscience, and an endeavor to show how this conception derives from the scholastic teaching. I have traced the general principles upon which this conception is built up, from the ancient philosophers up through the medieval, reaching their clearest definition in the work of St. Thomas Aquinas. Then I have endeavored to point out the modifications that the Renaissance brought about in the idea, and finally the particular application of the principles in Elizabethan psychology and philosophy.

In the second division of the thesis the place of conscience in Elizabethan moral philosophy is discussed. The relative importance of foreign influences upon the philosophy of the times is a point that has received comment. Then I have endeavored to point out the relationship of reason to conduct, a subject which assists greatly

in the correct placing of the conscience motive. Revenge also bears an important part in the motivating of actions at this period, and the study of the Elizabethan idea of revenge has a close connection with the conscience idea. As a final introductory step before taking up the principal part of the thesis, it was necessary to explain the distinction between the tragic hero and the villain. The distinction is brought about to a great extent by the difference in motive, and is of great importance for the correct interpretation of the dramatic works of the period, especially the works of Shakespeare.

The discussion of Elizabethan psychology in its bearing upon the morality of actions leads finally to the center of the research,--an analysis of some of the great plays in an effort to interpret the motives for action, also the effects of actions,--that is, the conscience condemning or praising for deeds already done. I have selected as the basis of the study the four great ideal tragedies,--Macbeth, Othello, King Lear, and above all, Hamlet. I have made reference also to a number of other tragedies, among them Coriolanus and Richard III, and also, to a limited degree, some of the comedies which present distinct conscience problems.

The final chapter of the thesis is a summary of the findings in this field, and an attempt to show the great

importance of the conscience theme in influencing the action of the plays and the development of the characters. These problems were studied from the Renaissance and Elizabethan viewpoint, and I have endeavored to show that Shakespeare's attitude is authentic and according to Christian standards.

PROBLEMS OF CONSCIENCE

IN SOME OF THE PLAYS OF SHAKESPEARE

Chapter I. The Development of the Elizabethan Conception of Conscience.

Of late years it has become increasingly evident to students of Shakespeare, that, if one is to understand and interpret the works of the great artist in any way approaching authenticity, it is necessary to look at them from the viewpoint of Shakespeare's own times. This modern study of Shakespeare takes into account the entire scope of Elizabethan life and culture, and this is particularly true in the field of ethics and moral philosophy.

Shakespeare was undoubtedly a man of his time, a complete product of the Renaissance. In his plays one finds that fullness of enthusiasm for discovery, that unbounded patriotism, and that love of life for its own sake, which characterized the period. But if Shakespeare was a man interested in the fullness of life as he found it, he must have been more than anything else a thorough student of human nature; and this study led him to a profound consideration of moral problems. In an age which is credited with being almost entirely secular in its viewpoint and its interests, this deep and sincere investigation of moral problems by the man who is the most perfect exponent of his times, is highly significant.

Some writers have said distinctly that Elizabethan life left out of consideration the idea of religion, and they credit, or discredit, Shakespeare with this lack of religion.

All things worked together to make the drama a full and complete expression of the Elizabethan Age. Whatever entered that Age, and contributed to make it what it was, or at least, what its report has been, entered the Drama. To be sure, that had its natural exclusions. It was not religious, and had little to say of the soul's destinies beyond the grave. 1.

Passages in the plays may doff the bonnet to the Christian faith; but only to meet the dramatic turn. Shakespeare and his plays are most genially of this world, its relationships, its passions, its sublimities and depths, its vanities and hopes of fame--but all on earth. The conventional references to the superhuman or the supernatural are often pagan by affinity, and seeming preference. 2.

One may find it necessary to agree with Taylor in the statement, that, of formal religion there is little expression in Shakespeare, but no one can deny that in the plays there is a carefully worked out moral system, in which good and evil are rightly related and evaluated, and that he recognizes and insists upon the relation of man's moral and spiritual life to God in its obligations and allegiances.

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1. Henry Osborn Taylor, Thought and Expression in the Sixteenth Century, Macmillan, N. Y., 1920, Vol. II, p. 238.
 2. Ibid: p. 257.

To understand Shakespeare's delineation of ethical and moral values, and the definite and consistent principles of morality upon which he builds up his great characters, it is necessary to understand the psychology and moral philosophy, not of a later time, but of the time in which he lived and wrote.

If we would understand and appreciate what Shakespeare meant to portray, we must know the principles which he accepted as the basis and motive of moral life, --not by any means as he applied it to his own conduct, --which is at best a conjecture,--but as he made use of it in the delineation of his characters.

A study of the plays in connection with the psychology of the period reveals that the poet had a definite and legitimate understanding of the problem of the conscience, and that he has made extensive application of the problem again and again in his plays, both in tragedy and comedy.

To arrive at a correct and thorough understanding of the psychology of which the conscience problem was an important part, it is necessary to trace the Elizabethan concept of moral responsibility from its sources, since the teachings of ancient and medieval philosophers are undoubtedly the basis of Renaissance and Elizabethan beliefs on the subject.

Elizabethan psychology derives primarily from Aristotle, and since the development of the science can be directly traced, and the ancient beliefs are borne out in the later developments, it is necessary, for a complete understanding of the system, to begin by a comment upon the fundamental principle of Aristotelian philosophy in this matter. Before Aristotle, Heraclitus taught that reason was a property of the universe, not a property inherent in man, and that it was breathed into man from the outside, somewhat as sensations were received. He did not make reason a party to moral responsibility as was done by later philosophers who better understood its function.

Aristotle taught that in living things there are three kinds of soul: the vegetal, which alone is possessed by plants, and which has to do with life, growth and reproduction; the sensible soul, which, together with the vegetal soul, is found in animals, and has to do with sensation and motion and a seeking after good; and, finally, the rational soul, which belongs only to man, and is the seat of the reason and the will.^{3.}

Aristotle's sense psychology is much like the accepted psychology of the present time, and in its main

3. Ruth Leila Anderson, Elizabethan Psychology and Shakespeare's Plays, University Press, Iowa City, Iowa, 1927, p. 14.

points agrees closely with that of the scholastics. He speaks of the central or common sense, by which he signifies the intellect and the imagination; and the outer senses--the five senses which we recognize as such. His maxim, that nothing can be known to the inner sense except through the outer, is one of the doctrines of the schoolmen.

A point in the psychology of the ancients, which persisted up to the time of Shakespeare, and is of the utmost importance in the correct interpretation of the plays, is its physiological aspect. Aristotle saw the immediate connection between outer stimuli and sensation, although the science of physiology was too little developed to provide an adequate explanation. The Greeks speak of a sort of fluid called "vital heat", which assumes various forms as it assists the several functions of the body. Thus, it is a part of the blood, it aids digestion, and becomes more and more refined as it ascends to the head. The physician Galen, in the third century A. D., explained and systematized this theory.⁴

The Greeks taught that children and animals live according to their feelings--thus indicating that they

4. George Sidney Brett, Psychology, Ancient and Modern, Longmans Green & Co., N. Y., 1928, pp. 25-27.

appreciated the lack of moral responsibility in persons who have not reached the age of discretion. They taught that vices are relapses into primitive states. A brave or a temperate man acts bravely in an emergency or overcomes temptations easily, because he has brought his senses under the control of reason. Complete virtue is complete control of the impulses by the deliberative or calculative reason. This system of ethics is, of course, false and incomplete in as much as it disregards the idea of Good and the question of eternal justice, and defines ethics as the sphere of praise and blame. That is, a good man does things that are praised, and a bad one does things that are blamed,--not from any idea of responsibility to a Higher Being, but for the good of the state. This also was the doctrine of the Romans, in a more restricted sense even than with the Greeks. The Roman idea of right conduct or morals was conformity to legal and social customs.

The Greek and Roman idea of conscience, the judgment in matters of conduct, was systematic and stable, but it left out the theistic idea,--there was no consideration of moral obligation to a higher being. Still, the ancients have many expressions of praise for "the peace of a good conscience."⁵ The Greeks believed that

5. Reverend Joseph Rickaby, "Conscience", in Catholic Encyclopedia, Vol. IV.

by constant practice of good deeds, and the experience acquired by such practice, one's principles became fixed and one became a more desirable and perfect member of the State, just as in the Christian, perfect possession of God by knowledge and love, will be the result of continuous attention to the warnings of conscience, and there will be less and less likelihood of lapses from duty. ⁶.

The scholastic philosophy is based upon that of Aristotle, one of the most essential differences being, of course, the Christian viewpoint, responsibility to, and dependence upon God.

In the works of the ecclesiastical writers, theology held an important place, and reason lost its supreme position in favor of revelation. The reason was a supernatural power, not something flowing distinctly from nature, but an attribute given to man by God, and by means of which man became in a manner like God. Man, by the gift of his reason, became responsible to the Giver for his voluntary actions. His reason aided him in aspiring to the supreme good, and it was against the reason, considered as one of God's greatest favors to man, to do evil, and thus be drawn away from his final end. Reverend Joseph Rickaby states:

6. George Sidney Brett, Psychology, Ancient and Modern, Longmans Green, N. Y., 1928, p. 28.

The natural conscience is not a distinct faculty, but the one intellect of man in as much as it considers right and wrong in conduct, aided meanwhile by a good will, and by the use of the emotions, by the practical experience of learning, and by the external helps that are to the purpose. The natural conscience of the Christian is known by him to act not alone, but under the enlightenment and the impulse derived from revelation and grace in a strictly supernatural order. 7.

In the theology of the Middle Ages the material and physiological connection of the senses with reason continued to be accepted. Knowledge must be acquired through the senses, but there is a world of immaterial realities which can be known or comprehended only by the intellect. By means of reason one knows God, and by the will one reaches out toward Him as the ultimate good. The outer senses, according to St. Thomas, were avenues by which images were formed by means of the inner senses--common sense, memory and imagination,--and then passed on to the intellect. He taught that reason was the link or interpreter between the knowledge received from the outer senses and the intellect, which alone could comprehend God. The choice of good and the rejection of evil lay in the will, directed and governed by the intellect. In the ecclesiastical fathers, emphasis is placed upon the knowing of God not by reason alone, but by faith. Faith is the desire to possess God as the highest good, and leads the

will to the performance of right actions. It thus gives a sanction to good deeds and is the motive-power of conscience. It is with reason governing conduct and practise that this paper is concerned--the field of ethics and the judgment of conscience.

Among medieval writers on the subject of reason, and of morality through right reason, Reginald Pecock is a sort of compendium of the scholastic theology accepted generally by the people. He makes reason the greatest of all man's powers. Even faith is subservient to it. Whatever could not be proved by reason was not of faith. Upon reason depended man's morality, because a deed could not be morally virtuous unless it accorded with reason. The will was a servant of the reason.

Free will is a power with which may freely be loved and chosen that thing which reason knoweth and deemeth to be good,--and which may command to all other witty and moving powers of the soul and to all members of the body such moving proper workings as she wills that they be commanded.

Man was made to rule his will and his outward and inward wits and their appetites, their doings and sufferings, after the doom of reason, while he liveth in this life, that he may obtain everlasting life before the presence of God. 8.

In his definition of sin he points out that it is only by

8. Reginald Pecock, The Donet. Now first edited from Ms. Bodl, 916, by Elsie Vaughan Hitchcock, London, Humphrey Milford, 1921, p. 12.

acting contrary to conscience that one can commit sin, in other words, temptation is not sin.

Sin is not in the sinful desires engendered by the outward nor even by the inward wits. It begins with the consenting of Reason and Free Will to sinful desire. The wilful choice of sin after Reason has pronounced upon it is sin. 9.

In the Folewer to the Donet Pecoock continues his explanation of the relation between reason and free will, and gives to reason the credit for curbing the sensual appetites and preventing sin. Thus according to his teaching, free will, working in agreement with reason is what defines a dictate of conscience.

Nearly all the medieval writers use Aristotle's division of man's soul into the vegetal, the sensitive, and the rational. They agree, of course, as to the outer wits, but there are many divergences with regard to the relations and divisions of the inner wits. The outer wits--the five senses--are the means by which knowledge of the outer world is presented to the inner wits. The inner wits, according to Batman--are feeling, wit, imagination, reason and understanding.¹⁰ Other writers name common sense, imagination and memory, as

9. Ibid: p. 14.

10. Batman uppon Bartholeme, His Booke, De Proprietatibus Rerum, London, Thomas East, 1582, Liber Tertius, Chapter 6, p. 13.

the internal senses, and say that these are the channels by which impressions, received by the outer senses, are transmitted to the intellect. In some writers, then, reason is considered to be a part of the sensitive soul, and in others, as part of the highest, or intellective soul. Pecoock calls the five inward bodily wits common wit, imagination, fantasy, estimation and mind. The common wit presents the sensations received through the outer senses to the imagination, which in its turn refers them to the fancy or "fantasy". The image, in its turn, is given over to the estimation, or judgment, and then is presented to the intellect to be loved as Good or rejected as Evil. The will is a power by which one chooses what the reason, or understanding, deems to be good. He says in The Donet,

Free will is a power with which may freely be loved and chosen that thing which reason knoweth and deemeth to be good--and which may command to all other witty and moving powers of the soul and to all members of the body such moving proper workings as she wills that they be commanded. 11.

Pecoock held that living morally was identical with living reasonably. If one lives reasonably, he necessarily lives according to faith. Thus reason is the ultimate criterion for action, the guardian and perfecter of conscience. Phineas Fletcher says that conscience is a

11. See Note 8.

"servant of the will, contributing to her proper function-
in the mind",¹². thus making conscience a counselor of the
will rather than of the mind or understanding. The gen-
eral belief is that the will is the intellect in action,
and it is the virtue or faculty, joined with rational
apprehension that carries out what the understanding
suggests. The rational apprehension was called specu-
lative intellect or understanding when it sought truth
by contemplation, and practical intellect, when it sought
good and suggested to the will that the good be accepted
and the evil rejected. This was the practical judgment
in matters of conduct which is called conscience.

Coeffeteau, a Renaissance writer who describes with
great care and exactness the various passions, says of
the will that it is an appetite, an object of desire.

He says:

To come to the Reasonable Soule; it
hath two principal powers, the one indued
with Knowledge, which is the Understanding;
and the other capable of Desire, which is
the Will; the which being blind as all appe-
tites are naturally, she followeth in the
pursuit of her objects, the light of the
Understanding, by reason whereof she is
called the intellectual appetite, but more
properly the Will. The office of our under-
standing, particularly of that which we call
possible, is to receive, and in receiving to
know, and in knowing to offer unto the will,
those kinds or forms, which are sent unto it

12. Phineas Fletcher, The Purple Island, Cambridge,
1633, p. 20.

from the Imagination.^{13.}

The will, as Coeffeteau explains, is called an intellectual appetite, because the object of its desire must be referred to the light of the understanding. Thus the will becomes, in his teaching, the connecting link between the outer world evident to the senses, and the inner soul of men.

The appetites, referred to so often in medieval psychology, played an important part in influencing conduct; unless they were controlled by reason they became the enemy of man's spiritual welfare. According to theological writers, the natural appetites were always at war with the soul, and their solicitings must be turned aside before a man was free to act according to the dictates of his conscience. These appetites or desires, were divided into three classes--the first and lowest were those which had to do merely with the vegetal soul, and governed the desire for food and drink; they also regulated digestion, assimilation, and the other natural functions of the body. These appetites or powers had in themselves, of course, no relation to reasonable conduct. The second kind of appetite, belonging to the sensitive

13. F. N. Coeffeteau, A Table of Human Passions With Their Causes and Effects, Translated into English by Edward Grimeston, London, Nicholas Okes, 1621, Introduction (no pagination)

soul, comprised those inclinations by which the soul desired that which presented itself as a Good, and rejected or opposed what appeared to it as evil. These appetites, accordingly, were called concupiscible and irascible, respectively. Coeffeteau, in A Table of Human Passions, says:

It was necessary for the good of man, that he should have two kinds of inclinations, the one to pursue those things which are pleasing and agreeable to his senses, and to avoid those which may any way annoy him: and this we call the concupiscible or desiring power; and the other, by means whereof he may encounter and vanquish whatsoever opposeth itself, crosseth his inclinations, or that tends to the destruction of his being, or the decay of his contentment, which is that we call the irascible or angry power. 14.

The intellective appetite resides in the rational soul and it is that virtue or power which covets the good and hates the evil. This is really the will working in conjunction with reason. The appetites, generally considered as such, were those desires which reached out toward sensible good, and the will was that power which reason urged to reach out toward what it considered good. Thus will was a servant of the understanding and held a higher place than the sensitive appetites. It was the regulation of will by right reason that constituted the control of man's actions by his conscience.

This correspondence of the understanding and the will in regulating man's actions, according to Burton, consists of three degrees or innate "species": synteresis, or the purser part of the conscience, which consisted in knowing good or evil; the dicamen rationis, which admonishes us to do good or evil, and the conscience itself, which approves good or evil, justifying or condemning our actions. This final classification is what we understand by conscience.¹⁵ Corresponding to the three divisions or classes of appetites were three degrees of knowledge: the knowledge of sense, which resulted in the pleasure of sense; the knowledge of imagination, which found its fulfillment in the pleasures of the imagination; and, the knowledge of the intellect, which was the highest of man's delights, and which led finally to love and service of God through man's reason. The predominance of one or other of these types of knowledge in a man was often used in the literature of the times as a means of estimating character.

