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## Bradley's Theory of Tragedy : Analysis and Critique

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BRADLEY'S THEORY OF TRAGEDY:  
ANALYSIS AND CRITIQUE

by

Thomas W. Charbeneau, S.J.

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School  
of Loyola University in Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts

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## LIFE

Thomas William Charbeneau, S.J., was born in Detroit, Michigan, June 6, 1929.

He was graduated from the University of Detroit High School in June, 1947. In the following month of July he entered the Novitiate of the Sacred Heart, Milford, Ohio. He was graduated from Loyola University with the degree of Bachelor of Arts in June, 1952. At this time, he enrolled in the Graduate School of Loyola University and took courses in English and Philosophy. He completed his courses in June, 1954.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

"Consult your 'Bradley'," is the advice that English professors have been giving their students for almost fifty years. These words refer, of course, to Shakespearean Tragedy, a set of lectures written by Andrew Cecil Bradley when he was professor of Poetry at Oxford in 1904.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps no other work of Shakespearean criticism is so widely used even today by professors and students as this careful analysis of the master's tragedies. The words of an early reviewer have proved to have been prophetic: "It is probable that this volume will attain a permanence for which critical literature generally cannot hope."<sup>2</sup>

Though severely attacked in recent years, Bradley's critical work is generally thought to stand at the beginning of modern Shakespearean scholarship. With good reason his book received unanimous praise from the 1904 London Times, Punch, and Tablet.<sup>3</sup> It was a breath of fresh air after the stifling moralistic and di-

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1 A. C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy, London, 1950.

2 Ibid , cited from Athenaeum behind the index.

3 Ibid., from same advertisement behind index.

dactic work turned out by such Victorians as Dowden<sup>4</sup> and Moulton.<sup>5</sup> One reviewer no doubt had this in mind when he called Bradley's work "the best Shakespearean criticism since Coleridge."<sup>6</sup>

In many respects, indeed, Bradley continued the methods of Coleridge, Hazlitt, and Lamb; especially is this true of his method of character portrayal. Each of the characters in a given play is treated separately, almost as though he were a real person. This method has long since been abandoned by modern critics because it tends to distort a view of the play as a whole. Most of the adverse criticism against Bradley has been directed against this "character extraction," as it is called.

With such criticism in vogue, it might be objected that one should not trouble to write a whole thesis on a critic whose work is now passé. The supposition in this objection is false. Despite so much adverse criticism, Shakespearean Tragedy survives as the most thorough treatment of the great tragedies.<sup>7</sup> There are even signs today of a "back-to-Bradley" movement. H. B. Charlton of the University of Manchester has recently stated that he is a

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<sup>4</sup> Edward Dowden, Shakespeare, New York, 1875.

<sup>5</sup> Richard G. Moulton, Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist, Oxford, 1893.

<sup>6</sup> Shakespearean Tragedy, cited in an advertisement from the Spectator, behind the index.

<sup>7</sup> A Literary History of England, A. C. Baugh, ed., New York, 1948, 535, in the section on Shakespeare, by Tucker Brooke.

confirmed Bradleyite.<sup>8</sup> In 1947 Paul N. Siegal of C. C. N. Y. defended Bradley in College English, affirming the great value of Shakespearean Tragedy. "The Shakespearean critic of the future will profit by the labor of all his predecessors. One of the most rewarding of these he will find to be A. C. Bradley."<sup>9</sup>

A more cogent reason for a study of Bradley's critical work is the fact that the most important phase of it--his theory of tragedy--has been almost entirely neglected. Usually critics will refer to Bradley either to agree or disagree with some interpretation of a particular Shakespearean tragedy. In the past ten years two articles on Bradley have appeared, one by Lily B. Campbell of the University of California against Bradley's method of character extraction,<sup>10</sup> the other by Paul N. Siegal, mentioned above. But neither of these considers the general theory of tragedy behind Bradley's critical work.

Furthermore, the philosophy behind Shakespearean Tragedy is undoubtedly the main reason for the enduring quality of the work. No other reason can be assigned; certainly not Bradley's style, though his writing is readable enough; nor merely his thor-

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8 H. B. Charlton, Shakespearean Tragedy, Cambridge, 1948, 4.

9 Paul N. Siegal, "In Defense of Bradley," College English, IX, 256.

10 Lily B. Campbell, "Bradley Revisited: Forty Years After," Studies in Philology, XLIV, 1947, 174-194.



ough knowledge of the text of the plays. Many critics have possessed both of these qualities, yet their works are short-lived because they lack a deep appreciation of man's nature. Basically, the enduring quality of a work of criticism depends upon the philosophy behind it. This explains why Aristotle's Poetics has come down to us, despite its very cryptic style. Similarly, Bradley rests his criticism upon an ingenious system of thought, the philosophy of Hegel, and has explicitly admitted his dependence upon the German philosopher.<sup>11</sup>

Finally, it can be said that Bradley's general theory of tragedy influences his interpretation of each of Shakespeare's great tragedies. Hence, if one is to evaluate Bradley's work correctly, he must analyze and criticize this theory as such. Other evaluations of Bradley which attack his method of character portrayal are well taken, perhaps; but they do not strike to the heart of the matter. Literary criticism is based upon principles. To determine the real value of a work of criticism one must test its principles. Thus far no one has applied such a test to Bradley's Shakespearean Tragedy.

But why should there be such a void in Shakespearean scholarship? Perhaps the main reason is that most modern critics have a rather confused philosophical background, a confused idea

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<sup>11</sup> A. C. Bradley, "Hegel's Theory of Tragedy," Oxford Lectures on Poetry, London, 1950, 69-95.

of the nature of man, the central figure in Shakespeare's tragedies. Given such a background, critics tend to shy away from an analysis of basic critical tenets. Modern philosophy being what it is, critics easily despair at arriving at a coherent idea of man's nature, upon which literature is based. A brief review of the progress and changing directions of Shakespearean criticism from Bradley's time to the present will confirm these remarks.

In the first decade of the twentieth century, Bradley's interpretation of Shakespeare was generally accepted. The great tragedies were looked upon as real, spiritual conflicts within the hero's soul; and character portrayal was used to analyze these conflicts. In the second decade, a reaction set in, inaugurated by E. E. Stoll of the University of Minnesota.<sup>12</sup> Stoll ridiculed Bradley's method of character portrayal because it considered the characters as though they were real persons. In his analysis of Othello, Stoll tried to prove that the characters in this play are psychologically improbable. Tragedy is merely a situation created by the clever use of stage devices. It gives a first impression of reality and probability; but on further, mature investigation, the causal connections from beginning to end are seen to disappear. Moreover, Stoll excludes any interpretation which seeks for sub-conscious meanings. Only the explicit intention of

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<sup>12</sup> E. E. Stoll, An Historical and Comparative Study of Othello, Minneapolis, 1915.

the author should be considered.<sup>13</sup> This would rule out "symbolic" meanings which a number of the new critics try to discover in Shakespeare. Stoll's theory of tragedy implies a Crocean aesthetic, according to which art is considered to be entirely separate from the real world. Art belongs to the world of the poet's subjective imagination, and is not to be judged by the psychology or ethics which applies to real people.<sup>14</sup>

Such a theory would seem to destroy literature as a representation of human nature; all it leaves is a bundle of stage conventions and other devices. Indeed, under Stoll's leadership lesser critics have carried the theory to its logical conclusion by spending all their energy in studies of Elizabethan stage conventions and other trivialities. L. L. Schucking is a perfect example. He has labored to show how dependent Shakespeare was on his source material; and frequently the implication seems to be that Shakespeare distorted rather than improved his material.<sup>15</sup> Schucking's work has aptly been described as "the historical method run mad." Somewhat related to the work of Stoll, Schucking, and the objectivist approach is the work of Harley Granville-

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13 E. E. Stoll, "Intentions and Instinct," Modern Language Quarterly, XIV, 1953, 375-412.

14 Benedetto Croce, A Modern Book of Esthetics, an anthology ed. by M. M. Rader, 159-178, New York, 1935; also Philosophies of Beauty, selections, E. F. Carritt, ed., London, 1931, 233-244.

15 Levin L. Schucking, Character Problems in Shakespeare's Plays, London, 1919.

Barker, who insists that Shakespeare's plays lack meaning unless considered from the point of view of staging.<sup>16</sup> Though he has made some valuable contributions to Shakespearean scholarship, his position seems to be extreme.

Contrary to this objectivist approach to Shakespeare and all other literature, a reaction began to set in around 1925. I. A. Richards and T. S. Eliot turned toward a more symbolic, humanistic approach to literature and away from the destructive influence of scientism. Richards' position closely resembled the work of Matthew Arnold; he made art the supreme value, independent of science, and the source of what is worthwhile in religion.<sup>17</sup> Eliot carefully separated art from religion while stressing the need of spiritual values in literature. The loss of a spiritual order and of integrity in the modern consciousness is the basic premise in Eliot's critical work.<sup>18</sup> Along with Richards and Eliot, the "New Critics" have adapted a similar approach today.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Harley Granville-Barker, Prefaces to Shakespeare, London, 1948, ix-xix.

<sup>17</sup> I. A. Richards, Principles of Literary Criticism, New York, 1924.

<sup>18</sup> T. S. Eliot, The Use of Poetry and the Use of Criticism, London, 1933, 121-142.

<sup>19</sup> Robert W. Stallman, "The New Critics," Critiques and Essays in Criticism, Stallman, ed., New York, 1949. Among the more notable of this school are Paul Valery, F. R. Leavis, Yvor Winters, R. P. Blackmur, Cleanth Brooks, Allan Tate, and Kenneth Burke.