Right conduct, as determined by reason and urged by the will, both of which working in unison constitute the natural conscience, would be the complete fulfillment of the rational powers of man, even without revelation. But

15. Burton, The Anatomy of Melancholy, Bell, London, 1896, pp. 189-190.

another element enters here--the rebellion of the sensitive appetites, the affections and the imagination against reason. The affections are motions or impulses of the sensitive appetite, which reach out toward good and reject evil. The affections are subjects of the imagination, and are not entirely within control of the will. They arise unbidden at some solicitation of the sensitive appetite. They therefore to a certain extent limit the power of reason; they are to be brought as soon as possible under control so as not to interfere with right conduct. The imagination, in all writers of this period, and in ecclesiastical writers of all times, has been considered a dangerous faculty, one that must be watched and struggled against, so that its phantoms may not disturb the reason and burden the conscience. The imagination is the faculty which receives impressions from the external senses. Then it acts as a sort of sending station, distributing its impressions immediately to the memory, or to the reason and the understanding to be deliberated on. It may send its message to the heart, the seat of the affections. Then the idea is presented to the will, which decides whether it is a good or an ill. But if the imagination has been allowed to act without the judgment of reason, the lower powers, the sensitive appetites, will command the will, and the man will act against his conscience.

The affections are milder motions of the sensitive appetite than are the passions. The passions are motions so violent that they disturb man's physical well-being. This question of the close connection between man's physical nature and his rational and moral nature is one that finds a prominent place in all the psychology and ethics of the period. With this subject is related the medieval idea of the four humors. These humors are elements corresponding to fire, earth, air and water, and out of them God formed all his Creation. These elements in the human body were called melancholy, phlegm, blood and choler. They varied in quantity and purity in individuals. If a man had these four elements mixed in his body in the proper proportions, he was near perfection both in his physical and his moral and reasonable nature. That one of the elements which predominated over the others gave to the man his individual characteristics, both physical and moral. Thus, those men in whom phlegm predominated were slow and slothful, the sanguine were cheerful and courageous, the melancholy sorrowful and hard to please, and the choleric easily provoked to anger and very active. This psychology of the humors is a descendant of the teachings of Galen. It was closely united with the beliefs regarding reason and conduct.

The study of the mind could not be

separated from a study of the body, nor this from a study of the four elements. 16.

The four humors, as said above, if they are in their proper proportions tend to the perfection of man. But in most instances one or other of the humors is out of due proportion. In the same individual, moreover, different humors may predominate at different times. Thus physiological disturbances may throw a man out of his usual calm or cheerful frame of mind. This, of course, is to a certain extent, obviously true. Also, conversely, a disturbance in the sensitive soul of man, the soliciting or rebellion of the passions over reason, may produce a corresponding disturbance in the body, bringing about alterations in the animal spirits.

The passions, according to Craig, resulted,

not from any imperfection in the faculties of the soul, which stood supreme, and, as a divine element, incorruptible, but from physiological conditions which cloud or interfere with the normal operations of the soul. 17.

The humors of the body became unbalanced by excess, and reason was disregarded. Imagination and passion were allowed to gain the upper hand over reason because reason was clouded and dulled by intemperance, and imagination, aided by the passions, remained all the more free. It

16. Anderson, op.cit. p.18.

17. Craig, H. "Shakespeare's Depiction of the Passions", Philological Quarterly, IV, (1925) p. 189.

was the duty of the will to control the appetites through the judgments of reason, but when the appetites and passions gained supremacy over the reason, the will became the slave of the passions. As Senault expresses it:

As long as they (the Passions) are awakened by objects, solicited by the Senses, and protected by Imagination's self, they have no other craft than what they draw from Corrupted Nature! But when the Understanding, overshadowed by their obscurity or won by their solicitations, perverts the Will, and obliges this Sovereign to take upon her the interest of her Slaves, she makes them guilty of her sin, she changes their motions into rebellion, and of the insurrection of a Beast, makes the fault of a man. It is true, that when the understanding keeps within the bounds of duty, and is faithful to the Will, he suppresses their seditions, and reduceth these Mutinies to obedience; she husbandeth their humours so well; as taking from all their unruliness, he makes rare and excellent virtues of them. In this estate they are subservient to Reason, and defend the party which they were resolved to fight against. The good or the evil that may be drawn from them binds us to consider their nature, to observe their proprieties; and to discover their original, to the end that, arriving at the exact knowledge of them, we may make use of them in our affairs. 18.

Thus it is evident that the medieval psychologists believed that the control of the passions by reason was essential to right conduct and to the freedom of man's judgment in matters of conduct--the conscience. Most of the philosophers of the period agree as to the

18. J. F. Senault, The Use of the Passions. Written in French, but put into English by Henry, Earl of Monmouth, London. Printed by W. G. for John Sims, 1677, pp. 16-17.

extremely close relationship between the soul and the body, although it was a matter of conjecture as to just how this came about. The passions affected the body, and the condition of the body had an important bearing upon the passions of the soul, changing and lessening to a greater or less degree the supremacy of the reason, and the freedom of the will. Another contemporary writer upon the subject, Thomas Wright, in his book, The Passions of the Mind in General, makes the following statements with regard to effect of passion upon the humors:

There is no passion very vehement, but that it alters extremely some of the four humors of the body, and all physicians commonly agree that among divers other extrinsical causes of diseases, one, and not the least, is the excess of some inordinate passion, for although it busieth their braines, as also the natural Philosophers, to explicate the manner how an operation that lodgeth in the soul can alter the body, and move the humors from one place to another, yet they consent that it may proceed from a certain sympathy of nature, a subordination of one part to another, and that the spirits and humors wait upon the passions, as their Lords and Masters. 19.

Another point with regard to the passions that was accepted generally as an explanation of the modifications in a man's moral nature in advancing stages of his life is that which has to do with the difference in the passions that affect man in youth and in old age; and also

19. Wright, Thomas: The Passions of the Mind in General, London, 1630, Chapter I, p. 4.

the effect of climate upon the passions. In youth a man is influenced strongly by the passions of love and anger. He is given to acting quickly, with little or no time for the judgment of reason. However, he is not covetous, because he has not had the experience of poverty, and therefore has no desire for earthly goods other than what he possesses.

Young men are commonly rich in invention, but poor in matters of judgment; they are fit for execution but incapable of any great design.²⁰

These words by Coeffeteau state other outstanding differences between the characteristics of youth and age, and indicate what the medieval psychologist would expect with regard to the steadiness of young men, and the relation of their actions to cool judgment. They are most likely to act impetuously, not heeding the voice of their conscience, particularly in regard to certain vices that depend upon the urgent demands of passion.

To sum up in a few words the origin and development of the medieval psychological system, especially in regard to man's actual responsibility for actions: The system originated principally with Aristotle, who first taught the doctrine of the three souls in man; the vegetal soul, common to all living things, whether plants or animals;

20. Coeffeteau, op.cit., pp. 654-671.

the sensitive soul, belonging to the lower animals and to man; and the rational soul, exclusively a quality of man. Man is endowed with outer wits--the five senses; and the inner wits--namely, common wit or sense, imagination or fantasy, estimation or reason, and mind or understanding. The outer wits presented their sensations to the inner common sense, where the image was presented immediately to the imagination, or was referred to the higher understanding. The judgment pronounced upon it, classifying it as good to be loved, or as evil to be rejected. The will, if it acted freely, and without undue influence from the imagination, the affections or the passions, accepted the good and renounced the evil. The will was ordained to follow the light of reason and it would do so, so long as it ruled over the appetites and governed them by the wisdom it gained from reason. Reason was a power by which spiritual things were known, and by which one might find out what was true or false, good or bad. Allied to this power of the higher understanding was the idea of conscience, a judge of actions and a counsel of morals.

The psychological system which I have followed from its sources up to the period with which we are at present concerned, provides a background for the correct placing of the Elizabethan theories with regard to the conscience.

Conscience was a judge of morality, powerful as a deterrent to crime when it was joined closely with the higher reason acting calmly and without influence from passion; but weak and powerless to guide the actions of a man if he allowed his will to be controlled by passion rather than by reason. Conscience to the Elizabethan was a definite and powerful force, a voice to be hearkened to at all costs, the disregarding of which carried with it its own punishment. The theory of conscience, applied in life and also in artistic literature, constituted all the difference between the tragic hero and the villain, between saints and sinners. It is not surprising that Shakespeare, with his highly developed sense of dramatic values, linked with an almost superhuman insight into human nature, would seize upon this problem of conscience when he brings into being with the utmost fidelity to nature and the supreme perfection of art, the great pageant of characters which are the creation of his genius.

Chapter II. The Place of Conscience in Elizabethan Psychology.

The philosophy of the Elizabethans is an outgrowth of the Medieval system, a bare suggestion of which I have endeavored to give in the previous chapter. The intimate relationship of the study of the mind with that of the body, the influence of exterior conditions upon conduct, the extreme importance of the passions in determining conduct and fixing the degree of praise or blame--are some of the leading features of Medieval psychology which were carried over into the Elizabethan.

The Renaissance, especially as it manifested itself in Italy, was of great importance in changing the outlook of Elizabethans with regard to moral philosophy, although the medieval background still remained the bulwark of the system. The humanistic movement, applied to all who were inspired by the new faith in beauty and reason, and who sought to realize the new exalted hope of human progress, modified to a great extent man's attitude toward God and his own soul. In many instances it proved only a further incentive to the love and worship of God, because of the greater appreciation of His gifts, while in others it had the effect of dulling man's feeling of religion and making him interested exclusively in the affairs of this world.

The European Renaissance was marked by a boundless enthusiasm for the newly discovered art and literature of ancient Greece. Men were fired by a new resolve to make the best and not the worst of life upon earth. They were ambitious to cultivate as the highest good the idea of beauty.

The Elizabethan Age, rich as it was in enthusiasm for extending its knowledge along all lines, and for employing man's capabilities to new and better advantage, was not likely to be introspective. The question of man's relations with his Creator was not by any means uppermost in his mind.

This secular viewpoint was more marked in England than in other countries, which felt strongly the influence of the Renaissance, and it manifested itself remarkably in the literature of the period. The medieval philosophy, influenced as it had been by the humanist movement of the Renaissance, was still the basis of character portrayal in artistic literature as in the works on psychology, philosophy and religion; but in many instances, the standards of conduct were without more than an incidental relationship to God. The period was by no means consciously irreligious; it was enthusiastically and passionately human in its aims and aspirations. Of the spirit of this great age, even in its rather indifferent attitude toward

religion, we find perfect expression in the works of Shakespeare. We find not the least flaw in his moral system, but we search in vain for any definite expression of religious thought, expression or belief. He believes whole-heartedly in the dependence of man upon his Maker, and in his obligation to lead a moral life. He never allows, in all his range of characters, that one feel sympathy for evil done, or that the evil should triumph for any length of time, but one is bound to acknowledge that the life upon earth is much more attractive to Shakespeare and to the characters that he has created, than is any looking forward to another life.

Sir Sidney Lee, in "Foreign Influence on Shakespeare", thus describes the spirit of the Elizabethan Age:

Elizabethan literature, which was the noblest manifestation in England of the Renaissance, reached its apotheosis in Shakespeare. It had absorbed all the sustenance of the new movement--the enthusiasm for the Greek and Latin classics, the passion for extending the limits of human knowledge, the resolve to make the best and not the worst of life upon earth, the ambition to cultivate the idea of beauty, the conviction that man's reason was given him by God to use without restraint. All these new sentiments went to the formation of Shakespeare's work, and found there perfect definition. 21.

Sir Sidney Lee's comment on the spirit of the age,

21. Sir Sidney Lee, "Foreign Influences on Shakespeare", in Great Englishmen of the 16th Century, London, Constable, 1904, p. 317.

and on Shakespeare's particular expression of it, summarizes Shakespeare's attitude toward Renaissance culture. His attitude toward religion is expressed by Wyndham Lewis, who quotes from Bradley as follows:

The Elizabethan drama was almost wholly secular; and while Shakespeare was writing, he practically confined his view to the world of non-theological observation and thought, so that he represents it substantially in one and the same way, whether the period of the story is pre-Christian or Christian. He looked at this secular world most intently and seriously, without regard to anyone's hopes, fears or beliefs. 22.

This does not imply, by any means, that Shakespeare is unethical in his teaching; it rather suggests that he has a definite ethical system, if not a theological one.

The ethical system that Shakespeare depicts is, as has been said before, based upon the philosophy of Aristotle, Christianized and developed by the Church Fathers, elaborated and systematized to a great degree in the medieval period, and further perfected under Renaissance influence. One can understand much of Shakespeare's character portrayal only by constant reference to medieval psychology. As he was not a religious man, in the strict sense of the word, neither was he a philosopher. He was, quoting Lewis again,

22. Wyndham Lewis, The Lion and the Fox, London, 1927, p. 169, (Quoted from Bradley)

a great and accomodating artist, accomodating himself, with great suppleness, but not slavishly--to the life, art and ideas around him. He was not inclined to any very strong expression of belief, although within that receptive frame he displays very much more passion and prejudice than is generally allowed. Nevertheless, that the framework was opportunist, accomodating, and in that sense "unoriginal" is evident. And it is in that sense that he was "impersonal"--a particularly glorious parasite on everything. 23.

Shakespeare made use in his plays of the psychology of his contemporaries, as Miss Anderson says:

His psychology was a crude explanation of observable facts, based on the science of the Middle Ages and motivated in its development by a desire to understand the functioning of the soul for the better regulation of conduct.²⁴

One of the fundamental principles of Elizabethan ethics was the belief that the faculties of the soul must be kept under strict control, so that they might not rebel against reason. The will must unite with reason to command the soul to act well, but as soon as the will turns against reason and becomes a slave of the passions, the conscience is no longer obeyed, and the sovereignty of the reason is destroyed. When the senses and the imagination join forces to entice the affections, then the will is drawn toward the affections and away from reason.

Right thinking and right doing spring

23. Ibid: p. 152.

24. Anderson, op.cit., p. 155.

alike from the supremacy of the intellect, understanding and will, but usually imagination determines thought, and the affections control action. 25.

The mind must work through the senses. Therefore it is evident that frequently the lower nature of man gains the ascendancy over the higher, and the conscience, which is the will working in conjunction with the reason to bring good actions, is not heeded.

The control of the will by reason, and the correct balance in the powers of the soul that brings about temperance and virtue and the joy of a good conscience, are governed to a considerable extent by physiological conditions, by a preponderance of certain humors in the body, by bodily imperfections and deformities. A good man's conscience is to be relied upon to judge properly of his actions, but a man who is bad by "complexion", by nature, by environment, or by the influence of climate, finds it very difficult to hear the voice of his conscience, because his actions are naturally bad. By persistent efforts these natural tendencies may be overcome, but it is almost impossible for education or philosophy or religion to counteract the effects of naturally evil propensities. In these persons, conscience is almost entirely deadened, but we find it in some instances making itself

felt when the wicked person has in some way lost control of his exterior senses, as in sleep, as in the case of King Richard and of Lady Macbeth.

Some specific problems with regard to conscience are met with in the Elizabethan psychology of revenge.

The most definite statement of the whole problem of evil was made for the Renaissance in one of the moral essays of Plutarch, the philosopher, who, although a Pagan, was able to guide moral teaching. The treatise was published in 1603, among the Morals translated by Philemon Holland. The second answer is the one which seems most clearly to have been accepted by Shakespeare, for it affirms that sin brings inevitably its own punishment to the heart and conscience of the sinner: but wickedness engendering within itself (I wot not what) displeasure and punishment, not after a sinful act is committed, but even at the very instant of committing, it beginneth to suffer pain due to the offence; neither is there a malefactor, but when he seeth others like himself punished beareth forth his own cross; whereas mischievous wickedness frameth of her self the engines of her own torment, as being a wonderful artisan of a miserable life, which (together with shame and reproach) hath in it lamentable calamities, many terrible frights, fearful perturbations and passions of the spirit, remorse of conscience, desperate repentance, and continued troubled and unquietness. 26.

Miss Campbell traces the Renaissance idea of tragedy from the medieval idea. It was chiefly concerned with an explanation that could justify the ways of God to men. It came to seek the justice which must inhere in the fall

26. Lily B. Campbell, Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes, Slaves of Passion, Cambridge, 1930, p. 21.

of princes (which in the beginning was the chief subject of tragedy) if there was a God of justice. And it found that justice in the error or the folly which caused men to bring down evil upon themselves. Tragedy came to stress more and more the teaching of Renaissance philosophy, that the man sins who would undertake to execute privately the justice of God. God will Himself execute justice through calamity visited upon the sinner; or through justice executed by the magistrates as His agents; (in the case of Hamlet, he was appointed by God as a magistrate to execute His justice.) Sometimes God executes justice through the troubled heart and uneasy conscience which are the penalty of sin, as in the case of Richard III.

An important distinction, in this study of conscience, is to be made between the tragic hero and the villain. The tragic hero sins under the influence of passion. He hears the warnings of conscience, but the will is perverted, and does not join with reason. In the case of the villain, the passions have so long held the mastery over the reason, that the reason itself coldly chooses evil. Miss Lily Campbell thus explains the distinction between a tragic hero and a villain:

Passion might cloud the understanding so that judgment could not be well made, or might sway the will by impetuous summons, and thus lead to sin that brought evil upon innocent and quiet alike.

Passion might be so excessive that reason would be, through the effect of passion on the humors, altogether lost. Thus no moral judgment could be given.

But that is not to say that the effect of passion in bringing on these abnormal states of unreason was not bringing about its own punishment.

Finally, however, passion might pervert the will, so that it maliciously willed that which it willed. Reason was itself perverted in such a case, and the sin became mortal.

The tragic hero sins under the influence of passion, his reason failing to check his passion. His passion may lead him to madness, but as long as his passion is in conflict with reason, he has not committed mortal sin. When, however, passion has taken possession of his will, has perverted his will, when, in perfect accord with passion, his reason directs evil through the will, then we have a villain, one who is dyed in sin, one whose sin is mortal. 27.

The great majority of moral and philosophical writers of the period lay stress upon the influence of the passions in perverting the will and blinding the judgment in such a way as to weaken man's moral responsibility and stifle the voice of his conscience. Conscience acting in itself, without any undue influence from the passions or the affections, will guide a man truly and safely; but the moral judgment is warped and distorted by passion to such a degree as to be no longer a reliable guide. Reason must be allowed to rule supreme if a man is to act safely

in accord with his conscience; any departure from reason is dangerous. A noble and virtuous character will become vicious if he lets his heart and his imagination blind his intellect. A man is truly honest and virtuous if he follows nature, that is to say (according to Charron) if he acts in accordance with right reason.²⁸.

Charron continues,

And the applauses, and joys, and transports of a good conscience, as they are sure to us, and cannot be withered by any who envy our virtue or our fame; so are they likewise, so large and full, so generous and noble, and sufficient, as may very well encourage, and satisfy us, during our continuance in this present world.²⁹.

He insists also upon the influence that complexion and climate have upon a person's actions, and declares that those men that are good naturally have not the same claim to the praise and honor of their fellowmen, as those who, to become good, must act in a manner contrary to their natural disposition; these last alone, he says, are truly virtuous. This doctrine of the difficulty that a man has to overcome natural tendencies is referred to again and again in Shakespeare, and the influence of man's surroundings and his "complexion" are frequently referred to as palliating excuses for crime or at least for irregular conduct. Thus Othello acts as he does

28. Charron, Pierre, Of Wisdom, Translated by G. Stanhope, London, 1763, p. 64.

29. Ibid: p. 75.

because of his complexion. That natural tendencies may be overcome is also subscribed to frequently in Shakespeare; as for instance, when Hamlet says,

For use almost can change the stamp
of nature. 30.

Thus one sees that right conduct was a matter of the proper restraint of the affections and the imagination--a true temperance which would give to the judgment its deserved freedom, and which would incline the will to accept the dictates of reason rather than the lower solicitations of the imagination and the passions. This supremacy of the reason was more or less under man's control, but a body in which there was an ill proportion of elements and humors inclined the soul to evil, and interfered with the freedom of the will, although it did not contradict or render it void. Vices consist not in our faculties, but in our habits, and our habits depend upon our will; and it is therefore the fault of our will that we are evil, and not originally of our nature. The will was responsible for action; the Elizabethans insist upon this, but they again and again point out how difficult it is to overcome natural tendencies. Thus it followed that the conquering of evil tendencies was a mark of nobility of character.

In considering the power of a man's conscience to influence him to perform good deeds or to refraining from evil ones, it is important to study the various sorts of wicked persons, with reference to the hold that evil has upon them. Charron thus describes "the three sorts of wicked persons."

Some, first, are perfectly incorporated with evil, they reason themselves into it; their resolutions and the whole bend of their wills are fixed entirely in its interests; or else long custom hath got such a perfect mastery over them that they cannot disengage themselves. These miserable wretches are utterly abandoned; their very understanding is vitiated, sees, consents to, and approves the evil; and this is usually the case, when vice and debauchery meet with a strong and vigorous mind, and hath taken such deep root in it, that it comes at last to be naturalized, and of a piece with it; all the faculties are tainted, it is corrupted throughout, and vice so closely interwoven, as to become a part of its temper and constitution. Others, secondly, have their intervals of folly only; they are wicked now and then by fits, just as any violent gush of a temptation disturbs or puts them out of their course; as some impetuous passion drives them headlong upon the rocks; so that these men are surprised, and carried away forcibly, by a current too strong for them to stem. The third sort are betwixt these two extremes. They have a right notion of vice, considered in itself; and when they reflect upon their fault abstractedly, do sincerely accuse and condemn themselves for it; and thus they differ from the first sort, who are advanced even to the desperate degree of even a good liking for wickedness. But then they have not the violence or surprise of passions or temptations to qualify and extenuate their crime; and in this respect they differ from the second sort, too. But these men go to work in cold blood, and with great

deliberation; they weigh circumstances, and drive a bargain as it were; observe well the heinousness of the sin; and put the pleasure or profit it brings into the contrary scale; and thus they barter away their souls, and are content to be wicked at a certain price, and for such as they think a valuable consideration. 31.

Continuing his discussion of the three sorts of wicked men, Charron introduces us to another phase or application of the conscience--that which condemns us after a wicked action is performed. He says:

Now the first of these three sorts are past repenting by ordinary means, and nothing less than an unusual and almost miraculous impression from heaven can reclaim them. For they are past feeling and commit evil even with greediness. Besides, the understanding is brought over to an approbation of the thing; and so all sense of remorse must be lost, which proceeds chiefly from acting against our better judgment; the soul is entirely corrupted, the distinctions of good and evil obliterated and worn away; and consequently the will can be under no solicitude to restrain or refuse. The third sort of men, though they may appear in some measure to repent, and condemn themselves, yet in reality, and properly speaking, they do not. Take the fact by itself, but view it dressed up in all its gay attire, with all the circumstance of pleasure and profit, that recommend and set it off and you shall find them of another opinion. They think the advantage of their sin a sufficient compensation for their guilt; and cannot be said to repent of that, which had the full and free consent of their reason and conscience. So that in truth the second sort seem to be the only persons that are seriously concerned to repent and reform. 32.

31. Charron, op.cit., pp. 76-77.

32. Ibid: pp. 77-78.

Related to this idea of the accusing conscience, which brings about in some the purpose of amendment, is the idea of despair--a passion by which the soul is made to desist from following after that which it is impossible to obtain. A man may be so steeped in vice that his conscience, active enough in the early part of his wicked career, becomes no longer his accuser; or if it does accuse him, he turns a deaf ear to its solicitations, with the explanation that there is no further hope for him. We see this in Macbeth, who says,

I am in blood stepp'd in so far that,
Should I wade no more,
Returning were as tedious as go o'er. 33.

The effect of despair upon a man may be of opposite kinds: he may acquire by it a sort of false boldness, as in the case of Macbeth; or it may make its victim weak and fearful, as in the case of Claudius.

Another application of the term conscience is found in the term a "good conscience", one that praises a man for actions well performed; this joy of a good conscience is referred to by Charron in the following words:

To the composition of an easy and quiet mind, two ingredients are indispensably requisite. The first, and indeed the chief, is a clear and good conscience; which does inspire men with wonderful strength and assurance; and is a mighty

stay and defence, and support, in all manner of contingencies--let a man be never so stout, and a stranger to fear, yet if he be not a good man, and his conscience cannot speak peace to him--he will never be capable of this happy tranquillity of spirit, this perfection and fruit of wisdom, which we are at present treating of. 34.

La Primaudaye, another French moralist who was well known in England during the Elizabethan period, and whose book on The French Academie, was a sort of compendium of natural and moral philosophy, gives a clear, although quaint and naive, explanation of the theory of conscience, and of the relation that the will should have with the higher part of man rather than the lower. He says:

Seeing God hath placed the heart between the head and the belly, the vital virtue of the soul between the nutritive, and the will between the understanding and the most sensual part in us; therefore the heart, affections and will ought to look always on high and not downward, to the end they should join to the most noble, celestial and divine part, and not to that which is most base, sensual, and earthly. 35.

True it is, that the heart and will often deceive themselves in the choice and election of that which is good, whether it be that following reason and judgment corrupted, which should show what is good, they embrace their error; or whether it be that will being corrupted of itself through sin, letteth loose the bridle against the judgment of reason, and so suffereth herself to be carried headlong by her evil affections, in following

34. Charron, op.cit., p. 250.

35. La Primaudaye, Peter, The French Academie, London, Thomas Adams, 1618, p. 511.

some false show of good. Whereupon it commonly cometh to pass, that instead of joy, which the heart should receive of good, unto which the will tendeth naturally, it receiveth great sorrow and griefs after knowledge taken of the fault. 36.

All the children of Adam are endued with reason and understanding, and have the knowledge of good and evil engraven and engrafted in their conscience. There is no man--that hath not some effect and sparks of this light of life. But this is not enough to make man possess the true peace of conscience--the spirit of the same word of God. The kingdom of heaven is at hand. We shall understand and know what our celestial inheritance is. We shall obtain a certain testimony in our consciences of the difference between being the children of God and the children of the devil. 37.

La Primaudaye in another place warns us against "custom in sinning", remarking that custom stills the voice of conscience, and he gives a striking explanation of the "furies" that were believed to be supernatural agencies appointed to torment the wicked. He says that they are nothing else but the torments of an evil conscience.

In the above passages we see that La Primaudaye accepted nearly the same doctrine as Charron with regard to the three classes of wicked men, and also with regard to a man whose conscience gives him true peace.

As a final summing up of the Elizabethan doctrine of conscience, we may say that it is a development of the medieval, with some changes brought about by Renaissance

36. Ibid: p. 467.

37. Ibid: pp. 866-7.

influence, as for example, the lessening of the importance of the rewards or punishments of a future life as a sanction for actions. The theory of conscience was based upon the close relationship of the three souls or faculties in man, and the correspondence of man's soul with outer circumstances. An important consideration was the classification of sinners into three classes or types--those who were surprised into sinning, those who were so blinded by passion that the reason lost control of the will; and those who were deliberately evil. Finally the Elizabethan moralists and psychologists refer again and again to the easily moved or influenced conscience, and to the joy of a good conscience, together with its ability to give to the man who possesses it all the tranquillity and peace of true wisdom.

According to many modern students of Shakespeare psychology and moral philosophy, the conscience was a faculty which was governed, not so much by a man's moral principles, as by passing sensations. Hence it was likely to change rapidly with changing circumstances, and with changing physiological conditions. The passions, which often gained control of the will, and thus deprived reason of its sovereignty, and with it, the conscience, which was reason applied for a certain purpose, changed with changes in the elements, and the humors of the body.

According to Craig, the passions result not from any imperfection of the faculties of the soul, which stands supreme, and, as a divine element, incorruptible, but from physiological conditions, which cloud or interfere with the normal operations of the soul. He continues:

Numerous illustrations of the power of passion can be found in Shakespeare's plays, and also of Shakespeare's familiarity with the theory of the passions. So universally and so deeply does the consciousness of correlated mental and bodily states enter into the expression of thought and feeling, that it may be said to constitute a principal basis of Shakespeare's realism, and to be a chief means by which he appeals to human feelings. 38.

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38. "Shakespeare's Depiction of the Passions", in Philological Quarterly, Vol. IV, (1925) pp. 191-3.

Chapter III. The Problem of Conscience as Studied in Some of the Plays of Shakespeare.

Before taking up specific conscience problems in the plays of Shakespeare, some general observations may be made, which apply to the whole moral problem as handled by the great dramatist.

As has been said before, many students of Shakespeare have come to the conclusion that he was not strictly a philosopher, surely not consciously a moralist, but there is no denying the fact that we find in the plays a definite moral system. If we deny that he was a philosopher or psychologist, we cannot refuse him the honor of being the greatest observer of human nature that has ever lived. Perhaps he did not study and portray psychology as a science, but he understood it practically, as few men have done. And as the age in which he lived was an age of awakened enthusiasm for all sorts of knowledge, ancient and new, we find all this exemplified in the works of the great artist, who steadily and surely "held the mirror up to nature." His ability to picture the full and complete life of the world about him is expressed by Taylor in the following words:

In some way each Elizabethan expresses

some phase of the contemporary world, and Shakespeare the impression of the universal whole. It is himself that he expresses through the universality of his illumination, or in any casual borrowing; he, a sheer playwright, making plays for the theater, following this business, inevitably expresses himself, and through himself the enlightenment and genius of his age. 39.

Shakespeare undoubtedly looked at life from the outside. He interpreted human life in his great characters from the viewpoint of the spectator. His ethics are built upon human life as it then was; and if one is to judge correctly of the morality of the characters, one must remember the period and the audience for which the characters were created. This makes all the more forceful the conclusion that Shakespeare's ethics are essentially valid and right, since his characters seem as true to life now as they must have been to Shakespeare's own audiences.

According to many modern students of Shakespeare psychology and moral philosophy, the conscience was a faculty which was governed, not so much by a man's moral principles, as by passing sensations. Hence it was likely to change rapidly with changing circumstances. Miss Anderson elucidates this theory. She

39. Taylor, op. cit. p. 218.

says that the ready response of the mind to reports from the senses makes of conscience a fleeting thing, yielding quickly to a new stimulus.⁴⁰ The conscience, according to this statement, would not be a fixed means of judgment, but rather an instrument of the passions. This is illustrated in many passages, for instance in the second murderer, in Richard III:

Sec. Murd. The urging of that word "judgment" hath bred a kind of remorse in me.

First Murd. What, art thou afraid?

Sec. Murd. Not to kill him, having a warrant for it; but to be damned for killing him, from which no warrant can defend us.

First Murd. I thought thou hadst been resolute.

Sec. Murd. So I am, to let him live.

First Murd. Back to the Duke of Gloucester, tell him so.

Sec. Murd. I pray thee, stay awhile; I hope my holy humour will change; 'twas wont to hold me but while one would tell twenty.

First Murd. How dost thou feel thyself now?

Sec. Murd. Faith, some certain dregs of conscience are still within me.

First Murd. Remember our regard, when the deed is done.

Sec. Murd. Zounds, he dies; I had forgot the reward.

First Murd. Where is thy conscience now?

Sec. Murd. In the Duke of Gloucester's purse.

First Murd. So when he opens his purse to give us our reward, thy conscience flies out.

Sec. Murd. Let it go; there's few or none will entertain it.

First Murd. How if it comes to thee again?

40. Anderson, op. cit. p. 93.

Sec. Murd. I'll not meddle with it; it is a dangerous thing, it makes a man a coward; a man cannot steal but it accuseth him...; and every man that means to live well, endeavors to trust to himself, and live without it. 41.

This sudden deposing of conscience from its throne as judge and controller of man's actions is typical of ignorant and unprincipled men; conscience loses its force when it counsels against the passions. We find this same attitude toward the conscience in the debate between Launcelot's conscience and the fiend, in the Merchant of Venice.

Laun. Certainly my conscience will serve me to run from this Jew my master. The fiend is at mine elbow and tempts me saying to me 'Gobbo, Launcelot Gobbo, good Launcelot', or 'good Gobbo' or 'good Launcelot Gobbo, use your legs take the start, run away'. My conscience says 'No; take heed, honest Launcelot; take heed, honest Gobbo; or, as afore-said, honest Launcelot Gobbo; do not run, scorn running with thy heels.' Well, the most courageous fiend bids me pack; 'Via!', says the fiend; 'Away!', says the fiend; for the heavens, rouse up a brave mind! says the fiend; and run! Well, my conscience, hanging about the neck of my heart, says very wisely to me, 'My honest friend, Launcelot, being an honest man's son, or rather an honest woman's son;' for, indeed, my father did something smack, something grow to, he had a kind of taste; well, my conscience says 'Launcelot, budge not.' 'Budge', says the fiend. 'Budge not', says my conscience. 'Conscience', say I, 'you counsel well'. 'Fiend', say I, 'you counsel well'; to be ruled by my conscience, I should stay with the Jew, my

master, who, God save the mark, is a kind of devil; and to run away from the Jew, I should be ruled by the fiend, who, saving your reverence, is the devil himself. Certainly the Jew is the very devil in carnal; and, in my conscience, my conscience is but a kind of hard conscience, to offer to counsel me to stay with the Jew. The fiend gives the more friendly counsel. I will run, fiend; my heels are at your command; I will run. ^{42.}

True, this speech is a sort of burlesque upon the theory of the solicitations of the lower nature against the conscience; nevertheless, it is authentic according to the Elizabethan psychology of the passions and affections warring against the reason. In this instance the desires of Launcelot are personified in the fiend. This situation, the fiend tempting man against his conscience, was familiar to medieval and Renaissance audiences. The fiend as a visible force for evil was an integral part of morality plays, and he was retained in many of the later dramas.

The words "My conscience, hanging about the neck of my heart", bear directly upon the theory that the conscience, a counsellor of the understanding, is opposed to the affections, whose principal seat is in the heart. Launcelot argues with his conscience, and his passions, in the person of the fiend, get the better of his judgment. In this instance, reflection

was an enemy to right conduct; this is unusual in Shakespeare. Miss Anderson points this out in discussing the relation of the tragic hero to his conscience. She cites especially the case of Hamlet, and shows that it was his "thinking too precisely of the event" that prevented the accomplishment of what he was morally certain was a duty imposed by Heaven. Many of the wicked characters speak against deliberation; Macbeth knows that

If it were done when 'tis done,
then 'twere well
It were done quickly. 43.

Richard III says that "fearful commenting is a leaden servitor." King Claudius, for fear deliberation will cool Laertes' purpose of revenge, urges him to act against Hamlet immediately. These men are afraid to give their conscience an opportunity to gain control over their actions. These men who speak against deliberation, in many instances also exhibit a fear of conscience, Sometimes the conscience is blamed as a weakening influence, "devised to keep the strong in awe." 44.

It "makes cowards of us all."

If a man desires hasty action, performed without deliberation, he is not a good man, according to

43. Macbeth, I, 7, 1-2.

44. Hamlet, III, 1, 81.

Elizabethan standards. If a man does anything without considering upon it, he is not to be called virtuous. He must give the judgment time to pass upon it before he acts. Shakespeare's good men, rather than finding in conscience a hindrance to brave deeds, as do the villains, rely upon it to make them moderate, but withal strong and courageous. Oxford, in Richard III finds that his conscience helps him to advance bravely against his enemy.

Every man's conscience is a
thousand men to fight against
that bloody homicide. 45.