In Shakespearean criticism itself this same new approach can be seen. J. Dover Wilson, the Cambridge critic, has endeavored to correlate the chronological sequence of plays with Shakespeare's personal life, and in so doing has added to our understanding of the last plays.<sup>20</sup> G. Wilson Knight has studied the imagery of the plays and their symbolic meaning.<sup>21</sup> H. B. Charlton, mentioned above, takes Bradley's approach to the tragedies. F. R. Leavis of Cambridge seems also to stress the symbolic meaning; his interpretation of the tragedies is half way between Stoll and Bradley, because he stresses the causal sequence of action and the responsibility of the hero for his action.<sup>22</sup> Another symbolist, Maud Bodkin, making use of the psychology of Freud and Jung, has sought to discover the sub-conscious meaning of the plays and sub-conscious motives of the characters.<sup>23</sup>

In summary, then, the two main currents of criticism are the objectivists (Stoll, et cetera) and the "new critics" or symbolists. The objectivists seem to lose the true value of Shakespeare's tragedies as representations of human nature in conflict; the "new critics" have recovered this idea, but without

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20 J. Dover Wilson, The Essential Shakespeare, Cambridge, 1937.

21 F. R. Leavis, The Common Pursuit, London, 1952.

22 G. Wilson Knight, The Wheel of Fire, London, 1949.

23 Maud Bodkin, Archetypal Patterns in Poetry, London, 1948.

arriving at a clear idea of the nature of man. Nowhere does one find as firm a philosophical basis as in Bradley's work, Shakespearean Tragedy. Neither does one find a penetrating analysis of Bradley's critical tenets, an analysis which this present study hopes to supply.

The specific purpose of this thesis is to analyze Bradley's theory of tragedy, especially as he applies it to Othello, and then to criticize his theory in the light of Scholastic-Aristotelian principles. To carry out this purpose it will be necessary, first, to discuss Bradley's Hegelian background in so far as determinism of man's will is involved; secondly, to explain Bradley's theory of Shakespearean tragedy especially as it applies to Othello; thirdly, to criticize the theory and its application; and finally, to summarize the results of this study. Bradley's theory will be analyzed step by step with its application to Othello. This should render the exposition more concrete and thus more interesting. Othello has been chosen over the other tragedies because the attacks of Stoll<sup>24</sup> and Leavis<sup>25</sup> against Bradley bear directly upon his interpretation of this play.

Research and analysis on this subject have revealed to

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<sup>24</sup> F. E. Stoll, Art and Artifice in Shakespeare, New York, 1951; also An Historical and Comparative Study of Othello.

<sup>25</sup> F. R. Leavis, "Diabolic Intellect and the Noble Hero," The Common Pursuit, London, 1950, 136-159.

the author certain conclusions which can be summarized beforehand as the thesis itself: Bradley's theory of tragedy, especially as applied to Othello, is false in so far as it leads logically to a denial of free will and true responsibility of the hero for his tragic action. The proof for this thesis is rendered especially difficult because Bradley never explicitly treats of the problem of free will. His position has to be inferred from a careful analysis of the introductory chapter in Shakespearean Tragedy, and of his lecture, "Hegel's Theory of Tragedy," in Oxford Lectures on Poetry. Such is the work of the following chapters.

## CHAPTER II

### BRADLEY'S HEGELIAN BACKGROUND

Every critic approaches a work of literature with a certain view of life; and this viewpoint will permeate his critical remarks either implicitly or openly. A. C. Bradley is no exception to this common psychological phenomenon. His college years were spent at Oxford under the tutelage of older men who had received their philosophical inspiration from the writings of Kant and Hegel. The impress of German idealism can be seen in much of Bradley's critical work, especially in his theory of tragedy. The present chapter intends to trace this philosophical influence.

Andrew Cecil Bradley<sup>1</sup> was born at Cheltenham, England on March 26, 1851, the fourth and youngest son of Charles Bradley, a distinguished cleric and notable preacher. Thus an early religious atmosphere inclined Bradley to see the spiritual side of man, an influence that remained in later life. After his early education at Cheltenham, he was sent to Balliol College, Oxford, and in 1873 was awarded "first class" in literae humaniores. After

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1 Roy M. Ridley, "Andrew Cecil Bradley," Dictionary of National Biography: 1931-1940, London, 1949, 98-100. The following facts are taken from this biographical article.



being elected to a fellowship at Balliol, he was appointed lecturer in 1876, at first in English, and then, until 1881, in Philosophy. During this period he was in close contact with Thomas Hill Green, an English Hegelian, "and like all who came within the orbit of that wise and selfless teacher and had the temper to estimate him rightly, Bradley was deeply influenced."<sup>2</sup> That this influence was Hegelian and Kantian can be ascertained from a short synopsis of Green's philosophy given by one of his biographers.

He [Green] developed the philosophical ideas, congenial to him from the first, 'by a sympathetic study of Kant and Hegel.' . . . His central conception is . . . that 'the Universe is a single eternal activity of energy, of which it is the essence to be self-conscious, that is, to be itself and not-itself in one.' His religious philosophy is a constant reproduction of 'the idea that the whole world of human experience is the self-communication or revelation of the eternal and absolute being.'<sup>3</sup>

This same spiritual pantheism will be seen later (Chapter Three) in Bradley's theory of Shakespearean tragedy; it suffices for the present to note the fact of such an influence upon Bradley's mind.

In 1882 Bradley left Balliol to become the first occupant of the chair of Literature and History at University College, Liverpool. At this period of his life, he edited T. H. Green's

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2 Ibid., 98; italics not in the original.

3 Robert E. Graves, "T. H. Green," Dictionary of National Biography, (from earliest times to 1900), VIII, London, 1937-8, 499.

Prolegomena to Ethics<sup>4</sup> with an analysis, and also delivered a set of lectures which were later (1901) published as the Commentary on Tennyson's 'In Memoriam'.<sup>5</sup> In 1890 he was elected to the chair of English Literature at Glasgow University, where he edited, with a biographical sketch, the first volume of the Philosophical Lectures and Remains of Richard L. Nettleship.<sup>6</sup> Nettleship had been a close friend and associate of Bradley's; a perusal of the above-mentioned volume indicates that both men shared the same Hegelian ideas, and no doubt influenced each other.

Bradley received a new honor in 1901 when he was elected to the chair of Poetry at Oxford. In 1904 his now famous lectures, Shakespearean Tragedy, were published; later, in 1909, his Oxford Lectures on Poetry, a miscellaneous volume containing his lecture on Hegel's theory of tragedy, were also published. In 1907 Bradley was invited to deliver the important Gifford Lectures at Glasgow University. These were published posthumously in 1940 under the title, Ideals of Religion.<sup>7</sup> These lectures exhibit the same spiritual monism and pantheism as were noted as typical of

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4 T. H. Green, Prolegomena to Ethics, A. C. Bradley, ed., Oxford, 1890.

5 A. C. Bradley, A Commentary on Tennyson's 'In Memoriam', London, 1901.

6 Richard Lewis Nettleship, The Philosophical Lectures and Remains of Richard L. Nettleship, A. C. Bradley, ed., London, 1897.

7 A. C. Bradley, Ideals of Religion, London, 1940.

T. H. Green." Bradley's last work is a set of lectures on various English authors, published in 1929 as Miscellany.<sup>8</sup> But by this time the fire was dying out; and on September 2, 1935, he died at the age of eighty. Although his biographer makes no mention of the possible influence of his brother, Francis H., it is noteworthy that he was also a Hegelian, perhaps the most important of all the English idealists.<sup>9</sup>

An understanding of Hegel's theory of tragedy is necessary before we can discuss Bradley's explicit adaptation of it. Unfortunately, the scope of this study will permit only a brief sketch of the main points of this theory--an extremely difficult task because of the obscurity of Hegel's thinking. (It is well-known that the Germans read Hegel in French translation because of the obscurity of the original.)

Hegel's theory of tragedy is an application of his more general philosophical principles to the field of literature. The basic Hegelian principle is the famous lex mentis est lex entis.<sup>10</sup> This means that everything in the world, though apparently enjoying independent existence, is basically made up of thought and is a part or expression of some all-embracing mind. To discover the

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<sup>8</sup> A. C. Bradley, Miscellany, London, 1929.

<sup>9</sup> J. R. H. Weaver, "F. H. Bradley," Dictionary of National Biography 1922-1930, London, 1937, 103-105.

<sup>10</sup> Murel R. Vogel, S. J., Theologia Naturalis, unpublished notes, West Baden College Library, 1948, 101-104.

creation or evolution of the world, all one has to do is to discover the first and indeterminate idea, and then deduce from it the whole world, according to the dialectical law of thesis, antithesis, synthesis: being, non-being, becoming, etc. The evolution of the world falls into three stages: Logic, Nature, and Spirit. These three taken as a whole are the Absolute Mind or God. The whole process takes place with rigid, logical necessity; free causality is excluded.

Art in Hegel's system belongs to the division called Spirit, along with religion and philosophy.<sup>11</sup> Art is a stage of the dialectical process by which the Absolute Mind adequately expresses itself in sensuous form. There is an antithesis, Hegel tells us, between the inner realm of spirit and the outer realm of sensuous phenomena which entangles the spirit. The truth lies in the reconciliation of these two opposites. The purpose of art is to represent this reconciliation. "Art has the vocation of revealing the truth in the form of sensuous artistic shape, of representing the reconciled antithesis just described, and therefore, has its purpose in itself, in this representation and revelation."<sup>12</sup>

Of all forms of art, poetry is the highest, the most

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11 G. F. W. Hegel, The Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy of Fine Art, B. Bosanquet, tr., London, 1905. My synopsis of Hegel's theory of art is taken from this book.