Malcolm, also, indicates his realization of the power of deliberation to prevent rash and wicked deeds, when he says to Macduff,

And modest wisdom plucks me
From over-credulous haste. 46.

Richard III presents interesting problems of conscience.

Richard belongs to the first of Charron's "classes of wicked men." He is perfectly incorporated with evil, and his very understanding approves the evil. Moulton says that Richard was evil for the sake of being evil. 47. He had built up carefully an assertion of individual will against the order of the universe. All ordinary restraints he had learned to cast off-sympathy,

45. Richard III, V, 2, 18-19.

46. Macbeth, IV, 3, 120-121.

47. R. G. Moulton, Moral System of Shakespeare, Macmillan Co. N. Y. 1903, pp. 43-44.

inherited affections, remorse; his position seemed impregnable. But he forgot that there are conditions under which the will is unable to act, and these are found, not in some remote combination of unlikely circumstances, but in the most commonplace of every-day conditions--sleep. During sleep, when his faculties are not under the control of his will, his conscience, kept so strictly in abeyance during his waking hours, and apparently dead, directs the procession of his victims, which appear and torture him with the remembrance of his wicked deeds. As each ghost appears and says in turn, "Let me sit heavy on thy soul tomorrow," and bids him despair, Richard's imagination, even in sleep, is roused against his will, and his conscience accuses him of the hatefulness of his crimes. When he awakes, he is unable immediately to gain control of his imagination, and his conscience is still free to condemn him. Then follows the dialogue between his two selves--the suppressed self of inherited humanity, and the artificial callousness so painfully built up.

Have mercy, Jesu! Soft! I did but dream.
O coward conscience, how dost thou afflict me!
The lights burn blue. It is now dead midnight.
Cold fearful drops stand on my trembling flesh.
What do I fear? myself? there's none else by:
Richard loves Richard; that is, I am I.
Is there a murderer here? No. Yes, I am;
Then fly. What, from myself? Great reason, why:
Lest I revenge. What, myself upon myself?

Alack, I love myself. Wherefore? for any good
 That I myself have done unto myself?
 O, no! I rather hate myself
 For hateful deeds committed by myself!
 I am a villain: yet I lie, I am not.
 Fool, of thyself speak well: fool, do not flatter.
 My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
 And every tongue brings in a several tale,
 And every tale condemns me for a villain.
 Perjury, perjury, in the high'st degree;
 Murder, stern murder, in the direst degree;
 All several sins, all used in each degree,
 Throng to the bar, crying all, Guilty! guilty!
 I shall despair. There is no creature loves me;
 And if I die, no soul shall pity me:
 Nay, wherefore should they, since that I myself
 Find in myself no pity to myself?
 Methought the souls of all that I had murder'd
 Came to my tent; and every one did threat
 Tomorrow's vengeance on the head of Richard." 48.

Richard is an illustration of another Elizabethan theory of conduct--the agreement between outer circumstances and appearances, and inward morality. This theory came down from Plato, who taught that beauty of person should go with beauty of soul. Richard, because he was

"curtailed of fair proportion,
 Cheated of feature by dis-
 sembling nature
 Deform'd, unfinish'd 49.

since he could not prove a lover, was determined to become a villain. Because Richard was born outside the pale of normal humanity, his trend was toward evil, since nature had already started him in that direction, and he frankly made choice of wickedness. His conscience

48. Richard III, V, 3, 177-206.

49. Ibid: I, 1, 18, 19.

would remain, as we have seen, under control of this wicked will, until the power of the will was removed.

Queen Margaret, in pronouncing her fearful curse upon Richard, says also that he was,

sealed in his nativity
The slave of nature and the son of hell!

and she asks that the worm of conscience should begnaw his soul, and that his dreams should be disturbed with hideous visions. This curse, so fearfully fulfilled, was part of that theory of retribution which we find exemplified in the plays.

A question that Moulton suggests with regard to this retribution is that at first appearance it does not seem sufficiently spectacular to provide sufficient retribution for the many open crimes of Richard. It seems that he is permitted to die rather quietly, and is not held up to the scorn of his enemies. Moulton explains the justice of this by saying that a spectacular death would have been a moment's pang and all would have been over, but as it was, the death that he suffered was neither quick and showy enough to give to his memory the added distinction of bravery, nor slow enough to arouse the sympathy of the reader. We are left to

conjecture the manner of his death, and the tortures of conscience which must have overwhelmed him at the end.

The Renaissance idea of tragedy--the justice which must inhere in the fall of princes, if there is a God of justice--is exemplified in Richard by the uneasy conscience which will not let him sleep in peace, and by the error which caused him to bring down evil upon himself. He is a true example of Renaissance villain, one who is so by free choice, who loves evil as a recompense for the lack of love which he finds in his fellow men, and whose will is so perverted that it is in perfect accord with passion,--who can feel no remorse which will bring about repentance and amendment, but who suffers, nevertheless, the intense pangs of a troubled and abused conscience.

The character of Richmond gives us an example of another sort of conscience, that "clear and good conscience" which Charron praises as the

source of wonderful strength and assurance, and of a happy tranquillity of spirit.⁵¹

In his sleep the ghosts of Richard's victims address

51. See Note 34.

Richmond as "Quiet, untroubled soul", and promise that God and good angels will fight on his side; and upon waking, he tell his friends that he has had

the sweetest sleep and fairest boding
dreams

That ever enter'd in a drowsy head. 52.

He has the peace of a good conscience, and even in sleep his imagination, governed strongly by reason during his waking hours, is kept under control. Richard, on the contrary, is tormented in sleep by the imagination which he has made subservient to his wicked passions while his will was able to control it.

An example of the power of passion upon conscience is found in the quick conversion of Anne to the side of Richard. As Richard himself says:

I, that kill'd her husband and his
father,
To take her in her heart's extremest hate,
With curses in her mouth, tears in her eyes,
The bleeding witness of her hatred by;
Having God, her conscience, and these bars
against me,
And I nothing to back my suit at all
But the plain devil and dissembling looks,
And yet to win her, all the world to nothing! 53.

The passions of the Lady Anne are immediately and violently roused by the flattery of Richard, and the will, turning aside from the sovereign reason to which

52. Richard III, 5, 3, 227-228.

53. Richard III, 1, 2, 231-239.

it owes allegiance, and from which it will derive the greatest good, becomes an ally to the passions, and Anne through her own act is made another victim of Richard.

In Clarence, in Richard III, we find an illustration of another of Charron's "three sorts of wicked men." He acknowledges, when he has been frightened by his fearful dream, that he has committed all the crimes of which he is accused in sleep, and he repents. La Primaudaye's theory that the furies which torment wicked men are merely the torments of a guilty conscience, is also illustrated here, when

came wandering by
A shadow like an angel, with bright hair
Dabbled in blood; and he squeak'd out aloud,
"Clarence is come; false, fleeting, perjured Clarence,
That stabb'd me in the field of Tewksbury;
Seize on him, Furies, take him to your torments!" 54.

The play of Richard II, offers some striking examples of the Renaissance theory of retribution--that Heaven always defends the right, and punishes the guilty by the tortures of conscience. This is true in the case of Richard, whom his courtiers refuse to punish for Gloucester's death, but who assures the duchess that heaven will revenge.

But since correction lieth in those
hands
Which made the fault that we cannot correct,

54. Richard III, I, 4, 53-57.

Put we our quarrel to the will of heaven. 55.

Gaunt refuses to avenge Gloucester's death, because he has so great respect for "the divinity that hedges a king", that he may not raise his hand against him, but promises the duchess that her husband's death will indeed be avenged:

God's in the quarrel; for God's substitute,
His deputy anointed in His sight,
Hath caus'd his death: the which if wrongfully,
Let heaven revenge; for I may never lift
An angry arm against His minister. 56.

This idea of the "divinity" of a king is further emphasized after the death of Richard, who, although he had been deposed, had still about him the aura of kingship. His executioner, Exton, was "stricken with the prick of a guilty conscience" although he had been commissioned to perform the deed by the highest authority of the land.

O would the deed were good!
For now the devil, that told me I did well,
Says that this deed is chronicled in hell. 57.

This peculiar expression with regard to the devil, implies the doctrine sometimes expressed of a good and an evil conscience; the good conscience inspiring to virtuous deeds, and the evil, to wicked deeds.

55. Richard II, I, 2, 4-6.

56. Ibid: I, 2, 37-39.

57. Ibid: V, 5, 115-117.

Richard II dies considering himself a severely wronged and innocent man. He has reasoned himself into the belief so generally accepted in medieval times that "the king can do no wrong". He is the contrary of those villains who reason themselves into evil, with the direct intent of committing evil for its own sake, as in Richard III.

In Measure for Measure, a play which, according to Coleridge, is the central expression of Shakespeare's moral judgments, the character of Angelo gives a striking example of the conscience suddenly transformed by passion. Shakespeare wrote this play as a protest against the narrow and fanatical Puritanism which hated his art, and which condemned and punished inexorably all human frailties, especially those of the flesh. The play is an expression of Shakespeare's wrath against moral hypocrisy and self-righteousness. Still Angelo is not a thorough, natural hypocrite; he is an excellent illustration of the power of passion to upset even the most firmly established moral judgments. Angelo is a self-deceiver. He sincerely thinks that he is what he appears to be. He is amazed and confounded at the sudden passion which the presence of Isabel awakens in him. He is one of that type of wicked men who are surprised into wickedness, according to Charron. His mind is not settled and grounded in sin; rather he sets

himself up as a pattern and enforcer of virtue. He forgets that he himself is frail, and is so proud that he thinks he is beyond the reach of temptation. When Isabel appears before him, and demands of him:

Go to your bosom:
Knock there, and ask your heart what it doth know
That's like my brother's fault: if it confess
A natural guiltiness such as is his,
Let it not sound a thought upon your tongue
Against my brother's life. 58.

Angelo, who has been suddenly aroused by her virtue and beauty, says aside,

She speaks, and 'tis
Such sense, that my sense breeds with it. 59.

acknowledging to himself that his sense--that is, his senses, are inflamed by her. When she has left him, he exclaims against the temptation that has so overwhelmed him, making him yield to desires which he had before scorned, thinking that his lofty virtue was beyond the reach of such solicitations. His pride and his hypocrisy were his downfall.

From thee,--even from thy virtue!
What's this, what's this? Is this her fault or mine?
The tempter or the tempted, who sins most?
Ha!
Not she; nor doth she tempt: but it is I
That, lying by the violet in the sun,
Do, as the carrion does, not as the flower,
Corrupt with virtuous season. 60.

58. Measure for Measure, II, 2, 138-141.

59. Ibid: 142-143.

60. Ibid: II, 2, 162-170.

What, do I love her,
That I desire to speak to her again,
And feast upon her eyes? What is't I dream on?
O cunning enemy, that, to catch a saint,
With saints dost bait thy hook! Most dangerous
Is that temptation that doth goad us on
To sin in loving virtue. 61.

The above lines show how completely Angelo is under the influence of passion. His conscience makes a correct pronouncement, but his will is under the control of his passions rather than his reason, and he, who was proud of his virtue, becomes sinful. He says again:

I have begun,
And now I give my sensual race the rein;
Fit thy consent to my sharp appetite. 62.

His sensual appetites have entirely taken possession of him. When Isabel says to the Duke:

He would not, but by gift of my chaste
body
To his concupiscible intemperate lust,
Release my brother; 63.

She uses language appropriate to the psychology of the time, in placing lust among the concupiscible passions, as is done by all medieval and Renaissance philosophers.

Another proof of Angelo's not possessing the conscience of a villain, but one that accuses him to his own great shame and confusion, and proves that he is one of those wicked men who are sinful because of weakness, and not

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61. Ibid: II, 2, 176-183.
62. Ibid: II, 4, 159-161.
63. Ibid: V, 1, 97-99.

from choice, is his evident sorrow when he accuses himself to the Duke:

O my dread lord,
I should be guiltier than my guiltiness,
To think I can be undiscernible,
When I perceive your Grace, like power divine
Hath look'd upon my passes. Then, good prince,
No longer session hold upon my shame,
But let my trial be mine own confession. 64.

In contrast to the hypocrisy and self-conceit of Angelo, which leads to his judgment being subjugated to his passions,--is Isabel, a

thing ensky'd and sainted. 65.

as Lucio calls her.

Her moral judgment is absolutely in control of her will, her sense of justice is so keen and her passions so well under control, that she is immoveable in her dignity and beauty of character. Her conscience is one which, as Charron says,

does inspire men with wonderful strength and assurance; and is a mighty stay, and defence, and support, in all manner of contingencies. 66.

Her reserve and modesty make her hesitate to appear before Angelo as a suppliant for her brother's life.

Isabel Alas! What poor ability's in me
To do him good?

64. Ibid: V, 1, 370-376.

65. Ibid: I, 4, 34.

66. See Note 34.

Lucio Assay the power you have.
Isabel My power? Alas, I doubt,--67.

But as soon as Lucio convinces her that her duty is to help her brother, she consents to appeal to Angelo. She is in full control of her body and its passions, and Angelo's wicked solicitations have no effect upon her.

In the Juliet of Measure for Measure, we find a conscience which has been suddenly and completely overcome by passion, and which repents as completely.

Prov: Look, here comes one: a gentlewoman
of mine,
Who, falling in the flaws of her own
youth,
Hath blister'd her report. 68.

We have here, also, an example of the effect of passion upon youth. As Wright says,

The concupiscible passions are those which are prone to gain control of youth, while the irascible passions belong more properly to age. 69.

The Duke, disguised as a Friar, calls upon Juliet to repent of her sin:

Duke Repent you, fair one, of the sin you
carry?
Jul. I do; and bear the shame most patiently.
Duke I'll teach you how you shall arraign
your conscience,
And try your penitence, if it be sound,
Or hollowly put on.
Jul. I'll gladly learn.

67. Measure for Measure, I, 4, 76-79.

68. Ibid: II, 3, 10-12.

69. See Note 17.

Duke Love you the man that wrong'd you?
Jul. Yes, as I love the woman that wrong'd
him.
Duke So then, it seems your most offenceful
act
Was mutually committed?
Jul. Mutually.
Duke Then was your sin of heavier kind than his?
Jul. I do confess it, and repent it, father.
Duke 'Tis meet so, daughter: but lest you do
repent,
As that the sin hath brought you to this
shame,
Which sorrow is always toward ourselves,
not heaven,
Showing we would not spare heaven as we
love it,
But as we stand in fear,--
Jul. I do repent me, as it is an evil,
And take the shame with joy.
Duke There rest. 70.

Here we have a perfect picture of the Catholic doctrine of sovereign contrition for sin--sorrow because we know we have offended God, rather than for any personal or interested motive. Shakespeare may not have been a Catholic, but his ethical and religious teachings are nearly always in perfect accord with Catholic teaching.

Here also, is an illustration of Shakespeare's attitude toward sins of weakness, in contrast with maliciously premeditated or unnatural sins. As J. Courtenay James says, in an article on "Religion in Shakespeare",

Sin is never belittled, much less condoned by Shakespeare. It is noticeable that sins of ingratitude, selfishness and worldliness are

particularly condemned. In Shakespeare's ethics, deeds which are the product of strong impulse are more pardonable than premeditated actions of fraudulence and hypocritical professions of generosity. Our Lord knew what was in man, and He judged by the inwardness of morality. Shakespeare also knew what was in man, and he judged as did Our Lord. 71.

Among Shakespeare's villains, those who did evil from free choice, and who were so steeped in sin that their consciences were almost immune to remorse, one remarkable example is the Queen in King Henry VI. It is very seldom that Shakespeare's women have not some redeeming qualities, but Margaret is an embodiment of all the crimes and vices of the age in which she lives. She ridicules her king's piety and peaceable nature and becomes herself worse and worse. She is shameless in her sinful life, and it is impossible to discover evidence that she feels any torments of conscience. As an example of the villain who sins for the sake of evil, Margaret is almost an equal of Richard III.

In the same play there is a striking passage illustrating the terrors of a conscience hardened in sin to such a degree that the sinner dies impenitent. Cardinal Beaufort is dying, and the fiend approaches to carry his soul to hell:

King Ah, what a sign it is of evil life,
Where death's approach is seen so terrible.

71. J. Courtenay James, "Religion in Shakespeare", in London Quarterly Review, Vol. 155, April 31, pp. 239-49.

Warwick Beaufort, it is thy sovereign speaks
to thee.

Cardinal Bring me unto my trial when you will.
Died he not in his bed? where should
he die?
Can I make men live, whether they will
or no?
O, torture me no more! I will confess.
Alive again? then show me where he is:
I'll give a thousand pounds to look
upon him.
He hath no eyes, the dust hath blinded
them.
Comb down his hair; look, look! it
stands upright,
Like lime twigs set to catch my winged
soul.

King O thou eternal mover of the heavens,
Look with a gentle eye upon this wretch!
O beat away the busy, meddling fiend
That lays strong siege unto this wretch's
soul,
And from his bosom purge this black des-
pair. 72.

Warwick So bad a death argues a monstrous life.
King Forbear to judge, for we are sinners all. 73.

In the same play occurs a passage which illustrates well
the peace and strength that a good conscience imparts:

King What stronger breastplate than a heart
untainted!
Thrice is he arm'd that hath his quarrel
just,
And he but naked, though lock'd up in
steel,
Whose conscience with injustice is corrupted. 74.

Cardinal Wolsey, in Henry VIII, is one of those
wicked men whom we find in Shakespeare, and in life, who

72. II Henry VI, III, 3, 5-23.

73. Ibid: 30-31.

74. Ibid: III, 2, 232-235.

have lived in absolute disregard of the demands of conscience until the loss of preferment or some other misfortune causes them to give thought to the vanity of earthly pride and ambition. Wolsey is an arrogant, scheming churchman, pitiless and double-dealing; but when misfortune comes upon him, he sees his guilt and turns to God. Before he knows that the king has found him out, he flatters him, and makes false pledges of loyalty and service.

Wolsey Though all the world should crack their
duty to you,
And throw it from their soul; though
perils did
Abound, as thick as thought could make
'em, and
Appear in forms more horrid--yet my duty,
As doth a rock against the chiding flood,
Should the approach of this wild river
break,
And stand unshaken yours. 75.

The king gives him the packet of papers which has fallen into the royal possession, and Wolsey knows that he is undone. The realization of the futility of human ambition comes upon him, and he is convinced that he has been most foolish to

hang on princes' favors. 76.

and he thanks the king for taking from his shoulders a load would sink a navy, too much honor. 77.

75. Henry VIII, III, 2, 193-198.

76. Henry VIII, III, 2, 367.

77. Ibid: III, 2, 383.

When he is disgraced he busies himself for the little remaining time of his life in making his peace with God.

When Cromwell asks him how he does he replies:

Why, well;
Never so truly happy, my good Cromwell.
I know myself now; and I feel within me
A peace above all earthly dignities,
A still and quiet conscience. 78.

The self-accusing conscience, which judges correctly, without any influence from passion, but is in fear of God's judgments, is expressed in the familiar words:

Wolsey O Cromwell, Cromwell!
Had I but served my God with half
the zeal
I served my king, he would not in
mine age
Have left me naked to mine enemies. 79.

Shakespeare in the same play gives us an illustration of the peace of a good conscience in Buckingham, who is executed for treason because of the hatred of Wolsey. At his trial, for an instant, as one of the Gentlemen says:

First Gent. ---he was stirred
With such an agony, he sweat
extremely,
And something spoke in choler,
ill and hasty.
But he fell to himself again,
and sweetly
In all the rest show'd a most
noble patience. 80.

Buckingham is moved to choler, and his physical

78. Ibid: 376-379.

79. Ibid: 454-457.

80. Henry VIII, II, 1, 32-36.

constitution bears witness to it, but as soon as he recovers from this almost involuntary feeling of anger, he exhibits the resignation and quiet courage which are the marks of a conscience at peace with God.

Buckingham The law I bear no malice for my death;
'T has done upon the premises but justice;
But those that sought it I could wish more Christians;
Be what they will, I heartily forgive 'em. 81.

And again, his resignation is beautifully expressed in the following words:

Buckingham Pray for me! I must now forsake ye;
the last hour
Of my long weary life is come upon me.
Farewell:
And when you would say something that is sad,
Speak how I fell. I have done; and
God forgive me. 82.

This attitude toward death--accepting it with resignation, or as in the case of Cardinal Beaufort, meeting it in terrible despair, but in no case with a joyful looking forward to a life beyond the grave--is characteristic of all Shakespeare's characters. In this instance as in many others, Shakespeare is distinctly human and natural; there is very little of supernatural motive in delineations of character. As Taylor says,

81. Ibid: 62-64.

82. Ibid: 131-136.

When he crosses the plain of death, it is but to portray the effect of the imminence or contemplation of death upon the human mind engaged with mortal aims or perceiving their nullity. 83.

In another place, he says:

It was a time when the energies, passions, ambitions, of eager men threatened to submerge the mystic anticipation of a life to come. No joyful anticipation of the bliss of heaven is expressed in Shakespeare. In plays as well as sonnets, he has no love of death, but detests it, along with all the 'wastes of time' and time's thievish progress to eternity. Dismally death's injurious approaches sap the beauty and wit of woman, and man's strength and glory. Reconcilement to the fatal necessity and a seemly end, are the most that can be expected. 84.

This idea that a "seemly end" is what is to be desired may be at the bottom of Wolsey's repentance and Buckingham's forgiveness of his enemies, but if one is to accept the evidence of many other characters in Shakespeare, it is more probable that he intended to portray the effect of conscience upon a man as he is brought face to face with death; or to illustrate the end of the "just man and the sinner."

A villain who seems in the early part of the play to be without conscience, but who repents most deeply later, is Iachimo in Cymbeline. He is a type of villain that seems to be so naturally, as an effect of the climate in which he was reared. The Southern nature in Shakespeare's

83. Taylor, op.cit. Vol. II, pp. 257-258.

84. Ibid: pp. 257-258.

characters is represented as ardent and violent. Their passions are easily aroused.

Iachimo is evil-minded, naturally wicked, and he tempts Posthumous to lay the wager upon his wife's fidelity, with a fiendish trickery and delight that argues his entire lack of moral integrity. He carries out this plan in the same spirit, and returns to gloat over his victory to Posthumous. He swears by all that he should hold sacred that he is telling the truth, and one finds it difficult to believe that he will ever repent. By a change of fortune Iachimo is brought a prisoner to the court of Cymbeline, and he confesses most humbly the crime of which he was guilty. His conscience, which one might suppose was entirely silenced in him, torments him so much with the concealed crime, that he is glad "to be constrained to utter that which torments him to conceal." As he tells the story of his villainy, he gives an explanation of his actions in Britain, which agrees closely with the teachings of Elizabethan psychology with regard to the close relationship of climate to conduct.

Away to Britain

Post I in this design; well may you, sir,
Remember me at court, where I was taught
Of your chaste daughter the wide difference
'Twixt amorous and villainous. Being thus
quench'd
Of hope, not longing, mine Italian brain
'Gan in your duller Britain operate

Most vilely. 85.

Iachimo's sudden and complete conversion is in line with Elizabethan belief that external influences have a remarkable effect upon conduct.

Posthumous' conduct is nearly as reprehensible to a modern mind as that of Iachimo. It seems impossible that a man of any depth of character could so easily fall a victim to the wiles of a villain such as Iachimo, and believe him in such a matter. It is probable that his crediting of the circumstantial evidence which Iachimo presents, is the direct result of his being so confident before, of his wife's fidelity. His confidence is shaken and changed immediately into distrust. His remorse and repentance at the end of the play are as great as his rage when he saw Iachimo with the tell-tale bracelet. Posthumous was so greatly moved by rage that he ordered his servant to put to death the wife whom he dearly loved; but when his passions are cooled, and his judgment is ruled by calm reason he repents bitterly of his deed. He represents his conscience as being imprisoned by guilt, as he is imprisoned in his physical person, and he desires to be freed from the imprisonment of a guilty conscience, even by death if that is necessary.

Post. Most welcome, bondage! for thou art

a way,
I think, to liberty: yet am I better
Than one that's sick o' the gout; since he had
rather
Groan so in perpetuity than be cured
By the sure physician, death, who is the key
To unbar these locks. My conscience, thou art
fetter'd
More than my shanks and wrists: you good gods,
give me
The penitent instrument to pick that bolt.
Then, free forever! Is't enough I am sorry?
So children temporal fathers do appease;
Gods are more full of mercy. Must I repent?
I cannot do it better than in gyves. 86.

After Posthumous is freed from prison, and Iachimo has confessed his crime, Posthumous is more enraged against himself than against Iachimo. His words express the greatest sorrow and repentance:

Ay me! most credulous fool,
Egregious murderer, thief, anything
That's due to all the villains past; in being,
To come! O give me cord, or knife, or poison,
Some upright justicer! Thou, king, send out
For tortures ingenious: it is I
That all the abhorred things o' the earth amend
By being worse than they. I am Posthumous,
That kill'd thy daughter: villain-like, I he;
That caused a lesser villain than myself,
A sacrilegious thief, to do it. The temple
Of virtue was she. 87.

Posthumous proves most conclusively La Primaudaye's argument with regard to those whose heart and will deceive them in the choice and election of that which is good, by following reason and judgment corrupted, and thus they

86. Ibid: V, 4, 4-14.

87. Ibid: V, 5, 210-220.

are led to embrace their error.⁸⁸ He is also an example of a tragic hero, who, as Miss Campbell says, sins under the influence of passion, his reason failing to check his passion.

Among the comedies we find numerous illustrations of Shakespeare's theories with regard to conscience--if we may say that he had any definite theories in this regard. At any rate, there are many examples of the Elizabethan conception of the conscience, and of the effects upon the individual of the self-accusing conscience or of the conscience that is at ease. The play just discussed comes under the classification of comedy, though it is one of a "happy ending." In the Winter's Tale, a comedy of the same period, and in much the same vein, we have another remarkable example of sin and repentance. Leontes does not need a villain from a strange country to convince him of his wife's infidelity, but his own mad jealousy makes him take as proofs of guilty affection the courtesies and kindnesses which his queen bestows upon his friend, a guest at the court. Leontes' repudiation of Hermione, and his public accusation of her are almost beyond the bounds of possibility. The sudden conversion of the king, when the death of his son causes him to acknowledge that he has blasphemed the god Apollo, by not believing the oracle,

88. See Note 36.

is also at first sight most unnatural. But this is characteristic of the psychology of the times, which pictures the conscience as being swayed very suddenly by an emotion which might become predominant on the instant.

Leontes Apollo's angry; and the heavens
themselves
Do strike at my injustice. 89.

Leontes Apollo, pardon
My great profaneness 'gainst thine
oracle!
I'll reconcile me to Polixenes
New woo my queen, recall the good
Camillo,
Whom I proclaim a man of truth, of
mercy. 90.

In speaking of his wronged friend, he says, expressing his great remorse:

How he glisters
Through my rust! and how his piety
Does my deeds make the blacker! 91.

When he thinks his queen is dead he expresses still greater grief and remorse:

Prithee bring me
To the dead bodies of my queen and son:
One grave shall be for both: upon them
shall
The causes of their death appear, unto
Our shame perpetual. 92.

Hermione's steadfastness under her afflictions and

89. Winter's Tale, III, 3, 145-146.

90. Ibid: III, 2, 155-159.

91. Ibid: III, 2, 171-173.

92. Ibid: III, 2, 236-240.

her fearless defence of her character, are proofs of her quiet and easy conscience. In her dignified and calm defence before the king, she declares her innocence, and calls her lord himself to witness to the purity of her life and her conscience:

Hermione Since what I am to say must be but
that
Which contradicts my accusation and
The testimony on my part no other
But what comes from myself, it shall
scarce boot me
To say 'not guilty'; mine integrity
Being counted falsehood, shall, as I
express it
Be so received. But thus: if powers
divine
Behold our human actions, as they do,
I doubt not then but innocence shall
make
False accusation blush and tyranny
Tremble at patience. You, my lord,
best know,
Who least will seem to do so, my
past life
Hath been as continent, as chaste,
as true,
As I am now unhappy. 93.

In the old Lord Camillo, Shakespeare gives us a splendid example of that perfect courtier whom Castiglione characterizes in his Book of the Courtier, as,

an honest, a faire, conditioned man, and
of an upright conscience. 94.

His honesty is so apparent, even to the stranger king Polixenes, that the latter does not hesitate to appeal to

93. Winter's Tale, III, 2, 23-36.

94. Hoby, Thomas, The Book of the Courtier, from the Italian of Count Baldassare Castiglione, 1561, London, David Nutt, 1900.

him for enlightenment and help in the perplexity into which Leontes' treatment has thrown him.

In the pastoral comedy As You Like It, Shakespeare gives us another remarkable illustration of sudden conversion in Oliver, whose hatred of his young brother would almost lead him to murder him, but who is so influenced by the exterior circumstances of quiet and solitude that his passion is subdued, and he confesses his sin openly:

Oliver I do not shame
To tell you what I was, since my
conversion
So sweetly tastes, being the thing
I am. 95.

The finest picture of a contented conscience that can be found in Shakespeare is in Duke Senior of As You Like It.

Duke S. Now my co-mates and brothers in
exile,
Hath not old custom made this life
more sweet
Than that of painted pomp? Are not
these woods
More free from peril than the envious
court? 96.

The content and peace which are found in simple surroundings, when accompanied by a good conscience, are expressed in the familiar words:

Sweet are the uses of adversity,
Which, like the toad, ugly and venomous,
Wears yet a precious jewel in his head;
And this our life, exempt from public haunt,

95. As You Like It, IV, 3, 135-138.

96. Ibid: II, 3, 1-4.

Finds tongues in trees, books in the running
brooks,
Sermons in stones and good in everything. 97.

The effect of exterior circumstances upon the moral judgment is found in the Duke Frederick, who, while he is not pictured as utterly debased and cruel, has committed the crime of usurping the place of his brother, and banishing his niece. When he finds himself among the quiet shades and pleasant scenes of the Forest of Arden, away from the intrigues and conventionalities of the court, his conscience is touched with sorrow for his crime.

Jaq. de B. And to the skirts of this wild
wood he came;
Where meeting with an old religious
man,
After some question with him, was
converted
Both from his enterprise and from
the world. 98.

One of the strongest arguments to prove the power of passion to overthrow reason and upset the power of moral judgment is found in Antony and Cleopatra. The oriental magnificence, the glow and color, the irresistible charm of the "serpent of old Nile" are fascinating. But despite the beauty of imagery which pervades the play and the charm of the characters, one can feel throughout that in this as in all the plays the moral laws that govern human life and destiny are still paramount. As Dowden says,

97. Ibid: I, 3, 12-16.

98. Ibid: V, 4, 165-168.

The worship of Cleopatra for Antony, and his for her, are destined to failure from the beginning. There could be no true confidence, no steadfast strength of love between them, because their love was built wholly upon external fascination, and had no mutual confidence in it. 99.

Antony is entirely under the sway of his passions, so much so that his reason is unhinged. When he is away from Cleopatra, she for that time loses her power over him, and his moral judgment causes him to repent, and spurn her as his destroyer; but as soon as he finds himself again in her presence, her fascination for him again asserts itself, and his reason is again deposed in favor of his passion. Antony expresses in himself all the Elizabethan belief in the power of passion.

The great Roman play which illustrates the Greek and Roman idea of conscience--the judgment of conduct based upon the relationship of man to the good of the state--is Coriolanus. Coriolanus based his moral judgments upon his duty to Rome. Moulton elucidates this in his chapter on "Roman Life Dramatised," in Moral System of Shakespeare. He says that Coriolanus is one of three Roman plays which illustrate the principle of the greatness and supremacy of the state, as opposed to the people. A compromise between the state--Coriolanus and the people--the tribune

99. Dowden E., Shakespeare, American Book Co., 1878, p. 140.

and the plebeians--was attempted by Volumnia, who illustrates the spirit of compromise. It was not his overmastering pride, but his devotion to the state as a principle, that brought about the greatness of Coriolanus' character, even though Volumnia herself named it pride. It was his acting against this principle that compassed his ruin.

Coriolanus was ruled by the passion of pride, but more by his devotion to the state. The good of the state was to him the end of his moral actions, as God is the end of the morality of a Christian. When his aristocratic pride is outraged at the hands of the plebians he turns against the state, the object of his devotion, and joins the enemies of Rome. Coriolanus, by putting his private wrongs and vengeance before the good of Rome, sacrificed his moral principles, which were centered in patriotism. He is induced by his mother to renounce his private revenge, and give himself up to death for the cause of his country. Thus Coriolanus becomes, according to Roman ethics, a perfect member of the state.

The same theory is exemplified in Julius Caesar, in the person of Brutus. From the viewpoint of modern ethics, Brutus commits a greivous sin of ingratitude and treachery when he turns against his friend, to whom he owes a great debt of gratitude for the preferment he has given him;

but, according to the Roman standard of conduct, we must acknowledge that Brutus, in so far as he was sincere, was justified in the killing of Caesar. His words, "Not that I loved Caesar less, but that I loved Rome more," would be the expression of his creed, "the State before all else"--and if his conscience judged this to be the highest good, he would certainly be justified in carrying out whatever he thought would conduce to that end.

Another play based upon life in pre-Christian times, and one which embodies the morality of the Greeks, is Troilus and Cressida. Shakespeare uses this old story for his own purposes and in his own way. He does not make Troilus ridiculous, and he pictures Cressida as utterly shameless and unattractive. It is a study in passion. The illicit love of Troilus and Cressida is not in Shakespeare, any more than in Chaucer, the central crime of the story. The infidelity of Cressida is held up to scorn to a far greater extent than is the other crime. The doctrine of the will being led captive by the exterior senses, is clearly expressed in Troilus' words, when he admits having fallen a victim to Cressida's charms:

Troilus I take today a wife, and my election
Is led on in the conduct of my will;
Two traded pilots 'twixt the dangerous
shores
Of will and judgment. 100.

Cressida acknowledges her infidelity and weakness in the words:

Cressida Ah, poor our sex! this fault in us
I find,
The error of our eye directs our mind:
What error leads must err: O then
conclude
Minds sway'd by eyes are full of
turpitude. 101.

The four plays which are almost universally considered the greatest of the great plays of Shakespeare,--Othello, King Lear, Macbeth, and Hamlet,--afford in the consideration of conscience, as in nearly every other question, the widest field of study. In these four plays one finds the most profound problems of morals and the greatest psychological study probably to be found in any work of artistic literature. These plays alone afford a complete summary of Shakespeare's treatment of moral responsibility. One finds here examples of all the teachings of Renaissance psychology with reference to conscience.

Othello presents nearly as many unsolved problems as does Hamlet. The motives of Iago's villainy, the sudden degeneration of Othello, the extent of Emilia's responsibility--all these present endless unanswerable questions.