12 Ibid., 141.

spiritual representation of truth; and of all forms of poetry, the greatest is tragedy. Tragedy reconciles two opposites, the epic, in which fate mercilessly controls the destiny of men, and the lyric, in which the human spirit asserts its independence. Considered in itself, tragedy is a moral action proceeding from a living will which is drawn into collision with other wills. The motives for this collision are all legitimate, universal values such as duty to family and to the state.<sup>13</sup>

Hegel's famous example is the Antigone. Here, Creon represents the right of the state; and the heroine represents the right of the family, devotion to her brother. Both Creon and Antigone are subjectively in the right (this is essential to Hegel's theory). They identify themselves with this right, attempt to translate it into action, and in so doing clash--from sheer dialectical necessity. In the catastrophe the conflict is resolved; Antigone dies and Creon is humbled. Thus a certain repose or reconciliation is achieved at the end. The forces which have been in conflict--duty to family versus duty to state--return to their essential harmony. Hegel gives an excellent summary of his theory which may be quoted here at length.

. . . these same moral powers existing in different intensity in individual souls, and results of human action being perceived with different degrees of clearness, collisions become possible. Of two personages in

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<sup>13</sup> G. F. W. Hegel, Hegel's Aesthetics, a critical exposition by John S. Kedney, Chicago, 1885, 287-300.

the true tragedy, each is represented as (subjectively) in the right. But not being able to realize what seems to him to be such without violation of another power, will, and end, equally just--the hero notwithstanding his morality, or rather on account of it, is drawn to commit faults. This contradiction must be destroyed, and a solution of this conflict be brought about; eternal justice must be exercised, and moral unity re-established by the destruction, if need be, of what has troubled its repose. Thus the real combat is not so much between particular interests, as between the moral reason in its pure Idea, on the one hand, and on the other, its concrete manifestations in the real world, and in human activity. This Idea is the harmonizing principle, and whatever has exclusive particularity must be accommodated to it. But the tragic personage, not being able to renounce his projects, finds himself condemned to total ruin, or at least is forced to resign himself, as he can, to his destiny.<sup>14</sup>

Since the hero is "in the right" in the tragic conflict, the tragic emotions aroused differ from those described by Aristotle. The pity felt is not for the suffering of the fallen hero but is rather a recognition and admiration of the justice of his cause, his moral rectitude. The fear aroused is not that the hero is bringing upon himself this calamity, nor that the spectators could bring such suffering upon themselves, but rather a fear of the moral principle, eternal Justice, who will destroy the hero, and in whom alone reason can find satisfaction. To excite these emotions

the tragic character . . . must have right aims, even though issuing in mistaken judgments. And the true tragic interest is sustained and satisfied only when we are allowed to see the Eternal Justice harmonizing, even destructively, these moral powers. Thus the substantial

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 290.

principle of the universe appears victorious in its inner harmony. It destroys . . . the exclusive side of these individuals, but brings their profound and essential relations into accord.<sup>15</sup>

For Hegel, then, tragedy is itself a dialectical process. The thesis is some universal ethical value represented by the protagonist. The antithesis is an opposing ethical value represented by the antagonist. In the catastrophe of the play the excesses of both personages in pursuing these ends are negated by eternal justice, and thus is brought about a synthesis or harmony of the conflicting forces. Throughout the whole tragedy there is no subjective guilt involved, no free will, because all actions occur according to a rigid dialectical law.

In large part Bradley accepted this Hegelian concept of the tragic.<sup>16</sup> However, he had to modify it so as to apply more easily to Shakespeare and modern tragedy. Hegel had seen in the tragic conflict only the universal ethical values. These values predominate in Greek tragedy, which was Hegel's main interest; but such is not the case in Shakespearian tragedy in which the motive force of the conflict is usually a personal passion or ambition, making the conflict itself one of personalities. For this reason Bradley modified Hegel's theory somewhat, but of course retained the deterministic view of man's will.

If we omit all reference to ethical . . . powers and

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15. Ibid., 292.

16 "Hegel's Theory of Tragedy," Oxford Lectures, 69-98.

interests . . . we have the more general idea . . . that tragedy portrays a self-division and self-waste of spirit, or a division of spirit involving conflict and waste. It is implied in this that on both sides in the conflict there is a spiritual value. The same idea may be expressed . . . by saying that the tragic conflict is one not merely of good with evil, but also, and more essentially, of good with good. Only, in saying this, we must be careful to observe that 'good' here means anything that has spiritual value, not moral goodness alone, and that 'evil' has a similarly wide sense.<sup>17</sup>

This idea of conflict and waste of spirit covers the whole range of tragedy, classical and modern. The tragic emotions will be experienced, Bradley maintains, as long as the forces in conflict are of great value. Hence, any spiritual conflict, either of universal ethical forces, or of purely personal passions and ambitions, will be tragic. Even in Macbeth where the conflict appears at first to be between pure good (those loyal to Duncan) and pure evil (Macbeth), we can find upon closer analysis that the hero himself possesses good qualities. These are his natural abilities: skill in fighting, bravery, vivid imagination, tremendous ambition, unflinching determination. Thus the conflict here is really between two forces both of which have spiritual value (in the broad sense in which Bradley uses the word spiritual).

This conflict between good and good may take place within the hero's soul, as well as between the hero and the antagonist. To maintain Bradley's position, an external conflict would

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17 Ibid., 86.



suffice, but a truly great tragedy should also have an inner conflict. It is here especially that the tragedian shows his greatest power and knowledge of human nature.

Turning to the cause of the conflict, Bradley emphasizes very strongly the work of fate or external forces. The hero's suffering is obviously more than he deserves; hence human agency cannot explain it. Yet the hero's action, like his antagonist's, proceeds from his character; thus human agency also seems to cause the conflict and suffering. At this point Bradley is undecided about this dual causality; we shall see below how he finally assigns but one cause--the moral order of the universe.

Adapting Hegel's ideas on the catastrophe, Bradley would exclude any reference to ethical or universal purposes, or to the work of "justice" in resolving the conflict. This leaves a very simple and general description: ". . . as the tragic action portrays a self-division or intestinal conflict of spirit, so the catastrophe displays the violent annulling of this division or conflict."<sup>18</sup> But since this does not represent the best part of Hegel's thought on the subject, Bradley goes on to explain that there are two aspects to the catastrophe, negative and affirmative. Negatively, the catastrophe is

the act of a power immeasurably superior to that of the conflicting agents, a power which is irresistible and unescapable, and which overbears and negates whatever

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 90-91.

is incompatible with it. So far, it may be called, in relation to the conflicting agents, necessity or fate; and unless a catastrophe affects us in ways corresponding with this aspect, it is not truly tragic.<sup>19</sup>

To avoid any feeling of depression or rebellion at the outcome of the tragedy, the catastrophe must also have an affirmative aspect, a feeling or sense of reconciliation.

And this will be taken into account if we describe the catastrophe as the violent self-restitution of the divided spiritual unity. The necessity which acts and negates it . . . is yet of one substance with both agents. It is divided against itself in them--they are its conflicting forces; and in restoring its unity through negation it affirms them, so far as they are compatible with that unity. [This] qualification is necessary, since the hero, for all his affinity with that power [of the one substance], is, as the living man we see before us, not so compatible. He must die, and his union with 'eternal justice' . . . must itself be 'eternal' or ideal . . . He dies . . . and yet his death matters nothing to us, or we even exult. He is dead; and he has no more to do with death than the power which killed him and with which he is one.<sup>20</sup>

In these remarks we see what is behind Bradley's theory of tragedy. The ultimate power of his tragic world--fate, eternal justice, the moral order, God, call it what you will--is of one substance with the conflicting characters. This one substance is divided against itself in the characters so that they are its expressions, parts, products. Acting from a necessity, this pantheistic substance causes through the characters both their good and evil actions. Like Hegel's Absolute Mind, this ultimate substan-

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19 Ibid., 91.

20 Ibid., 91, italics not in the original.

tial power is of its very nature self-contradictory, causing good and evil, giving birth to a conflict of opposites according to the rigid dialectical law of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. Since the characters are only parts of this process, they are entirely subject to its necessity. Hence free will activity (and true responsibility for their actions) would logically seem to be ruled out. In this respect Bradley has not changed Hegel's theory at all.

### CHAPTER III

#### BRADLEY'S THEORY OF SHAKESPEAREAN TRAGEDY

The aim of the present chapter is to explain Bradley's general theory of Shakespearean tragedy, especially as he applies it to Othello. Besides the application to Othello there is another important difference between this and the preceding chapter. There it was shown how Bradley espoused Hegel's theory of tragedy as a theory, on the a priori level. Here it will be seen how Bradley induces the same theory with its deterministic implications from an analysis of Shakespeare, an a posteriori approach. The introductory words of the first lecture in Shakespearean Tragedy also indicate this difference and will serve as a fitting introduction to the present matter.

The question we are to consider in this lecture may be stated in a variety of ways. We may put it thus: What is the substance of a Shakespearean tragedy, taken in abstraction both from its form and from the difference in point of substance between one tragedy and another? Or thus: What is the nature of the tragic aspect of life as represented by Shakespeare? What is the general fact shown now in this tragedy and now in that? . . . What is Shakespeare's tragic conception, or conception of tragedy?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Shakespearean Tragedy, Lecture I, "The Substance of a Shakespearean Tragedy," 5.