Iago has been presented in so many different ways by critics that it is difficult to make any decision of one's

own in regard to him. By the elder critics, and by most of the present day critics also, he is considered one of those villains, like Richard III, who are artists in evil, choosing evil deliberately, usually to compensate for the lack of some pleasure or preferment or physical perfection of which they are painfully conscious. Brandes, in William Shakespeare, says:

He is mischievousness personified. He does evil for the pleasure of hurting, and takes active delight in the adversity and anguish of others. He is that eternal envy which merit or success in others never fails to irritate. He is blear-eyed rancor itself, figuring as a great power, nay--as the motive force in human life. He embodies the detestation of others' excellences which shows itself in obstinate disbelief, suspicion, or contempt; the instinct of hatred for all that is open, beautiful, bright, good and great.

Elsewhere, in reading Shakespeare's monologues, we learn what the person really is; even a villain like Richard III is quite honest in his monologues. Not so Iago. This demi-devil is always trying to give himself reason for his malignity, is always half fooling himself by dwelling on half-motives, in which he partly believes, but disbelieves, in the main. Coleridge aptly designated this action of his mind: 'The motive-hunting of a motiveless malignity.' 102.

This characterization of Iago is the usually accepted one. Shucking, in his "Motives for Action in Shakespeare's Plays", quotes some of the nineteenth century German

102. Brandes, George, William Shakespeare, A Critical Study, in Two Volumes, London, William Hennemann, 1898, pp. 109-110.

critics, among them Kreyssig, Ulrici, and Gervinus, as expounding this doctrine with regard to Iago. Kreyssig says that Iago tries to hide his own malignity from himself, as may be clearly recognized from his accusing his wife of infidelity, though he himself is more than half doubtful of this possibility. Gervinus and Ulrici agree in finding in Iago an unconscious tendency to persuade himself of valid reasons for his conduct, and thus to suppress any vague stirrings of conscience. ¹⁰³. This last criticism implies a little deviation from the usually accepted early opinion--that Iago is a villain merely by choice. If he were, he would not find it necessary to seek reason for his wickedness--the very fact of his having deliberately chosen evil would imply that he had effectually stifled the voice of his conscience, at least so long as it was under the control of his will.

Stopford Brooke states the difference between the earlier interpretations of Iago and those generally accepted at the present time, in the following terse paragraph:

Iago is raised by some writers into the representation of almost absolute evil: a Satan incarnate, with a majesty of evil surrounding him, of which I think Shakespeare had no notion at all. He is again represented as a great artist

103. L. L. Shucking, "Motives for Action in Shakespeare's Plays", in Character Problems in Shakespeare's Plays, Henry Holt, N. Y., 1922, p. 325.

of evil, who is enthralled with the pleasure of his own artistry in wickedness. I think these views are grossly exaggerated, and that Shakespeare would not accept them. There is no majesty in Iago. He is a low cunning beast. Nor is his intellect of a high character; it is keen and subtle, partly of the fox, but there is nothing great about it. It enables him to disguise his real nature, to wear the mask of an honest man, of the bluff, open-speaking soldier; but that kind of cleverness is not uncommon, and needs no special intelligence. His chief characteristics are self-love, sensuality, and cruelty. 104.

Iago is a strange contradiction. At times he seems to declare his utter lack of conscientious scruples openly, as when he says to Roderigo:

Iago Were I the Moor, I would not be Iago:
In following him, I follow but myself;
Heaven is my judge, not I for love and
duty;
But seeming so, for my peculiar end. 105.

Again he appears to be making excuses, even to himself, for his crimes, and trying to find means of quieting the qualms of conscience, as when he says:

Iago Though in the trade of war I have slain
men,
Yet do I hold it very stuff o' the con-
science
To do contriv'd murder. I lack iniquity
Sometimes to do me service. 106.

Craig, in his notes on Othello, says that Coleridge

104. Stopford Brooke, Ten More Plays of Shakespeare, p. 184, London, Constable, 1913.

105. Othello, I, 1, 57-60.

106. Ibid: I, 2, 1-5.

based his famous line, "the motive-hunting of a motiveless malignity", upon the passage in which Iago seems deliberately to search for sufficient reason for carrying out his diabolical plan.

I, for mere suspicion in that kind,
Will do as if for surety. He holds me well;
The better shall my purpose work on him. 107.

The Moor is of a free and open nature,
That thinks men honest that but seem to be so,
And will as tenderly be led by the nose
As asses are.
I have't. It is engender'd. Hell and night
Must bring this monstrous birth to the world's
light. 108.

In the final lines of this speech another clue is given to the hardness of Iago's conscience, and his persistence in evil. He chooses hell instead of heaven, and proclaims his allegiance to the devil. These final words may imply that he belongs to that third class of villains who choose evil merely for the sake of evil, without any reason. Craig says, however, that Iago has personal motives, which he expresses more than once.

His military record was good, and he deserved, so he thought, the position that had been given to Cassio. Also, although he does not believe the rumor concerning Othello and Emilia, he is determined to avenge the bare suspicion, inasmuch as it injures his reputation. Iago's

107. Othello, I, 3, 395-397.

108. Ibid: 405-409.

pride and jealousy are the motives that govern him and silence all conscientious scruples.

Iago thinks evil of everyone. In his eyes no one is good. He has no scruples about imputing a grave crime to the spotless Desdemona. He thinks that all women are wantons, and does not hesitate to impute wickedness to his own wife. He says of women:

Iago I know our country disposition well;
In Venice they do let heaven see the
pranks
They dare not show their husbands;
their best conscience
Is not to leave't undone, but keep't
unknown. 109.

The character of Othello is one of the finest illustrations in Shakespeare of the effect of the passions upon the judgment, and also of the sudden and almost inexplicable change in character and action brought about by exterior causes. Othello, in the beginning, manifests himself a man of calm disposition, of unblemished honor, and of a quiet and untroubled conscience:

Othello My parts, my title, and my perfect
soul
Shall manifest me rightly. 110.

Even his enemy speaks of Othello in terms of praise:

Iago The Moor is of a free and open nature
That thinks men honest that but seem
to be so. 111.

109. Ibid: III, 3, 202-205.

110. Ibid: I, 2, 31-32.

111. Ibid: I, 3, 405-406.

Also:

Iago The Moor, howbeit that I endure him not,
Is of a constant, loving, noble nature. 112.

Othello is, as Iago says, of a free and noble nature;

when Lodovico sees his treatment of Desdemona, he says:

Is this the nature
Whom passion could not shake? whose solid
virtue
The shot of accident, nor dart of chance,
Could neither graze nor pierce? 113.

This opinion of Othello's greatness of spirit is carefully built up from the opening of the play; and the contrast when he gives way completely to the passion of jealousy, is difficult to explain.

A hint is given of the transformation to take place in Othello's behavior, in Act II, when Cassio and Montano have quarreled.

Othello My blood begins my safer guides to
rule;
And passion, having my best judgment
collied,
Assays to lead the way. 114.

Some critics say that Shakespeare intended that we should believe that Othello had

poured his treasure into foreign
laps, 115.

112. Ibid: II, 296-297.

113. Ibid: IV, 1, 274-277.

114. Ibid: II, 3, 205-208.

115. Furness, Variorum, Othello, p. 422--quoted by
Stoll, Othello, p. 2.

and that it was a guilty conscience that made him so easily convinced of Desdemona's guilt. Another argument is that his very trustfulness and love for his wife made him an easy prey to jealousy. Stoll's whole argument is against the study of Othello psychologically. He says that Shakespeare did not pretend to make a character psychologically consistent. He wrote for the stage, and used the dramatic conventions which he knew would be intelligible to his audience, without regard to their psychological significance. He says that the instilling of jealousy into a man's soul by a villain's wiles is an arbitrary but immemorial convention, and one that an Elizabethan audience could fully appreciate. Stoll says,

With or without sexual jealousy, the convention of the calumniator credited is one of the oldest traditions of the drama. The matter is everything, the manner nothing. 116.

He says again,

The dramatist leans on the dramatic convention of slander and 'diabolical soliciting' (which means here almost diabolical possession, not merely temptation). Othello is untainted, and yet is overwhelmed at his only vulnerable point, his trustfulness, by superhuman art. 117.

However, the passion of jealousy may be interpreted as having entered into, and enslaved the mind and spirit

116. Stoll, E. E., Othello, A Historical and Comparative Study, University of Minnesota, 1915, p. 6.

117. Ibid: p. 17.

of Othello; when Iago has begun to work upon him, the images that he calls forth of Desdemona's wickedness and his own disgrace keep his passions so stirred up that his calm reasonable judgment is completely overthrown. His conscience is still extremely active, and shows itself in the end when he proves himself fully aware of the nature of his deed. Othello's moral judgments are suspended, but his conscience is active and trustworthy, and in the end asserts its supremacy. 118.

Emilia is a character in which the conscience seems peculiarly absent. She has no qualms about stealing the handkerchief for her husband, and when she might have saved her mistress a great deal of suffering, she does not tell what she knows. She is truly devoted to Desdemona, however, and finally dies defending her. That Emilia's conscience is not likely to trouble her a great deal about the means she might use to attain a desired end, and that Desdemona's is so true and pure that she cannot endure the slightest suspicion to come near her, is shown in the conversation between the two, after Othello has accused Desdemona of inconstancy.

Des. Dost thou in conscience think, tell me,
Emilia,--
That there be women do abuse their husbands
In such gross kind?

Emil. There be some such, no question.

Des. Wouldst thou do such a deed for all
the world?

Emil. Why, would not you?

Des. No, by this heavenly light!

Emil. Nor I, by this heavenly light; I
might do't as well in the dark.

Des. Woulds't thou do such a deed for all
the world?

Emil. The world's a huge thing: it is a
great price
For a small vice. 119.

To Desdemona's purity of conscience the entire play
bears witness. Her father says of her that she was,

Brabantio A maiden never bold
Of spirit so still and quiet that
her motion
Blush'd at itself. 120.

He thinks that his daughter's judgment has been
paralyzed by drugs or witchcraft, and thus her duty to
him and her sense of fitness have been destroyed.

Brabantio It is a judgment maim'd and most
imperfect
That will confess perfection so
could err
Against all rules of nature, and
must be driven
To find out practises of cunning
hell,
Why this should be. I therefore
vouch again
That with some mixtures powerful
o'er the blood,
Or with some dram conjur'd to this
effect,
He wrought upon her. 121.

119. Othello, IV, 3, 61-69.

120. Ibid: I, 3, 95-97.

121. Ibid: I, 3, 99-106.

This Elizabethan doctrine of the power of supernatural forces in weakening moral responsibility is used over and over again in Othello. Of course in this particular instance, Othello refutes Brabantio by telling of his wooing of Desdemona by true and honorable means, and thus the imputation against Desdemona's character is contradicted.

Iago speaks in praise of her goodness even when he is plotting his diabolical schemes against her:

Iago So will I turn her virtue into pitch
And out of her own goodness make the net
That shall enmesh them all. 122.

When the terrible plot has been worked out, and Othello has openly accused Desdemona of infidelity, she cannot bear even to repeat the name by which he has called her.

Des. Am I that name, Iago?

Iago What name, fair lady?

Des. Such as she says my lord did say I was. 123.

When Othello prepares to kill her, and tells her to reconcile herself with heaven and grace, since he would not kill her soul, she says that she does not know why she fears.

Des. Why I should fear I know not
Since guiltiness I know not, but yet
feel I fear. 124.

122. Ibid: II, 3, 366-369.

123. Ibid: IV, 2, 117-119.

124. Ibid: V, 2, 31-33.

Othello does not believe her, but we know, as he did not, how utterly guiltless she is. This is a conscience in which the reason is sovereign, and keeps her sovereignty even under the attack of the passion of grave fear.

King Lear is essentially a tragedy of ingratitude, but as Miss Campbell says, it is more than that. It is a tragedy of anger against ingratitude. The entire play is built around this theme. The ingratitude of Lear's elder daughters is the motivating action, but beyond that we have the righteous indignation of Kent protesting against his master's deed, Albany against his wife, and Edmund, and Cordelia and the King of France fighting for the restitution of Lear. The play is pagan in its setting and details. 125. Wilson Knight makes the following statement:

Lear is a symbolic pattern of human affairs exactly correspondent to any philosophy which is limited to a strict naturalism, pessimistic but stoic. It is bleak, colorless, limited, naturalistic. Hence, it is pagan through and through. In Lear our vision is constricted to the earth. 126.

Hardin Craig, in contradiction of Knight's argument, says that, although the play is pagan, it is interpreted by Christian philosophy. He says that the four moral virtues

125. Campbell, op.cit., p. 200.

126. Knight, Wilson, "Macbeth and Antony and Cleopatra", The Imperial Theme, Oxford U. Press, 1931.

are the theme upon which the play is based, the outstanding principal basis of the plot being the virtue of prudence. These virtues were especially honored by the old philosophers, and were defined and applied by St. Thomas. In Aristotle the virtue of prudence is the groundwork and source of all other virtues. Upon the observance or non-observance of the virtue of prudence the entire moral system of this play is built. It also emphasizes the enormity of crimes against nature. The foolish imprudence of Lear is the great error which forms the motivating action of the play; and the base ingratitude of the elder daughters and the wickedness of Edmund are the crimes against nature which upset the established order.

King Lear's sin lay in his pride and in his stubborn resistance to any suggestion from his courtiers that Cordelia was true. It was his vanity and pride that caused him to repudiate Cordelia because she would not flatter him. His conscience was hardened against her, and later on in the play, when misfortunes had come thick upon him, and he began to repent, he acknowledged that he had been unkind and selfish with regard to the poor in his kingdom.

Lear Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless
storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed
sides,
Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend
you

From seasons such as these? O, I have ta'en
Too little care of this. 127.

Lear is religious. His devotion to the gods and his acknowledgment of their providence is evident throughout the play. When he realizes his crime against his youngest daughter, he confesses his error in words that indicate clearly the relationship that judgment and passion bear to moral responsibility:

Lear O most small fault
How ugly didst thou in Cordelia show!
That, like an engine, wrench'd my frame
of nature,
From the fix'd place; drew from my heart
all love,
And added to the gall. O Lear, Lear, Lear!
Beat at this gate, that let thy folly in,
And thy dear judgment out. 128.

Just before he loses control of his passions and his judgment in madness, he acknowledges the power of the gods, their control over the conscience of men, and their justice in punishing the guilty, when he says:

Let the great gods
That keep this dreadful pother o'er our heads,
Find out their enemies now. Tremble, thou wretch,
That hast within thee undivulged crimes,
Unwhipp'd of justice: hide thee, thou bloody hand;
Thou perjur'd, and thou simular of virtue
That art incestuous: caitiff, to pieces shake,
That under covert and convenient seeming
Hast practis'd on man's life: close pent-up guilts,
Rive your concealing continents, and cry
These dreadful summoners grace.--I am a man
More sinn'd against than sinning. 129.

127. King Lear, III, 4, 27-31.

128. Ibid: I, 4, 287-294.

129. Ibid: III, 2, 49-59.

When Lear is completely mad, of course he has no more responsibility for his actions, his conscience is not under his control--that is, its action is suspended, and he abandons his faith in the justice of the gods.

Why, thou wert better in thy grave, than
to answer

With thy uncovered body this extremity of the
skies.

Is man no more than this?-----Off, off, you
lendings! 130.

When Cordelia has returned, and Lear struggles back to partial sanity, he tries to make amends to his youngest daughter, and accompanies her joyfully to prison:

Come, let's away to prison:
We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage;
When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down
And ask of thee forgiveness. 131.

And when Cordelia dies, King Lear's grief and despair drive him back into insanity. Lear's conscience is ruled by the passions of pride and vanity, and because of his fatal lack of prudence, he allows his enemies to gain control of his kingdom and to overthrow his reason. He has no calm moral judgment, although he is religious. His sin is not one of malice. It is indeed true that he was a man "more sinn'd against than sinning."

The villains of the play illustrate two types of villain recognized by Elizabethan psychology. The sisters,

130. Ibid: III, 4, 105-107, 115.

131. Ibid: V, 1, 7-10.

Regan and Goneril, are among the few women of Shakespeare that are entirely wicked, almost more so than human nature will allow. They are villains who are so of their own choice. They have no redeeming qualities. Nowhere is any hesitancy in evil manifested, whether caused by qualms of conscience or in any other way. One might be led to suppose in the earlier part of the play, that even in their ingratitude and wickedness toward their father, that they had a fondness for each other; but it is not long before we discover that they hate each other as they do their father and their young sister. The crime of ingratitude brings with it its own punishment for the wicked daughters of Lear. It is a crime against nature, which is never allowed to go unpunished, in Shakespeare or in life.

The other villain, Edmund, is one of these wicked men, who, like Richard III, choose to ally themselves with the powers of evil because they feel themselves outside the pale of normal nature. Edmund plans deliberately to bring about the ruin of his brother Edgar, and states as the motive for his crime that he must equal in some way his legitimate brother, if not in birth. He reasons that, as long as he is not born under the pale of honor and custom, he will enjoy the pleasures that nature can give him. This is the deliberate setting aside of moral judgment and the joining in a confederacy with sin.

Edm. Thou, nature, art my goddess; to thy law
My services are bound.
Legitimate Edgar, I must have your land;
Well my legitimate, if this letter speed,
And my invention thrive, Edmund the base
Shall top the legitimate. I grow, I
prosper:
Now, gods, stand up for bastards! 132.

Edmund ridicules the belief in planetary influence which was one of the most popular beliefs of the time. He states clearly that he is wicked, not because of this star or that, but because he chooses to be so.

Edm. This is the excellent foppery of the world, that, when we are sick in fortune, --often the surfeit of our own behaviour, --we make guilty of our disasters the sun, the moon, and the stars: as if we were villains by necessity; fools by heavenly compulsion; knaves, thieves, and treachers by spherical predominance; drunkards, liars, and adulterers, by an enforced obedience of planetary influence; and all that we are evil in, by a divine thrusting on. 133.