After this clear statement of the problem, Bradley reminds the reader that Shakespeare, while he never formulated a theory of tragedy, nonetheless reveals in his dramas a certain way of looking at life, a Weltanschauung; and that by analyzing these tragedies, one should be able to state Shakespeare's view of the tragic in propositional form. In doing this one must confine the problem to Shakespeare's dramatic views, and not consider his views outside of his poetry--his opinion, creed, or convictions on ultimate questions, if indeed he had any.<sup>2</sup> Nor should one simplify the analysis by referring to some well-known theory of tragedy.<sup>3</sup> Bradley intends to start directly from the facts, and induce gradually Shakespeare's idea of the tragic. These facts are all contained in the plays themselves.

Bradley begins his analysis with the obvious statement that the hero is the center of the action in all of Shakespeare's tragedies. The Shakespearean hero is always a man of high estate, of intensified and noble character traits. Hence, when he falls, his suffering and calamity are exceptional.

His fate affects the welfare of a whole nation or empire; and when he falls suddenly from the height of earthly greatness to the dust, his fall produces a sense of contrast, of the powerlessness of men, and

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2 Ibid., 6.

3 As a matter of fact, Bradley does refer to a "well-known theory of tragedy" later on in the same lecture where he explicitly introduces Hegel's theory, ibid., 16.

of the omnipotence--perhaps the caprice--of Fortune or Fate, which no tale of private life can possibly rival.<sup>4</sup>

The most important aspect of the hero is not his being "of high estate," but rather his exceptional character traits. In him desire, passion, and will attain a terrible force. The fundamental tragic trait of Macbeth, Lear, Hamlet, and Othello, is that they are one-sided; they possess "a fatal tendency to identify the whole being with one interest, object, passion, or habit of mind."<sup>5</sup> This fatal gift inspires sympathy and pity, terror, admiration and awe.

Bradley's interpretation of Othello is perfectly consistent with these general remarks on the Shakespearean hero. Othello is "the most romantic figure among Shakespeare's heroes"; moreover, his very nature is romantic.<sup>6</sup> His language shows that he is a poet; one need only recall his famous speeches that begin: "Her father loved me,"<sup>7</sup> "Never, Iago,"<sup>8</sup> "It is the cause,"<sup>9</sup> and the closing speech, "Soft you, a word or two before you go."<sup>10</sup>

4 Ibid., 10.

5 Ibid., 20.

6 Ibid., Lecture V, "Othello," 188-189.

7 William Shakespeare, Sixteen Plays of Shakespeare, G. L. Kittredge, ed., New York, 1946, "Othello," I, III, 128-170.

8 Ibid., III, III, 453-462.

9 Ibid., V, II, 1-22.

10 Ibid., V, II, 338-356.

This romantic, poetic hero is also "grave, self controlled, steeled by the experience of countless perils"; he is "a great man naturally modest but fully conscious of his worth, proud of his services to the state."<sup>11</sup> Add to this the fact that he is also of high estate in the strict sense, from royal lineage.<sup>12</sup>

Like all of Shakespeare's heroes, says Bradley, Othello is one-sided. His mind is simple, unobservant, free from introspection, and not given to reflection. For all his dignity and calm, "he is by nature full of the most vehement passion."<sup>13</sup> He is a man of action, too trustful in his own judgment. "Convinced, he will act with the authority of a judge and the swiftness of a man in mortal pain. Undeceived, he will do like execution on himself."<sup>14</sup>

Returning to Bradley's general theory, we can now consider another principle which he draws out of Shakespeare. The hero's suffering and calamity do not merely happen by chance; they proceed from his actions; the hero causes his own suffering. In the beginning of the play he is placed in certain provoking circumstances, then begins to react. These actions beget a whole

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11 Shakespearean Tragedy, 189.

12 "Othello," I, 11, 22.

13 Ibid., 190.

14 Ibid., 191.

series of interconnected deeds, leading inevitably to a catastrophe.

The effect of such a series on the imagination is to make us regard the sufferings which accompany it, and the catastrophe in which it ends, not only or chiefly as something which happens to the persons concerned, but equally as something which is caused by them.

. . . The center of tragedy, therefore, may be said with equal truth to lie in action issuing from character or in character issuing in action. Shakespeare's main interest lay here.<sup>15</sup>

By way of corollary to this statement, Bradley points out<sup>16</sup> that abnormal actions such as Lady Macbeth's sleep-walking, or supernatural manifestations such as the ghost in Hamlet, or chance happenings, such as the loss of the handkerchief in Othello--none of these are ever the true origin of the tragic conflict. Here Bradley seems to be searching for a distinction which Scholastic philosophers would make between actus humanus and actus hominis. Yet he never attained a true description of an actus humanus, a conscious, deliberate act.

The actions of the hero proceed, then, from his character, a character which is terribly one-sided and possesses a tragic flaw. Given this trait, the hero precipitates his downfall by some action or omission, some error which joins with other causes (fate) to bring about his catastrophe. But this error, according to Bradley, usually "involves no conscious

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15 Ibid., 11-12. The italics are not in the original.

16 Ibid., 13-15.



breach of right."<sup>17</sup> In fact, Brutus and Othello commit their errors with a full conviction of right. The moral evil in such characters as Richard III and Macbeth, which seems to be conscious, would greatly diminish their stature if it were not for the fact that Shakespeare endows each one with astonishing power. Thus if the hero is not good, at least he has "so much of greatness that in his error and fall we may see the possibilities of human nature."<sup>18</sup>

At this point it will be well to consider how Bradley applies all of this to Othello--the action issuing from character and involving no conscious breach of right. From the very beginning of his analysis on this point, Bradley sets out to exonerate Othello of all blame for his jealousy and tragic killing of Desdemona. First of all, Bradley objects to those critics who consider that Othello "was easily jealous" and who "seem to think that it was inexcusable in him to feel any suspicion of his wife at all," and who "blame him for never suspecting Iago or asking him for evidence."<sup>19</sup>

Othello's trust in Iago was blameless, says Bradley. Iago was his companion in arms, a man Othello could trust in

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17 Ibid., 22; the italics are not in the original.

18 Ibid., 22; this entire paragraph above is a summary of ibid., 22.

19 Ibid., 191.

military matters and had no reason to suspect in other affairs. That Othello's trust was misplaced was no sign of stupidity (or vincible ignorance as Scholastic philosophers would say). Everyone else in the play thought Iago was honest and could be trusted. "This being so, even if Othello had not been trustful and simple, it would have been quite unnatural in him to be unmoved by the warnings of so honest a friend, warnings offered with extreme reluctance and . . . from a sense of a friend's duty."<sup>20</sup> Such being the case, any husband would have been troubled by these admonitions.

Moreover, Othello and Desdemona were newly-weds. Othello did not know his wife very well as yet; he was "conscious of being under the spell of a feeling which can give glory to the truth but can also give it to a dream."<sup>21</sup> He was powerless to repel Iago's artful suggestions on the ground of knowledge of his wife, or knowledge of the customary morality of Venetian women; "and he had himself seen in Desdemona's deception of her father how perfect an actress she could be."<sup>22</sup> Unable to refute Iago's suggestions with facts, Othello in the third scene of the third act abruptly dismisses his friend.<sup>23</sup>

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20 Ibid., 192.

21 Ibid., 193.

22 Ibid., 193.

23 "Othello," III, iii, 239.

Bradley maintains that up to this time in the play, Othello is not jealous. "His confidence is shaken, he is confused and deeply troubled, he feels even horror; but he is not yet jealous in the proper sense of that word."<sup>24</sup> Even in the soliloquy that follows,<sup>25</sup> the deepest source of Othello's suffering is not jealousy but the wreck of his faith and his love. Furthermore, up to this scene of the play "there is not a syllable to be said against Othello."<sup>26</sup> He is blameless, and Bradley refuses to consider whether the hero incurs any blame from this point to the end of the play. The death of Desdemona is no murder, but a sacrifice; and in performing it Othello is neither jealous nor angry, but acts from righteous indignation.<sup>27</sup> His error is accompanied "by a full conviction of right."<sup>28</sup> Even here, then, Othello is blameless; he has committed no conscious breach of right. He has merely acted in accordance with his character; and it seems that his character has wholly determined how he must act.

Thus far in the discussion of Bradley's theory of

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24 Shakespearean Tragedy, 194.

25 "Othello," III, iii, 258-277.

26 Shakespearean Tragedy, 194.

27 Ibid., 197-8.

28 Ibid., 22.

Shakespearean tragedy two of his principles and their application to Othello have been considered; first, that the hero is a man of noble character traits, yet is one-sided, possesses some tragic flaw or weakness; secondly, that the action of the hero proceeds from his character in such a way as to involve no conscious breach of right.

Bradley introduces a third consideration into his lecture at this point, the Hegelian idea of conflict.<sup>29</sup> Can the tragic action of a Shakespearean play truly be called a conflict? Yes, he replies. There is always a conflict, either between two groups in one of which the hero is the leading figure; or between two persons, the hero and his antagonist. Each of these opposing persons or groups represents some passion, idea, principle, force, or tendency in human nature.

The love of Romeo and Juliet is in conflict with the hatred of their houses, represented by various other characters. The cause of Brutus and Cassius struggles with that of Julius, Octavius and Antony. In Richard II the king stands on one side, Bolingbroke and his party on the other. In Macbeth the hero and heroine are opposed to the representatives of Duncan. In all these cases the great majority of the dramatis personae fall without difficulty into antagonistic groups, and the conflict between these groups ends with the defeat of the hero.<sup>30</sup>

But the conflict is not merely external; it is within

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29 Ibid., 16.