Edmund characterizes the goodness of Edgar, and the purity and peace of his conscience, when he says of him:

A brother noble
Whose nature is so far from doing harms
That he suspects none: on whose foolish
honesty
My practises ride easy. 134.

Edmund continues his villainous and treacherous practices until almost the end, when he fights with his own brother.

132. Ibid: I, 2, 1-2, 16, 19-22.

133. Ibid: I, 2, 128-138.

134. Ibid: I, 2, 195-198.

It is at this time that he shows his conscience not to be entirely subdued to his evil passions. He is not such a villain as are Regan and Goneril. Before he dies he repents, and wishes to do an act of justice before it is too late. He is born outside the pale of the social order; he makes himself deliberately an enemy to gods and men, but at the end he proves that he has some humanity.

Edm. I pant for life: some good I mean to do,
Despite of my own nature. Quickly send,
Be brief in it, to the castle; for my writ
Is on the life of Lear and Cordelia. 135.

Of the conscience of Cordelia, one may say that it is one of those which is not swayed by passion. Her spirit is so gentle, and her nature so calm and even, that passion, even though it rises in her at her father's injustice and her sisters' cruelty, is never allowed to gain the sovereignty over her judgment. She displays her love of virtue and modesty, and her admiration for truth, in the words:

Cord. I yet beseech your majesty,--
If for I want that glib and oily art
To speak and purpose not; since what
I well intend,
I'll do't before I speak,--that you
make known
It is no vicious blot, murder or foul-
ness,
No unchaste action, or dishonor'd step
That hath depriv'd me of your grace and
favour;

But even for want of that for which I am richer,
A still-soliciting eye, and such a tongue
As I am glad I have not. 136.

When Goneril in her duplicity presumes to counsel Cordelia to be true to her husband as she has not been to her father, and tells her that she is suffering justly for her disobedience, Cordelia shows her confidence in her own innocence and her knowledge of her sister's crimes:

Time shall unfold what plaited cunning
hides:
Who cover faults, at least shame them
derides. 137.

This is an expression of the doctrine that retribution will overtake the wicked. This brings up the question that has been frequently discussed as to whether the theory of retribution which is so common in Elizabethan psychology, and also in the literature of the period, was not fulfilled in the case of Cordelia. Her fate was not dominated by Nemesis, but as Moulton says,

by another dramatic motive,--that of pathos, --that unlocks the sympathy of the spectator, and sheds a beauty over suffering itself. Cordelia has devoted herself to her father; fate mysteriously seconds her devotion, and leaves out nothing, not even her life, to make the sacrifice complete. 138.

The tragedy of Macbeth presents a wonderful study of sin and its punishment. It is a tragedy of religion, state, royalty and patriotism, and above all, ambition. E. K.

136. Ibid: I, 1, 227-234.

137. Ibid: I, 1, 283-284.

138. Moulton, op.cit., p. 47.

Chambers characterizes the play as a cosmic tragedy, and says that as such it is philosophical rather than psychological. 139. But the philosophical interest transcends rather than excludes the psychological, since after all it is through and not apart from human character that external forces are conceived as acting upon and disposing of human destinies. The psychological interest of the play lies in the study of the contrasted effects of sin, and the results of sin upon two characters of different mould and fibre, one that of a man--realizing itself in action, the other that of a woman, realizing itself in thought and will. The noblest side of Macbeth's nature is his bravery and devotion as a soldier,--away from the battle field he is like common men. Dowden expresses the same idea with regard to Macbeth's good qualities:

The theme of the drama is the gradual ruin, through yielding to evil within and without, of a man, who though tainted from the first by base and ambitious thoughts, yet possesses elements in his nature of possible honor and loyalty. 140.

That Macbeth was held in high esteem by his associates, and by the king himself, is shown in the very opening of the play, when after the battle, Macbeth and Banquo are praised by the wounded sergeant for their bravery,

139. Chambers, E. K., Shakespeare: A Survey, Sedgwick & Jackson, London, 1925, p. 234.

140. Dowden, Shakespeare, p. 138.

and the king speaks highly of Macbeth in the words:

Duncan O valiant cousin! worthy gentleman. 141.

Craig says,

The two great characters in Macbeth are both cast in noble mould, both consistently conceived and perfectly adjusted the one to the other. Macbeth is man yielding to temptation and plunging deeper and deeper into sin. Lady Macbeth is woman in the nature of her ambitions (as far as one can see, largely for her husband and for social position) in her sense of the importance of tangible things and of bearing and deportment, and in her methods with her husband. Perhaps Macbeth as conceived by Elizabethan audiences, would be more immediately condemned as a villain than he is by us. Ambition to them was fundamentally a sin, and the idea of surrendering one's soul to the devil was more immediately horrible. Macbeth seems to place every hope upon the earthly life and to sacrifice every noble ideal and every manly virtue to a wicked ambition; but, in doing so, he does not rid himself of the fear of human justice. The element of earthly fear in his composition is large. He seems to be preyed upon throughout by dread of punishment, by horrible dreams, startings and agonies, than moved by any spiritualized remorse or repentance. 142.

Stopford Brooke carries out somewhat the same idea, when he says that killing in itself does not trouble Macbeth at all, because he is a rude soldier of a rude time, and killing is his trade. The thing that does trouble him is his violation of his code of honor. 143.

141. Macbeth, I, 2, 24.

142. Craig, Shakespeare, p. 723.

143. Stopford Brooke, On Ten Plays of Shakespeare, p. 196.

He says, arguing with Lady Macbeth and his own ambition, against the proposed crime:

Macbeth He's here in double trust;
First, as I am his kinsman and his
subject,
Strong both against the deed, then,
as his host,
Who should against his murderer shut
the door,
Not bear the knife myself. 144.

Macbeth understands clearly the enormity of his sin:

Macbeth His virtues
Will plead like angels' trumpet
tongu'd, against
The deep damnation of his taking-off;
And pity, like a naked new born babe,
Striding the blast; or heaven's cher-
ubim, hors'd
Upon the sightless couriers of the air,
Shall blow the horrid deed in every
eye,
That tears shall drown the wind. I
have no spur
To prick the sides of my intent, but
only
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps
itself
And falls on the other. 145.

Stopford Brooke says further that this sense of honor, which is frequently man's only conscience, disappears entirely after Macbeth has begun his succession of terrible crimes. He has no real remorse, but the wild indifferent recklessness which comes to one who knows that he has deliberately shut himself off from his fellows by

144. Macbeth, I, 6, 12-16.

145. Ibid: I, 7, 18-27.

a fatal act of dishonor.

Macbeth is under the control of a nameless fear. He really does not definitely will Duncan's murder. He says:

Why do I yield to that suggestion
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
And make my seated heart knock at my
ribs,
Against the use of nature? Present
fears
Are less than horrible imaginings:
My thought, whose murder yet is but
fantastical
Shakes so my single state of man that
function
Is smother'd in surmise, and nothing is
But what is not. 146.

This horrible suggestion, or temptation, assails Macbeth through his imagination. Macbeth's will and reason are under the control of his imagination. In conjunction with the exterior diabolical agency of the wierd sisters, it keeps before him the crown which his ambition urges as the highest good. His imagination is at the root of his crime, but it also is the cause of his hesitations, his fears; and it is the cause of the terrible agony which he undergoes at the appearance of the ghost of Banquo.

Lady M. Are you a man?
Macbeth Aye, and a bold one, that dare look
on that
Which might appal the divine.

Lady M. O proper stuff!
This is the very painting of your
fear.
This is the air-drawn dagger, which
you said
Led you to Duncan. 147.

Macbeth has physical courage to a great degree, but no moral courage. It is this physical courage which is the cause of the high esteem in which he is held by his associates and by the king in the early part of the play. The courage that he displays later on in the play is caused by his desperation. He has begun to be independent of Lady Macbeth, and is becoming accustomed to crime, and thus grows indifferent and bold.

Macbeth I am in blood
Stepp'd in so far that, should I
wade no more,
Returning were as tedious as go o'er:
Strange things I have in head, that
will to hand;
Which must be acted ere they may be
scann'd.

Lady M. You lack the season of all natures,
sleep.

Macbeth Come, we'll to sleep. My strange
and self-abuse
Is the initiate fear that wants hard
use:
We are yet but young in deed. 148.

In the end, Macbeth's bold words when faced by Macduff display a courage which is caused by a new impulse of passion. He will not live to be the "rabble's curse."

147. Ibid: III, 4, 57-63.

148. Ibid: III, 4, 136-143.

Macbeth Before my body
I throw my warlike shield. Lay on,
Macduff,
And damn'd be he that first cries
Hold, enough. 149.

Mr. Albert B. Purdee has carefully worked out a study of the sin and punishment of Macbeth, and says that it parallels exactly the scholastic doctrine, as elucidated by St. Thomas.

He says that as Shakespeare used Holinshed as his historical source, so he almost seems to have referred to St. Thomas Aquinas for his philosophy. St. Thomas and Shakespeare are statement and illustration of the same truths. Scholastic logical consistency is to be found in Macbeth--it is a complete study in sin, and it corresponds in a remarkable way to the treatment of the same subject by St. Thomas.

Purdee divides the play as follows: He says that temptation to sin comprises the first act and the first scene of the second act; that is, up to the commission of the crime. The sin itself is the subject of act two, and the consequences of the sin are brought out in the last two acts.

According to Purdee, following St. Thomas, man reaches his supernatural end by the observance of acts, and into these acts enters the twofold element of reason and free will. The reason judges; the will determines upon
149. Ibid: V, 8, 32-34.

performance or omission. A will inclined to evil is the prime interior cause of sin; but there are two exterior causes that may enter in, man and demonic agencies. In the first scene of Macbeth the preternatural agency soliciting to sin is introduced. St. Thomas says that the devil tempts by exploring the inner condition of a man, that he may work on that vicious propensity to which a man is prone. (That is as much as to say that a man's appetites and passions are likely to unite themselves to exterior causes of evil.) Then the devil forces a change in the appetites, and though he cannot actually force the will, he may incline it. This is just how the witches in Macbeth join their prophecies to the passion of ambition which is already rooted in his soul.

The second exterior cause--man, is found in Lady Macbeth. Her wild and reckless determination carries her over all the dictates of reason and urges Macbeth away from cool judgment. Lady Macbeth stifles the cry of reason, and makes outcast her very conscience, in which sure sentence is passed on the morality of acts. She unsexes and dehumanises herself. She is to precipitate the ruin of her husband. In Macbeth conscience makes one moral appeal, even if on ignoble scores. He saw the possibility of eternal punishment and, what grieved him still more deeply, the punishment that would dog him the rest of his

life (poena concomitans). But he dismisses the warnings of his judgment, and his will is in accord with the urging to sin.

In the second part of the drama the sin itself takes place, when Macbeth's will becomes insurgent against the law of God, and he carries out in act what he has been guilty of in desire. His imagination pictures to him the dagger that he is to use to kill his king and guest: this is the last protest against sin. He suffers in his conscience but nevertheless carries out the deed.

The consequences of sin are many. First, nature is corrupted. Man has three fold natural good: the intrinsic principles by which he is a rational being, the natural tendency to the performance of virtuous acts, and the gratuitous gift of original justice. Macbeth suffers corruption of his nature. He has habituated himself to evil, his reason is hesitant in action, his will is in arms against good;--his passion for evil grows. But beside this sapping of his moral forces, he is in a state of guilt. It is not merely the stain on his hands that he realizes, but that on his soul.

Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this
blood
Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will
rather
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,
Making the green one red. 150.

An act of sin is rebellion against self, man, and God, and incurs a triple punishment. Macbeth's sin began internally with the wilful disregard of the dictates of right reason, and so his first punishment will come from his own soul--his mind will torture him with anxiety and uneasiness, his conscience will be racked with remorse, and despair will freeze his heart. This is the concomitant punishment spoken of by St. Thomas. The anxiety and insecurity caused by sin open the way to further sins. This is the cause in Macbeth of his murder of the grooms and of Banquo. St. Thomas places as one of the punishments of sin the increased liability to temptation from the power of evil--it is not surprising that Macbeth should return to the weird sisters. Finally despair is the severest punishment of self on self. Macbeth is a rebel against God, against himself, and against human government.

The last phase of Macbeth's earthly punishment is swift and terrible. He is oppressed by his sins, but he feels no contrition. He speaks of himself as much as of Lady Macbeth, when he asks the Doctor:

Canst thou not minister to a mind diseas'd;
Pluck from the memory a root'd sorrow;
Raze out the written troubles of the brain;
And with some sweet oblivious antidote
Cleanse the stuff'd bosom of that perilous
stuff

Which weighs upon the heart? 151.

For a man to repent, he who freely admitted the evil, must freely turn to good. Macbeth does not turn to good, --he fights and dies. The eternal punishment alone remains. 152.

Macbeth's crime, as Wilson Knight says, is a blow against nature's unity and peace, a hideous desecration of all creative and family and social duties, all union and concord. He murders hospitality and sleep, therefore his punishment is a living death. This is the reason that he hears the voice cry

Sleep no more, Macbeth does murder
sleep. 153.

This is the reason that he is not allowed his place at the banquet table. And finally it is this that makes him at the final catastrophe, cry to Macduff:

Get thee back! my soul is too much
charg'd
With blood of thine already. 154.

As to Lady Macbeth, she seems to have had more original goodness of character than Macbeth. Her crime was the direct result of a strong will influenced by fierce passion. 155. Miss Campbell says, that the principal

151. Ibid: V, 3, 40-45.

152. Purdee, Albert B. "Macbeth, A Study in Sin", Catholic World, Vol. CX, Nov. 1919, pp. 184-195.

153. Macbeth, II, I, 36.

154. Ibid: V, 8, 6-7.

155. Knight, Wilson, The Imperial Theme, pp. 134-5.

cause of the dreadfulness of Lady Macbeth's despair lies in her having been false to herself as a woman. She is pictured as consciously unsexing herself, as converting all that is womanly into the courage and determination to be cruel. Even more than Macbeth, she dyes her will in ambition; her punishment is more terrible than that of Macbeth, and brings her to the sin of self-destruction.^{156.}

Lady Macbeth was never really heartless, even in the midst of the overwhelming impulse which drove her to murder; and after the natural good in her character had begun to emerge, she became the victim of an avenging conscience. Finally, in another rush of unregulated impulse, she laid violent hands on herself. As Brooke says:

Lady Macbeth walks with her
conscience at night, and dies before
the dawn. 157.

The character of Banquo offers a striking contrast to that of Macbeth in the matter of conscience. Banquo hears the prophecies of the weird sisters, but because his conscience is sensitive, he dreads the appearance of evil, and does not allow himself to be unduly influenced by their promises. He is pleased with the idea of his descendants being kings, but he knows that from evil no good can arise. He warns Macbeth against the promises of

156. Campbell, op.cit. p. 238.

157. Stopford Brooke, Ten Plays of Shakespeare, p. 204.

the witches.^{158.}

Banquo knows the evil effect that imagination has upon the conscience, and even in sleep he guards against its taking too strong hold upon him. He prays before he sleeps:

Banquo Merciful powers
Restrain in me the curs'd thoughts that
nature
Gives way to in repose. 159.

Banquo with his keen, clear conscience, is set over against Macbeth, whose only conscience is his sense of honor. Banquo also has a soldier's sense of honor, but it is strengthened by a good conscience, which distrusts even the suggestion of evil.

When Macbeth tempts him with promises of greatness in the words:

If you shall cleave to my consent,
when 'tis,
It shall make honor for you, 160.

He answers:

So I lose none
In seeking to augment it, but still
keep
My bosom franchis'd and allegiance
clear,
I shall be counsell'd. 161.

Banquo's clear-sighted conscientiousness is a menace to

158. Campbell, op.cit., p. 193.

159. Macbeth, II, 1, 8-10.

160. Ibid: II, 1, 23-24.

161. Ibid: II, 1, 25-28.

Macbeth, and it is because the tyrant fears Banquo's intelligence and his sensitive conscience, that Macbeth puts him to death.

Macbeth Our fears in Banquo
Stick deep; and in his royalty of
nature
Reigns that which would be fear'd;
'tis much he dares,
And to that dauntless temper of his
mind,
He hath a wisdom that doth guide his
valor
To act in safety. 162.

Beyond a doubt the character of Hamlet has been more discussed than any other in Shakespeare; and of all the problems that this very complex character presents, one that offers the most ground for discussion and disagreement is that of the extent of his moral responsibility, and the reasons that lie at the bottom of his procrastination.

That Hamlet before the appearance of the ghost was a man of pleasing appearance and address, admired by his associates and by the people in general, is vouched for by Ophelia in the speech beginning,

O, what a noble mind is here o'er-
thrown!
The courtier's, soldier's, scholar's,
eye, tongue, sword. 163.

Hamlet is as he is because the humor of melancholy predominates in him, not as a natural quality of his

162. Ibid: III, 1, 49-54.

163. Hamlet, III, 1, 149-150.

disposition, but superinduced by his great grief for his father, and his sense of shame and outrage at the manner of his father's death. Miss Campbell states this opinion, and remarks that naturally Hamlet was of sanguine disposition. We are sure that there must have been a great change in the disposition of Hamlet from the words, "He has forgone all mirth, failed to find delight in nature or in man." These changes are noteworthy because they are changes, and indicate that the melancholy disposition is not natural to him. Miss Campbell continues:

The grief that leads to the deadly sin of sloth was one of the regularly recognized types of that wicked grief which refuses to be consoled. That such grief results in melancholy, a grief which so dries and cools the brain that the images of memory cannot be clearly retained, and a man's mind becomes dark and sluggish, is indicated in the writings of many authorities on the passions. To the philosopher of Hamlet's day, the picture, then, of one moved to revenge by heaven and hell and yet stayed by an excess of grief from action...would not have seemed to call for poetic exposition. Hamlet's type of grief was one generally accepted in his day. 164.

Mr. Wilson Knight, on the same subject, remarks that when we first meet Hamlet the passion of melancholy has already started its disintegrating work, and that during the rest of the play his outstanding peculiarities are his bitterness and his disillusionment. 165.

164. Campbell, op.cit., p. 131.

165. Knight, G. Wilson, Wheel of Fire, p. 32.

The melancholy which infects Hamlet's disposition, and which changes the entire course of his life, is the direct result of his father's death, and of the revelation the ghost makes to him of the manner of that death. The duty of revenge which the father lays upon his son is also one of the causes of Hamlet's melancholy. Looked at in that light, it is an evil, but it must be considered in the light of Renaissance thought, and not from a modern viewpoint. Revenge was a sacred duty, especially in the case of revenge for a death; and it was in the interests of carrying out this duty of revenge, that Hamlet "wipes from the table of his memory, all trivial fond records," 166. and declares that, "the commandment of the ghost shall live within the book and volume of his brain, unmix'd with baser matter," 167. until the behest of his father be fulfilled.

There never enters Hamlet's mind a doubt as to the morality of revenge--a question that would certainly be foremost in a modern mind. The only difficulty that he has with regard to heeding the behest of the ghost, is the possibility that the apparition is not the spirit of his father.

166. Hamlet, I, 5, 95.

167. Ibid: I, 5, 98-99.

Hamlet The spirit that I have seen
May be the devil: and the devil
hath power
To assume a pleasing shape; yea,
and perhaps
Out of my weakness and my melancholy
Abuses me to damn me. 168.

The phase of the revenge that troubles Hamlet's conscience is not the morality of carrying it out, but the fact that he has not done his father's bidding immediately; and this procrastination, according to modern critics, is due, not to weakness and vacillation of character, but to a sluggishness caused by the passion of grief. He is so overcome by the confirmation of his suspicions with regard to his uncle, and by a knowledge of his mother's perfidy, that he contemplates suicide. In the famous "To be, or not to be," soliloquy it is not so much the fact that suicide is forbidden by God's law, that keeps him from it, but, the vivid imagination of the eternal punishment that will fall upon suicides.

Hamlet Who would fardels bear
To grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after
death,
The undiscover'd country, from whose
bourn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will
And makes us rather bear the ills we
have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience does make cowards of us
all. 169.

168. Ibid: II, 2, 595-599.

169. Ibid: III, 1, 74-81.

In another place, however, suicide as a direct sin against God is more immediately pointed out.

O, that this too, too solid flesh would
melt,
Thaw, and resolve itself into a dew!
Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter. 170.

Hamlet's conscience then, is a deterrent in the task of fulfilling his father's commandment, but this was surely not intended by Shakespeare to be the motive of the delay. Stoll says that in revenge tragedies of Shakespeare's day, there was always a delay, as indeed there must have been to afford time for the working out of the plot. What is necessary is to provide sufficient motive for the delay. In Hamlet a number of motives are at least suggested, though not all of them are presented with any fullness. Among these are the doubt about the ghost's identity (already discussed), the hero's aversion to the deed,

The time is out of joint! O cursed spite
That ever I was born to set it right, 171.

and the desire to kill the king when he is engaged in some act of wickedness instead of in prayer. As to this final motive, it seems unnecessarily vindictive to us but it would not be so from the viewpoint of an Elizabethan audience. It was held that the future fate of an individual

170. Ibid: I, 2, 129-132.

171. Ibid: I, 5, 181-2.

depended to a great extent upon his state or occupation immediately at the moment of his death. Therefore it would have been against the perfection of Hamlet's revenge and therefore in opposition to his conscience, to kill the king when his heart was "season'd for its passage."

After Hamlet's mind is made up and he is thoroughly convinced that the king is guilty, he refrains from action only once: when he comes upon the king praying. Here, if we are to trust his own explanation, he refrains for a reason entirely consistent with his conscientious earlier behavior. Now, sure of his duty, he has determined to perform it with scrupulous thoroughness, and is dissatisfied with any mere approximation of accomplishment. After Hamlet has been convinced of his duty, and is determined to carry it out, the ghost of his father appears to him again, and here it is that the idea of conscience is most fully developed. His conscience tells him that he should not have spared the king, that he should not have so cruelly wrung his mother's heart. This "conscience" of Hamlet comes in as his father's ghost, visible to him but invisible to his mother. The ghost of Hamlet's father urges him to revenge, not so much for himself as for Denmark; he makes no stipulations with regard to Claudius' damnation, and he expressly warns his son against cruelty to his mother.

One deed of Hamlet's which is difficult of explanation

because it seems so vindictive and so unnecessarily cruel, is the sending of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their death. That he should kill Polonius is in the scope of his revenge,--he thought it was the king, and his apparent indifference when he discovers his error, is due to pre-occupation with his plans for revenge; but these two young men, although they were tools of Claudius, showed no great enmity for Hamlet, and he was hardly justified in his treacherous act of cruelty toward them. This act of Hamlet's is inconsistent with his character, and calls forth a sort of concealed protest from Horatio, who usually agrees with all Hamlet's plans, and is willing to accompany him in everything.

So Rosencrantz and Guildenstern go to't. 172.

Hamlet answers his scruples with the decided answer:

Why man, they did make love to their
employment;
They are not near my conscience. 173.

One is inclined to believe that, if melancholy had not so strong a hold upon Hamlet, he would have found the murder of these two old school-companions very near his conscience, however influenced they were by the false reasoning of the king to aid him against Hamlet.

After Hamlet's revenge has been partly carried out

172. Ibid: V, 2, 55-56.

173. Ibid: V, 2, 57-58.

--after he has overcome the sluggishness which his melancholy has forced upon him--he goes straight on, without any hesitation from moral scruples; in fact his moral judgment commends him rather than otherwise. The passion of grief has been the cause of his long procrastination, and his conscience condemns him for it, but at the climax of his sacrifice his conscience is clear and his mind free from doubt. He proves himself in this to be a tragic hero, not a villain. Passion has led him to disregard for a time the warnings of his conscience, but he recovers, and dies at peace.

Claudius is a character in Hamlet which also offers many interesting problems of conscience. A most remarkable discussion as to the guilt of Claudius, remarkable because it differs so radically from the generally accepted opinion, is that of Wilson Knight in the Wheel of Fire.

It is a mistake to consider Claudius as a hardened criminal. When Polonius remarks on the hypocrisy of mankind, the king murmurs to himself:

O, 'tis too true!
How small a lash that speech doth give
my conscience. 174.

Again, Hamlet's play wrenches his soul with remorse--primarily not fear of Hamlet, as one might expect, but a genuine remorse.

174. Ibid: III, 1, 47-48.

What then? what rests?

Try what repentance can. What can it not?

Yet what can it, when one cannot repent?
O wretched state! O bosom black as death!
O lim'd soul, that struggling to be free,
Art more engag'd! Help, angels! make
assay!

Bow, stubborn knees, and, heart with
strings of steel
Be soft as sinews of the new born babe!
All may be well. 175.

Set against this lovely prayer--the full flower of a human soul in anguish--is the entrance of Hamlet, the late joy of torturing the King's conscience still written on his face, his eye a-glitter with the intoxication of conquest, vengeance in his mind, his purpose altered only by the devilish hope of finding a more damning moment in which to slaughter the King, next hastening to his mother to wring her soul, too. Which, then, at this moment in the play, is nearer the Kingdom of Heaven? The question of the relative morality of Hamlet and Claudius reflects the ultimate problem of the play. Claudius is very human, Hamlet is inhuman. Through no fault of his own Hamlet has been forced into a state of evil. Claudius, whose crime originally placed him in a state of evil, is now in a state of healthy and robust spiritual life. 176.

This opinion is indeed hard on Hamlet, and I fear, would not meet the approval of many present day critics; and I hardly think that it would be at all accepted by Elizabethan playgoers, who undoubtedly must have regarded Hamlet as a tragic hero, a victim of circumstances, chosen by fate to avenge a horrible crime, and Claudius as a

175. Ibid: III, 3, 64-71.

176. Knight, op.cit., 38-39.

deep-dyed villain, whose moments of remorse were as truly caused by the reason influenced by passion, as were his very deeds of wickedness.

Stopford Brooke expresses the generally accepted opinion with regard to the guilt of the king:

Fear is a common inhabitant in a treacherous soul. After the Mouse Trap, fear drinks up his (the king's) heart; and fear awakens his drugged conscience into idiotic speech. The King's conscience, for Shakespeare does not leave him without a semblance of it, totters about, uttering confused contradictions, and falls back again into its drugged slumbers. What sort of conscience it was, we hear in his soliloquy, when (after the terror of his discovery) he tries to pray. Shakespeare opens the secret chambers of his soul. He confesses himself to himself-- his murder, his inability to pray. But there is forgiveness in heaven, he says, else what were the use of the existence of mercy; and to pray is to be pardoned. So will my fault be gone. But then, I keep all the pleasant results of my crime, and I doubt that one can be pardoned and retain the offence. That is often the way with earthly law, but not with heavenly.

He prays; but his heart and its fear keep his thoughts to earth. He cannot get away from his dread of discovery.

All the same, it is a relief to have it out with his conscience, to have listened to its wail and bid it go to sleep; to have confessed in speech his crime; to have bluffed heaven with a desire for repentance. 177.

This is surely the orthodox explanation of Claudius' conduct, and is more easily accepted than that of Knight, who would have us believe that the king is a beautiful

character, surprised by passion into a sin of which he heartily and sincerely repents. If passion is the cause of his sin, the same sudden change is the cause of his conversion. This sudden repentance, which according to Elizabethan psychology, was caused by the ready movement of spirits to the heart, serves to convince the audience all the more surely of his guilt.

Another comment on the same subject, one which gives a clear picture of the effect of passion on the king, and characterizes him as a villain, is given by Miss Campbell:

There is still to be reckoned the sin which is mortal, the sin which has come as the effect of passion which has perverted the will. The King as he tries to pray sees himself accursed like Cain and yet hopeful of mercy. But he cannot be forgiven while yet he holds the rewards of his deed. The three objects of his passion, in themselves sinful, are thus indicative of the mortally sinful nature of the King's passion. Ambition and lust have taken possession of him until they have turned his reason into an instrument for their own uses, and until they have indeed turned his soul away from God into mortal sin. And though God's vengeance is slow, there is no doubt in the mind of any reader of Hamlet, that the King has suffered punishment from the moment when he committed the crime, in the fear and suspicion and unrest of his days, in the increasing battalions of his troubles, and in the sick soul which could not rid itself of passion to find peace with God. Nor can any reader doubt that the eternal vengeance of God is to fall upon the King. 178.

There is still to be considered the problem of conscience in some of the minor characters in the great play.

The picture of the Queen's conscience is given in her own speeches and also in Hamlet's in the closet scene. There we see again the picture of sin as evil willed by reason perverted by passion. Hamlet says this plainly when he accuses his mother:

You cannot call it love, for at your age
The heyday in the blood is tame, it's
humble,
And waits upon the judgment; and what
judgment
Would step from this to this? 179.

Hamlet speaks such truths to his mother, that she realizes that passion has overcome her judgment, and begs him to

Speak no more,
Thou turn'st my very eyes into my soul;
And there I see such black and grain'd
spots,
As will not leave their tinct. 180.

Hamlet sees that his mother realizes her guilt, and begs her to "confess herself to heaven, repent what was past, and avoid what was to come." 181.

Hamlet has "set up a glass, in which his mother can see the inmost part of her" and he begs her to turn away from the evil into which passion has led her, and to

179. Hamlet, III, 4, 67-70.

180. Ibid: III, 4, 88-91.

181. Ibid: III, 4, 147-149.

conquer the devil by acts of virtue. She promises to keep Hamlet's secret, though she does not agree to keep the remainder of his behest. However her soul has been touched with remorse, and from this point she seems to defend Hamlet and to take sides with him at least covertly. Her conscience reasserts its sway. She says:

To my sick soul, as sins true nature is
Each toy seems prologue to some great
amiss,
So full of artless jealousy is guilt
It spills itself in fearing to be spilt. 182.

The cry of a guilty conscience, remorseful and not knowing how to be rid of its burden, is evident in these lines. The queen's punishment goes on to the very catastrophe, as one woe follows upon another's heels, and her consciousness of her love for her son and the end of her wrongdoing come upon her. She is remorseful, and although Shakespeare does not say directly that she repents, we are certainly led to think that in the end her judgment again unites itself with her reason, and she is able to bring her passions under the control of her will.

In the case of Polonius, he has no morality except the morality of worldly wisdom. According to his standards of morality, which are not more than surface-deep, his reason allows him to listen behind the arras, and to use his own daughter as a tool for his spying. It is not passion that

moves him, but perverted reason.

As for Ophelia herself, she is too much under the control of her father to act freely, and in accord with her reason. Her conscience is free, but her will is not, and thus she has her share in bringing about the final catastrophe.

Horatio is a man "who is not passion's slave", who acts exactly in accord with his conscience; he is one of those gentlemen of whom Castiglione speaks--"an honest, a fair-conditioned man, and of an upright conscience."

Finally, Laertes is moved by passion. His love for his father makes him speak and act against his conscience in that he dares the punishments of hell, in order to avenge himself upon his father's murderer:

To hell, allegiance! vows, to the
blackest devil!
Conscience and grace, to the profoundest
pit!
I dare damnation. To this point I stand,
That both the worlds I give to negligence
Let come what comes. 183.

Laertes is sincere, but because of his association with Claudius, his will becomes infected with evil and he descends to treachery.

In this great play, the poet has given us all varieties of innocence and guilt, and from the study of this one play, we might arrive at Shakespeare's conception of conscience in all its phases.

Chapter IV. A Summary of Shakespeare's Treatment of the Problem of Conscience.

E. E. Stoll, in his study of Othello and Hamlet from a historical and comparative point of view, tells us that he would have us not try to find a definite psychological system in Shakespeare. He does not attempt to discover philosophical or ethical causes for variations in conduct, and sudden changes of moral standards. He says that Shakespeare was a playwright, not by any means a philosopher; that he was not interested in the moral development or degeneration of a character, but in the general effect of the entire play. The great conundrums in Shakespeare, such as the reason for Iago's conduct and the question of Hamlet's melancholy, do not trouble Mr. Stoll. He lays all that is inexplicable, or at least difficult of explanation, at the door of poetic and dramatic convention. Mr. Stoll himself is strictly consistent, but he differs radically from most Shakespearean critics, both of the present day and of earlier times. Most writers find in all the characters an essential psychological conformity. The difference between modern critics and those of an earlier date lies not in their agreement or disagreement as to the existence of a great psychological field of study in Shakespeare; the difference is in the viewpoint of that study. It was the practise of earlier students

of Shakespeare to interpret character problems, not from the viewpoint of Elizabethan psychology, but in the light of modern investigation in that line. Modern writers have been concerned not to discover what they might expect characters to do according to their own knowledge of psychology, but they have made it their aim to interpret the characters from the viewpoint of Renaissance and Elizabethan psychology and moral philosophy. Surely, if we are to arrive at the truth with regard to Shakespeare's portrayal of his characters, we must view them in the light of his own knowledge. Shakespeare may not have been a philosopher or a psychologist, he probably was neither, consciously; but he was a profound student of human nature. He learned by first-hand observation the causes and effects of actions upon a man's character. But beside this "holding the mirror up to nature", which is the most far-reaching and comprehensive reason for his greatness, he must have had also a complete and detailed knowledge of the psychology of his times, even though that knowledge was practical and applied, rather than scholarly and scientific. We cannot consent that it was with no motive except dramatic stage effect that he portrays so vividly the result of the workings of passion upon Macbeth; or that he did not have a comprehensive knowledge of the accepted psychology of the passions when he drew the great figures of Hamlet and the King.

Mr. Craig, in his notes on King Lear, says:

Renaissance moral philosophy is a greater, worthier, and profounder thing than our current speculations on such subjects usually are. Shakespeare said great and far reaching things about life, though not always the things his critics make him say, and has as his instrument a great ethical system of which we have grown unconscious.¹⁸⁴.

In the study of the conscience in the plays of Shakespeare, this fact of his consistent application of the accepted psychological principles of his day, becomes evident. The plays present examples, thoroughly consistent and intelligible, of problems of conscience in all its phases. After the Elizabethan understanding of this phase of moral philosophy has been discussed and its principles laid down, it is with a growing feeling of admiration for Shakespeare's profound insight into moral problems that one finds examples carefully drawn and psychologically consistent, of each phase of the conscience problem, most graphically and truthfully presented. And what strikes one as remarkable and worthy of all praise, is that from a study of the problems in Shakespeare, one comes to have a growing appreciation and respect for the psychology which was at the bottom of his characterizations. The moral philosophy of the Elizabethan as exemplified in Shakespeare, is, in spite of crudities, undoubtedly authentic. It is

184. Craig, Hardin, "Ethics of King Lear", in Philological Quarterly, Vol. 4, April 1925, pp. 97-109.

not necessary nor apropos to attempt any deductions with regard to Shakespeare's religion. What is to the point is this,--that his doctrine of the conscience is thoroughly Christian and Catholic. Someone has said that St. Thomas gives the principle, and Shakespeare the illustration. The great dramatist's conformity to Catholic principles in this matter gives him an added claim to the respect and admiration of all who find in Shakespeare a perennial source of edification and delight.

B I B L I O G R A P H Y

Note: Some of the works mentioned in the bibliography are not referred to directly in the thesis, but were used in a general way to aid in establishing a working background for the study.

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Dr. Morton D. Zabel

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Professor James J. Young

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