30 Ibid., 17.

the soul of the hero as well. The type of tragedy in which the hero presents an undivided soul to his antagonists is not often found in Shakespeare. It is especially in this inward struggle that Shakespeare displays his most extraordinary power. Only in the earlier and less mature tragedies, Romeo and Juliet and Richard III, do we find a purely external conflict.<sup>31</sup>

To include the inner and outer struggle in the idea of conflict, Bradley uses the term "spiritual force." Tragedy is a conflict of spiritual forces. What does this mean?

This will mean whatever forces act in the human spirit, whether personal passion or impersonal principle; doubts, desires, scruples, ideas--whatever can animate, shake, possess, and drive a man's soul. In a Shakespearean tragedy some such forces are shown in conflict. . . . Treasonous ambition in Macbeth collides with loyalty and patriotism in Macduff and Malcolm; here is the outward conflict. But these powers or principles equally collide in the soul of Macbeth himself; here is the inner. And neither by itself could make the tragedy.<sup>32</sup>

This idea of conflict emphasizes the fact that tragedy is basically an action; inner conflict emphasizes the action as proceeding from character.

In Othello the outer conflict is obviously between the hero and Iago. We have already seen how Bradley portrays Othello and his inner conflict, a conflict between his love for

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31 Ibid., 18.

32 Ibid., 18-19.

Desdemona and his sense of justice. Here we shall consider Bradley's portrayal of Iago, the antagonist of the play. The first and most startling aspect of Bradley's treatment of Iago is its very length. Iago receives thirty-one pages of discussion; Othello, only sixteen.<sup>33</sup> Iago is so fascinating a portrayal of evil that Bradley abstracts him from the context of the play, and thus exaggerates his true importance. "Evil has nowhere else been portrayed with such mastery as in the character of Iago."<sup>34</sup> "Of Shakespeare's characters, Falstaff, Hamlet, Iago, and Cleopatra . . . are probably the most wonderful. Of these again, Hamlet and Iago, . . . are perhaps the most subtle."<sup>35</sup> Bradley also claims that critics would have written as many pages about Iago as they have about Hamlet, if only Iago had not been so unattractive.<sup>36</sup>

Bradley warns against two misinterpretations of Iago. One is to say that Iago is a commonplace villain, "a man who has been slighted and revenges himself, or a husband who believes he has been wronged, . . . or an ambitious man determined to

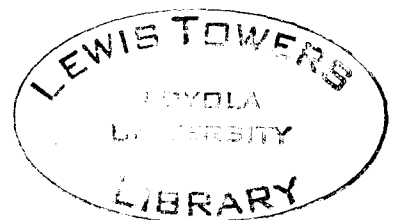
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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., Lecture V, 186-201, on Othello; Lecture VI, 207-237, on Iago.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., Lecture VI, 207.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 208.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.



ruin his successful rival. . ."<sup>37</sup> The other false view holds that Iago "is a being who hates good simply because it is good . . . His action springs from a 'motiveless malignity'. . ."<sup>38</sup> This would make Iago a psychological impossibility, a devil. Bradley considers these two interpretations to be the result of imperfect analysis.

Since Iago's words cannot be trusted, they must be tested against the words and thoughts of the other characters in the play. Proceeding in this manner, Bradley arrives at Iago's first character trait, his tremendous powers of dissimulation. Everyone in the play, except the poor dupe Roderigo, thought that Iago was honest and trustworthy.<sup>39</sup> The fact that he never allowed anyone to glimpse into the pit of his soul proves that he possessed marvelous self-control and was decidedly cold by temperament. However, though he was thoroughly selfish and unfeeling, he was not "by nature malignant, nor even morose, but that, on the contrary, he had a superficial good nature, the kind . . . that wins popularity and is often taken as a sign . . . of a good heart."<sup>40</sup> He also possessed remarkable powers of intellect and will--insight into human nature,

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37 Ibid., 209.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid., 216-17.

40 Ibid., 217.

ingenuity and address in dealing with it; quickness and versatility in sudden difficulties. But he perverts these powers; his creed is "that absolute egoism is the only rational and proper attitude, and that conscience or honour . . . is an absurdity."<sup>41</sup> He is one of those

Who, trimmed in forms and visages of duty,  
Keep yet their hearts attending on themselves.<sup>42</sup>

The main problem in analyzing Iago is to find the motive for his action. According to Bradley, none of the motives which Iago mentions were the true ones: i.e., desire for advance, a feeling that he had been slighted, revenge for some illicit affair Othello might have had with Emilia. Neither is Iago's action motiveless. Rather, the motive is unconscious, and rises but once to the surface when Iago says that he will "plume up my will in double knavery."<sup>43</sup> Bradley takes this to mean that Iago's thwarted sense of superiority or power wants satisfaction. This is the motive of his action, to be the master of the General who undervalued him and of the rival who was preferred to him.<sup>44</sup> Besides this longing to satisfy his sense of power, Iago is driven on by two other allied forces--the pleasure in an action

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 219.

<sup>42</sup> Othello, I, 1, 50-51.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., I, 111, 399-400.

<sup>44</sup> Shakespearean Tragedy, 229.



very difficult and exciting, and the joy of artistic creation in weaving his plot.<sup>45</sup>

Finally, Bradley insists that Iago is not all evil.<sup>46</sup> A sense of power, delight in difficult activity, joy in creative skill--all are basically good things. This goodness in Iago falls in line with Bradley's more general principle that tragedy is a conflict of spiritual forces both of which are good--nobility and love in Othello versus intellectual genius and sense of power in Iago.

In summary of Bradley's general theory of Shakespearean tragedy, treated thus far, the following principles can be listed: tragedy is centered around a noble hero who possesses a tragic weakness of character; because of it he is led to commit a tragic error which involves no conscious breach of right; and the action which leads to the error can be viewed as a conflict of spiritual forces, a conflict which goes on both within the hero's soul and between the hero and his antagonist(s).

The next logical step in Bradley's analysis of Shakespeare is that the conflict always ends in the defeat of the hero, his catastrophe, his death.

. . . No play at the end of which the hero remains alive is, in the full Shakespearean sense, a tragedy;

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45 Ibid., 230-1.

46 Ibid., 233-37.

and we no longer class Troilus and Cressida or Cymbeline as such, as did the editors of the folio. . .  
 ("Tragedy") is in fact essentially a tale of suffering and calamity conducting to death.<sup>47</sup>

But why does tragedy essentially demand the death of the Hero? To answer this, we must recall Bradley's interpretation of Hegel on this point, which was treated in the last chapter. The catastrophe is the violent annulling of the conflict, and as such, it has two aspects, negative and positive. Negatively, the catastrophe is the act of a power infinitely superior to the conflicting agents, a power which negates whatever is incompatible with it. But the hero, who has contracted evil in the course of the play, is not compatible with this Power. Therefore he must die. Affirmatively, the catastrophe shows that the hero in his death is united or harmonized "ideally" with this ultimate Power; the result of this upon the audience is a feeling of exultation and satisfaction.<sup>48</sup>

This principle of the catastrophe is verified perfectly in Bradley's description of Othello's death. While it has been painful to watch the murder scene, a scene which excites pity mingled with admiration and love, there is no pain at all in the closing scene." . . . Pity itself vanishes, and love and admiration alone remain in the majestic dignity and sovereign

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47 Ibid., 7.

48 Oxford Lectures, 90-91.

ascendancy of the close."<sup>49</sup> The old Othello has returned, or rather "a greater and nobler Othello still."<sup>50</sup> In his parting words there is a "triumphant scorn for the fetters of the flesh and the littleness of all the lives that must survive him."<sup>51</sup> Our grief is swept away, and we are left exulting in the power of love and man's unconquerable mind.<sup>52</sup>

Closely connected with the catastrophe are the tragic emotions or what Bradley calls "the central tragic impression." Although there is an affirmative aspect to the catastrophe, this is not the abiding impression that a Shakespearean tragedy gives us. Even the pity and fear which are aroused are not central and abiding. Rather, it is the sadness which results from the waste of so much good that affects us the most.

With Shakespeare, at any rate, the pity and fear which are stirred by the tragic story seem to unite with, and even to merge in, a profound sense of sadness and mystery, which is due to this impression of waste. 'What a piece of work is man,' we cry; 'so much more beautiful and so much more terrible than we knew! Why should he be so if this beauty and greatness only tortures itself and throws itself away?'<sup>53</sup>

Sadness at the waste of good is also the central im-

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49 Shakespearean Tragedy, 198.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid., 23.

pression Bradley finds in Othello. The mind of the reader is "bound down to the spectacle of noble beings caught in toils from which there is no escape."<sup>54</sup> His feelings are those of oppression, of confinement to a comparatively narrow world, and of a dark fatality. It is painful to watch jealousy convert Othello into a beast thirsting for blood;<sup>55</sup> frightening to see in Iago an unusual intellect joined with extreme evil;<sup>56</sup> and extremely pitiful, nearly intolerable, to watch the passive suffering of the sweet and innocent Desdemona.<sup>57</sup>

This impression of sadness at the waste of noble qualities leads Bradley to his last problem in the analysis of Shakespeare's concept of the tragic. How can the presence of such evil in the tragic world be explained, especially spiritual evil in man?

Everywhere, from the crushed rocks beneath our feet to the soul of man, we see power, intelligence, life and glory, which astound us and seem to call for our worship. And everywhere we see them perishing, devouring one another and destroying themselves, often with dreadful pain, as though they came into being for no other end. Tragedy is the typical form of this mystery, because that greatness of soul which it exhibits oppressed, conflicting, and destroyed, is the

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54 Ibid., 181.

55 Ibid., 178.

56 Ibid., 237.

57 Ibid., 179.

highest existence in our view.<sup>58</sup>

The presence of evil, the waste of good through suffering and calamity, cannot be explained merely by appealing to human agency no matter how decisive it may be. But if human agency is not the ultimate power in the tragic world, then what is this power? In answering this question, one must be careful, Bradley warns, not to impose everyday moral notions on Shakespeare, nor should we try to give a religious answer since Elizabethan drama was almost wholly secular. Shakespeare confined himself to the world of non-theological observation and thought. His view is the same whether the play has a Christian or pagan setting.<sup>59</sup>

To decide the nature of the ultimate power, Bradley begins with the tragic fact as Shakespeare presents it. First, this tragic fact is piteous, fearful and mysterious; secondly, it does not leave us crushed or desperate.<sup>60</sup> Any explanation of the ultimate power that distorts these two facts should be rejected. For instance, to say that the ultimate power is some benevolent moral order that awards poetic justice, would not be true to life, would destroy the mystery and therefore the wonder and fear. Similarly, if blind fate alone were the ultimate

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58 Ibid., 23.

59 Ibid., 25.

60 Ibid., 25-26.

power, the tragedy would leave us rebellious or despairing. These two exaggerated ideas are found in most accounts of Shakespeare's tragedies. Somehow they must be reconciled: the one which holds for an unbroken connection of character, deed, catastrophe, which show the hero receiving justice; and the other which stresses the pressure of outward forces, chance, circumstance, and fate.

That fate is the ultimate power--this opinion has some foundation in Shakespeare. The hero, faulty as he may be, is far from being the whole cause of his suffering. He is a doomed man, and the power from which he cannot escape is immovable and relentless. The hero confidently attempts to translate thought into action, but what he achieves is far from what he intends. He seems to act freely, yet he is blind; his actions bind him hand and foot, and "it makes no difference whether he meant well or ill."<sup>61</sup> Brutus had the best of intentions; Iago, the worst; but both bring evil into the world. Bradley suggests that this is the medieval influence upon Shakespeare according to which "man is the plaything of an inscrutable power, called by the name of Fortune or some other name--a power which appears to smile on him for a little, and then on a sudden strikes him down in his pride."<sup>62</sup> A glance at Othello bears this out. He is

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61 Ibid., 27.

62 Ibid., 9.

terribly unlucky. Why did Desdemona drop the handkerchief at the crucial moment? What is it that brings Othello the one problem which is fatal to his character, the one person who can trick him into his tragic error? Why do his virtues help to destroy him? Summarizing this point of view, Bradley describes fate as

. . . the whole system or order, of which the individual characters form an inconsiderable and feeble part; which seems to determine, far more than they, their native dispositions and their circumstances, and, through these, their action; which is so vast and complex that they can scarcely at all understand it or control its workings, and which has a nature so definite and fixed that whatever changes take place in it produce other changes inevitably and without regard to men's desires and regrets.<sup>63</sup>

Next Bradley considers the opposite viewpoint, that in the main the catastrophe is the return of the hero's bad actions upon his own head. According to this view the hero receives justice and terrible as it may be, it satisfies the moral sense. But this cannot be "poetic justice" by which prosperity and adversity are proportioned according to the merits of the agents. According to Bradley, this contradicts what we find in Shakespeare. In many cases the hero suffers more than he deserves--Lear for instance. The consequences of a man's actions cannot be limited to what "justly" follows from them. Moreover, ideas of justice and merit are untrue to our experience of Shakespeare. We never judge the characters regardless of our

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63 Ibid., 30.

feelings toward them. We judge only when we slip back into our everyday moral notions. "But tragedy does not belong, any more than religion belongs to the sphere of these (moral) notions."<sup>64</sup>

If we wish to speak of the ultimate power as a moral order, says Bradley, we should discard notions of justice and merit, and speak simply in terms of good and evil. That the ultimate power is moral means that it shows itself akin to good and alien from evil.<sup>65</sup> Evil is the main source of the convulsion in all the tragedies; in Romeo and Juliet, the hatred between two families; in Othello, the envy of Iago; in Lear, the ambition and greed of Goneril, Regan, and Edmund; in Hamlet, the lust of the king and Hamlet's mother. In the hero also there is evil--his character flaw and the error he commits. The moral order or power is disturbed by these evils, reacts violently by ruthlessly destroying evil and seeking good in its perfection.

In summary of this viewpoint then, the moral order reacts from a necessity of its nature against attacks made upon it, or failure to conform to it. Tragedy is the exhibition of that convulsive reaction of the moral order. This exhibition leaves us with a feeling of acquiescence in the catastrophe because the suffering results from a collision with a moral power which is akin to the good found in the hero. We do not pass

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 33.



judgment and hence do not lose any pity and fear at the tragic waste. This view also explains those aspects of Shakespearean tragedy which suggest fate, since the moral order acts from a necessity of its nature. Like fate, this moral order can be ruthless, but since it is akin to good it is never capricious.

Yet Bradley admits that this so-called moral order is not a completely satisfactory explanation. It leaves the problem of evil in the tragic world still unexplained. Speaking of this moral order or power, he says:

. . . The evil against which it (this moral order) asserts itself, and the persons whom this evil inhabits, are not really something outside the order, so that they can attack it or fail to conform to it: they are within it and a part of it. It itself produces them,--produces Iago as well as Desdemona, Iago's cruelty as well as Iago's courage. It is not poisoned, it poisons itself. Doubtless it shows by its violent reaction that the poison is poison, and that its health lies in the good. But one significant fact cannot remove another, and the spectacle we witness scarcely warrants the assertion that the order is responsible for the good in Desdemona, but Iago for the evil in Iago. If we make this assertion we make it on grounds other than the facts as presented in Shakespeare's tragedies.<sup>66</sup>

Secondly, this view of the omnipotent moral order does not correspond to our feelings regarding the tragic characters.

We do not think of Hamlet merely as failing to meet its (the moral order's) demand, of Antony as merely sinning against it, or even of Macbeth as simply attacking it. What we feel corresponds quite as much to the idea that they are its parts, expressions, prod-

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66 Ibid., 37.

ucts; that in their defect or evil it is untrue to its soul of goodness, and falls into conflict and collision with itself; that, in making them suffer and waste themselves, it suffers and wastes itself; and that when, to save its life and regain peace from this intestinal struggle, it casts them out, it has lost a part of its own substance--a part more dangerous and unquiet, but far more valuable and nearer to its own than that which remains. . . . There is no tragedy in its expulsion of evil; the tragedy is that this involves the waste of good.<sup>67</sup>

Here at the conclusion of his lecture Bradley seeks to induce from Shakespeare his own Hegelian, pantheistic idea of the ultimate power of the tragic world. The omnipotent moral order is this power; it has a passion for good in its perfection and a violent hatred of evil; yet at the same time it engenders the very evil that it struggles to destroy. The evil, the evil characters, the hero, are all parts and products of this pantheistic moral order. Since they are not outside of it, they are not free to attack it or fail to conform to it. Their activity is absolutely determined by it. This theory, according to Bradley's own explanation of it quoted above, is verified also in Othello. Hence, there is no need to explain the matter further.

In summary of the present chapter the following principles can be listed as constituting Bradley's analysis and theory of Shakespearean tragedy, principles verified especially in his analysis of Othello: (1) A noble hero with some char-

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67 Ibid., 38.

acter weakness is the center of Shakespearian tragedy. (2) The hero's action proceeds from his character but involves no conscious breach of right. (3) This action can be viewed as a conflict of spiritual forces both good, a conflict that takes place both within the soul of the hero and between himself and an antagonist. (4) This conflict is resolved in the catastrophe which always involves the death of the hero in a moment of exultation. (5) The central impression or emotion excited by the tragic conflict is sadness at the waste of so much goodness. (6) The ultimate power behind the tragic conflict is an omnipotent moral order, a god as it were, which, acting from a necessity of its nature, causes both the good and the evil in all the characters, especially the hero.

## CHAPTER IV

### CRITICISM OF BRADLEY'S THEORY OF TRAGEDY

Most critics will agree with the first step in Bradley's analysis: the hero is the center of action in all of Shakespeare's tragedies, a man of noble qualities yet with some weakness of character. In this respect, Shakespeare's hero is a direct descendant of Greek and medieval tragedy. Immediately there comes to mind Aristotle's famous dictum on the hero, "a man not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity but by some error or frailty. He must be one who is highly renowned and prosperous . . . like Oedipus . . . or other illustrious men of such families."<sup>1</sup> Concerning the character of the hero Aristotle informs us that "it must be good," and will be so if "the purpose is good."<sup>2</sup>

When such a hero meets catastrophe his fall produces a profound effect upon the audience. According to Bradley this effect is a sense of contrast, between the powerlessness of man

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1 Aristotle, Poetics, XII, 1453a, tr. H. S. Butcher in Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, Dover, 1951, 45, 47.

2 Ibid., XV, 1454a, 53.

and the omnipotence of fate. To see the hero identifying himself with one interest, object, passion or habit of mind, to see his terrible one-sidedness inspires sympathy, pity, terror, admiration and awe. Even more important than these according to Bradley is the central impression of waste, the loss of goodness and nobility which the hero possessed before his fall.

This description of the effect that a noble but imperfect hero has upon the audience seems to be true as far as it goes, yet it lacks the depth of Aristotle's explanation, an explanation which is also true to our experience of Shakespeare. Pity and fear, the central tragic emotions, can be aroused only by a certain type of hero. "Pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune, fear by the misfortune of a man like ourselves."<sup>3</sup> If the hero's misfortune were brought about by some deep-seated depravity or vice in his character, we would experience a sense of justice, not pity. Hence, the hero must be morally good; his suffering, not altogether merited, beyond what he deserves. Yet he must not be perfect; otherwise we could not identify ourselves with him and fear for him and for ourselves. The patient suffering of the perfect man, the martyr, inspires admiration more than pity, and certainly not fear; the martyr is afraid of nothing.

But if the hero must be a man "like ourselves" this

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., XIII, 1453a, tr. Butcher, 45.

does not mean that he is a person of mediocre virtue and average powers. "This character," says S. H. Butcher, the famous modern commentator on the Poetics, "while it has its basis in reality, transcends it by a certain moral elevation"; and in power the hero "must be raised above the ordinary level; . . . he must possess a deeper vein of feeling, or heightened powers of intellect or will."<sup>4</sup> Nothing about him is trivial as in the common man, the man on the street. The hero, then, is an idealized man, one in whom the dignity of human nature stands forth in all its glory. For this reason, no doubt, the Greeks insisted that the hero be of high estate, a king, since the king was dignified, a god-man in the eyes of his subjects. Even in his character flaw or weakness, the hero is above the ordinary. He has that terrible passion, desire, and will that Bradley speaks of; never is his flaw something trivial or petty like the faults of the ordinary man.

These remarks on the noble hero obviously do not contradict anything Bradley has drawn from Shakespeare on this matter, but merely confirm, expand, and penetrate to the basis of his statement that the hero is the center of tragic action, a man with good yet imperfect character. Likewise, Bradley's analysis of Othello on this point is perfectly acceptable and is in

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<sup>4</sup> S. H. Butcher, Aristotle's Theory of Poetry and Fine Art, with critical text and translation of Poetics, Dover, 1951, 317.

fact about the only point which is universally admitted by critics. Othello is the hero of the play (although Bradley has obscured this fact by lavishing too much attention on Iago). He is a very noble and romantic hero, a man of self-control, modesty, and just pride; and yet, despite his dignity and calm, he is a man of vehement passion, a man of decisive action and unreflective mind. It suffices to recall these traits in order to recognize the validity of Bradley's analysis up to this point. Later it will be seen how some critics, F. R. Leavis<sup>5</sup> for example, charge Bradley with overemphasizing Othello's nobility, and others, such as E. E. Stoll,<sup>6</sup> who think that Othello's character is a psychological impossibility.

The second step in Bradley's analysis of Shakespeare has met with a storm of criticism: the hero's action proceeds from his character but involves no conscious breach of right. The concept of action proceeding from character has been attacked by the historical school of criticism. Critics like Stoll and Campbell say that such a concept leads one into the fallacy of treating characters as though they were real.<sup>7</sup> The concept may be perfectly valid when applied to real people. However, the

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5 The Common Pursuit, 136-159.

6 Art and Artifice, 6-55.

7 Lily B. Campbell, "Bradley Revisited," SP, 1947, 174-194; Stoll, Art and Artifice, 6-55.

characters of a play are subject to stage conventions and artifices which frequently (or always, according to Stoll) restrict the psychological probability of the character. In real life no one would ever act the way the hero of a play acts. His action proceeds not from some static character he possesses, but from exigencies of the playwright, the necessity of making the action move along. Frequently his action contradicts the qualities with which he has been endowed earlier in the play.<sup>8</sup>

This attack on Bradley is unwarranted. It contradicts what is found in Shakespeare and in Aristotle. Since Stoll's position is based especially upon Othello, its validity will be considered later in this chapter. For the present, it suffices to point out how at variance it is with the Poetics. First of all, one can recall the words of Bradley which gave rise to the dispute: "The center of tragedy . . . may be said with equal truth to lie in action issuing from character or in character issuing in action."<sup>9</sup> At first glance this might seem to contradict Aristotle's statement that the plot "is the first principle, and, as it were, the soul of a tragedy; character holds the second place."<sup>10</sup> Actually the two statements are in complete

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8 Art and Artifice, 6-55.

9 Shakespearean Tragedy, 11-12.

10 Poetics, VI, 1450a, tr. Butcher, 27, 29.



harmony. As Butcher notes, "Plot in the drama, in its fullest sense, is the artistic equivalent of 'action' in real life." This action in Aristotle "is not a purely external act, but an inward process which works outward, the expression of a man's rational personality."<sup>11</sup> "It embraces not only the deeds, the incidents, the situations, but also the mental processes, and the motives which underlie the outward events or which result from them. It is the compendious expression for all these forces working together towards a definite end."<sup>12</sup> The basis of these remarks which link action or plot with character can be found in Aristotle: "Thought and character are the two natural causes from which actions spring."<sup>13</sup> From this brief analysis it follows that Bradley's statement is in complete agreement with Aristotle's mind. Action or plot is the soul or center of tragedy; this action springs or proceeds from character as from a natural cause.

But what shall we say of Stoll's contention that the character of the hero is a psychological impossibility, his action inconsistent with his character? Again Aristotle seems to have spoken decisively against such a position: "Character must be true to life . . . [the next trait is] . . . consistency; for

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11 Poetry and Fine Art, 334.

12 Ibid., 337.

13 Poetics, V, 1450a, tr. Butcher, 25.

though the subject of the imitation, who suggested the type, be inconsistent, still he must be consistently inconsistent."<sup>14</sup>

Furthermore, the character should be probable.

As in the structure of the plot, so too in the portraiture of character, the poet should always aim either at the necessary or the probable. Thus a person of a given character should speak or act in a given way, by the rule either of necessity or of probability; just as this event should follow that by necessary or probable sequence.<sup>15</sup>

The basis of Stoll's attack upon Bradley seems, then, to be rooted in a denial of Aristotle's general concept of art as an imitation of nature, and of tragedy as an imitation of human action. In nature, in human action as it is found in the real world, character and action are always bound together; in the world of art they must be found the same way, true to life, though of course idealized. Stoll on the contrary abstracts action completely from characters and makes it dependent solely upon stage conventions and artifices; and in so doing he is left with something untrue to life, incapable of drawing the sympathy of an audience.

Thus far we have vindicated Bradley's principle, drawn from Shakespeare, that the hero's action proceeds from character. However, this statement is incomplete; Bradley adds that the action involves no conscious breach of right, as we saw in the

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<sup>14</sup> Poetics, XV, 1454a, tr. Butcher, 53, 55.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., XV, 1454a, tr. Butcher, 55.

previous chapter. The hero precipitates his downfall by committing some error, an action or omission; this error is unconscious, often committed with full conviction of right. Moreover, if a hero should be conscious of his error, this consciousness will greatly diminish his tragic stature. Bradley cites Richard III as an example of this.

On the face of it, the concept of unconscious error would seem to deny that the hero is responsible for his action. Certainly what is done unwittingly is not blameworthy, unless the hero's ignorance is itself culpable. Unfortunately, Aristotle's doctrine in this matter is hotly disputed. Butcher is of the opinion that in many tragedies the error is committed unconsciously and that the hero is or is not responsible for his action depending on whether or not he is responsible for his ignorance.<sup>16</sup> Butcher agrees with Bradley that culpability is not necessary for tragedy; "a single great error, whether morally culpable or not; a single great defect in a character otherwise noble,--each and all of these may carry with them the tragic issues of life and death."<sup>17</sup>

That the tragic error need not be culpable is an unacceptable interpretation of Aristotle's position. Culpability and responsibility are implied in Aristotle's description of the

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16 Fine Art and Poetry, 318.

17 Ibid., 321.

hero as one not eminently just or good, one whose tragic downfall is brought about by his own frailty. Obviously, if the tragic error were unconscious and guiltless the hero would be subjectively perfect, eminently good and just. The imperfection of the hero is moral imperfection. He is "a man like ourselves." Man in real life, the object of the tragedian's art, is morally imperfect, and moreover is responsible for his actions which make him imperfect. Thus true tragic action must be an actus humanus, an act which proceeds from reason and will, a conscious act, a free act. Only such an act is proper to man as man, and is completely within his dominion. Only this human act can account for man's true dignity, a nature endowed with intellect and free will. It is this action which the dramatist must imitate to give us real tragedy; otherwise he is not imitating human nature in its essential activity. In some sense, then, the hero's tragic error must be a responsible act. Either he sins in vincible, culpable ignorance, or he directly intends something morally reprehensible as an end or means, or else there is an evil effect connected with his action, an evil effect which he foresees and which he is prohibited by natural law from permitting.

Of course, it is not necessary that the consequent suffering and calamity be entirely deserved: if such were the case, there would be very little pity for the hero. Conversely, the tragic suffering must at least be partially deserved; other-

wise there would be no fear "for a man like ourselves" but mere pathos. Death from an automobile accident is pathetic; but it rouses no fear in the audience. But death or calamity brought on by a culpable free will act--this inspires fear; "this I could bring upon myself." Only such a downfall is truly tragic.

But perhaps Bradley would object that this Scholastic explanation of tragic action was not Shakespeare's; Bradley would remind the reader that the Elizabethan drama was almost wholly secular and that Shakespeare confined himself to the world of non-theological observation and thought.<sup>18</sup> To this we can reply that the Scholastic doctrine on the human act was commonly accepted in Elizabethan, Anglican England. Only later, when the Puritans rose to power, was free will denied in accordance with calvinistic doctrine. Besides, it is certain Shakespeare was not a Puritan, whatever else he may have been. That the doctrine of free will and responsibility was commonly accepted, and therefore implicit in Shakespeare's tragedies, has been attested to by Willard Farnham of the University of California in an interesting historical study, The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy. "It is thus one distinction of St. Thomas to have prepared a part of the way for Shakespearean tragedy."<sup>19</sup> The con-

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18 Shakespearean Tragedy, 25.

19 Willard Farnham, The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy, Berkeley, 1936, 126.

tribution of St. Thomas is precisely his teaching concerning the human act and responsibility of man for moral evil.

St. Thomas knows that in order to give man this responsibility for his defects of action the theologian must also give him a power of choice and a power of reason to guide that choice which shall be stamped with human individuality. . . . One must admit that it (St. Thomas' teaching) is an unequivocal fixing of fault upon humanity for human failure in action . . . <sup>20</sup>

That St. Thomas made such an important contribution to Shakespearean tragedy is a generous admission from a scholar who in no way shares St. Thomas' philosophy or religion. It is unfortunate that Bradley was unaware of this important influence in Shakespearean tragedy; unfortunate also that he approached the great tragedies with a mind thoroughly penetrated with Kantian and Hegelian philosophy, for in doing so he lost an even deeper appreciation of Shakespeare. The importance of a knowledge of Scholastic philosophy for the Shakespearean critic has been aptly expressed by Father William H. McCabe, S. J., former English professor at St. Louis University.

For between the Greeks and Shakespeare a great thing had intervened: the sublime marriage, in the thirteenth century, of the Hebrew-Christian tradition of divinity and humanity to Greek truth, in the Summa of St. Thomas Aquinas. . . . And just as the tragedy of the Greeks is unintelligible without an intimate knowledge of their view of religion, so modern tragedy after the Summa's diffusion through the Christian world cannot be understood except in the light of Scholasticism, refracted though that light has been . . . Especially is Shakespeare incomprehensible save in that light. . .

This is no naive assertion that Shakespeare was a Catholic or that he actually felt a Dantesque vocation to make poetry out of Scholasticism; but it does mean that the critic who knows little of, and attends less to Scholasticism's Christian interpretation of the universe, will miss something important in Shakespearean tragedy.<sup>21</sup>

The truth of Father McCabe's last remark is borne out especially in Bradley's analysis of Othello on the matter of unconscious error. Bradley exonerated Othello from all blame for his tragic error. Othello was not easily jealous even though he was disturbed by Iago's lies. Othello's trust in Iago was blameless because Iago was his companion in arms and because everyone else in the play thought that Iago was honest and trustworthy. Othello's ignorance of Venetian customs and his overidealized love of Desdemona made him powerless to repel Iago's artful suggestions. Up to the third scene of the third act, line 239--the temptation scene--Othello is not "properly" jealous; he is merely troubled; and furthermore he is blameless. Once convinced of Desdemona's guilt, Othello acts with a full conviction of right; Desdemona's death is not a murder but a sacrifice offered in righteous indignation, and not out of jealousy. Othello has committed no conscious breach of right, and there is nothing in Bradley's analysis to indicate guilt even in causa.

Critics have not been slow to react against this in-

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21 William H. McCabe, S. J., "The Tragic Theodicy," Modern Schoolman, XII, November, 1934, 31-32.

terpretation of Othello. F. R. Leavis has pointed out that Bradley's view--which is also Coleridge's and the traditional view of Othello--is pure sentimentality and displaces the center of the tragedy. This view holds that "it was external evil, the malice of the demi-devil, that turned a happy story of romantic love--of romantic lovers who were qualified to live happily ever after, so to speak--into a tragedy."<sup>22</sup> Leavis repeatedly points out that Bradley's Othello is too noble, that Bradley sees him only through his (Othello's) eyes and not as Shakespeare saw him. Contrary to Bradley's position, explained in the previous chapter, Othello was easily jealous. He yielded to Iago's promptings very quickly and easily. Beginning at about line ninety in the third scene of Act Three, Iago begins his sustained attack (after Desdemona's exit); and within seventy lines he can say

O, beware, my lord, of jealousy!  
It is the green-eyed monster, which doth mock  
The meat it feeds on . . .<sup>23</sup>

while all Othello can do is gasp, "O misery!" In another ninety lines the noble, "not easily jealous" hero is saying, "Why did I marry?"<sup>24</sup> Only blindness, says Leavis, would lead one to con-

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22 "Diabolic Intellect and the Noble Hero," The Common Pursuit, 137.

23 Othello, III, iii, 165-167.

24 Ibid., 242.



clude that Othello is not jealous here. "And it is plain that what we should see in Iago's prompt success is not so much Iago's diabolic intellect as Othello's readiness to respond. Iago's power, in fact, . . . is that he represents something that is in Othello . . . the essential traitor is within the gates."<sup>25</sup>

What is this "essential traitor," Othello's character flaw? According to Leavis, his flaw is a certain self-centeredness or egotism, a habit of self-approving self-dramatization:

Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them.<sup>26</sup>

and

Behold, I have a weapon.<sup>27</sup>

Along with this egotism in an otherwise noble character, there is also a lack of self-knowledge, "a virtue which Othello, as soldier of fortune hasn't had much need of."<sup>28</sup> He has the necessary qualities for a life of action and all its trials, but the trials facing him once he has married a Venetian girl are of an entirely different order. As another critic, Samuel Klinger,<sup>29</sup>

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25 Common Pursuit, 140-141.

26 Othello, I, ii, 59.

27 Ibid., V, ii, 259.

28 Common Pursuit, 142.

29 Samuel Klinger, "Othello: the Man of Judgment," Modern Philology, XLIV, 225-237.

has pointed out, Othello cannot judge decisively or correctly when domestic duties conflict with military duties, as in Desdemona's pleas for Cassio's reinstatement. Yet in the first act, Othello had promised that there would be no such conflict.

No, when light-wing'd toys  
Of feather'd Cupid seel with wanton dullness  
My speculative and offic'd instruments  
That my disports corrupt and taint my business,  
Let housewives make a skillet of my helm.<sup>30</sup>

This same passage belies another self-deception.

Othello disclaims the possibility that sexual love might ever get the better of him--a fatal attitude for any man to assume, human nature being what it is. A few lines below this passage, Othello again disclaims the feelings of sexual love, and it is the night of his marriage!

Duke. . . . the affaires cry hast,  
And speede must answer, you must hence to night.  
Desdemona. To night my Lord?  
Duke. This night.  
Othello. With all my heart.<sup>31</sup> (Underlining is mine.)

Another critic, Leo Kirshbaum,<sup>32</sup> has pointed out the difference between Desdemona's reaction, a perfectly human and justifiable reaction, and the stoical answer of Othello. He places himself above human passion somewhat like Angelo in

30 Othello, I, 111, 269-73.

31 Ibid., I, 111, 276-79.

32 Leo Kirshbaum, "The Modern Othello," Journal of English Literary History, XI, 1944, 290-91.

Measure for Measure, but Othello's self-delusion remains to the end. Even when he murders Desdemona, he refuses to admit that sexual feelings of jealousy are moving him, but assumes the "god-pose," administering justice.

Actually, Othello's love for Desdemona is much more sexual and more selfish than he will admit. As Leavis remarks, "It may be love, but it can be only in an oddly qualified sense love of her; it must be much more a matter of self-centered and self-regarding satisfactions--pride, sensual possessiveness, appetite, love of loving--than he suspects."<sup>33</sup> Indications of this lower aspect of Othello's love are found in his soliloquy after the temptation scene:

O curse of marriage,  
That we can call these delicate creatures ours  
And not their appetites! I had rather be a toad,  
And live upon the vapour of a dungeon,  
Than keep a corner in the thing I love  
For others' uses.<sup>34</sup>

Given these tragic traits, his habit of self-idealization, self-dramatization, his lack of knowledge regarding his own shortcomings, his refusal to consider himself as ordinarily human and subject to sexual passion and jealousy, it is quite understandable and consistent with his character, that he falls into Iago's snares. This does not mean that Othello was habit-

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<sup>33</sup> Common Pursuit, 145.

<sup>34</sup> Othello, III, iii, 268-273.

ually jealous but that "his past history hasn't been such as to test his proneness to sexual jealousy--has, in fact, thereby been such as to increase his potentialities in just that respect."<sup>35</sup>

Against this view, which seems to be the only admissible one, F. E. Stoll has labored to show that Othello is psychologically inconsistent as a character. He starts out with a nature "not easily jealous," and then becomes easily jealous.

And it is only . . . by means of a specious and unreal psychology that he is made incapable of distrusting the testimony which his nature forbids him to accept, to the point of distrusting the testimony and character of those whom both his nature and their own forbid him to discredit.<sup>36</sup>

In Stoll's opinion, no psychological theory can explain away the apparent contradictions and inconsistencies in Othello. Othello acts the way he does (believes Iago) because Shakespeare is using a stage convention, the "calumniator credited." Thus the hero's action is imposed upon him from without, and Stoll adduces many instances from Elizabethan drama to prove that Shakespeare is merely following his contemporaries. The Bard's genius consists merely in the skill with which he employs these artifices.

The error in Stoll's position arises from the supposi-

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35 Common Pursuit, 159.

36 Historical Analysis of Othello, 33.

tion that Othello was not easily jealous because he showed no previous disposition, no habitual jealous temperament in the early part of the play. As we have fully shown above, Othello had never been tested against jealousy; and, given his weakness of character, his habit of self deception, and his lack of self-knowledge with regard to sexual passions and domestic life, his fall is perfectly consistent and probable. In fact, from beginning to end--even to his suicide soliloquy--Othello remains self-deluded; that which makes his character consistent is his refusal to see himself as subject to human sexual passions, his self-idealization.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, Stoll's interpretation of Othello reduces the tragic action to an artifice and robs the play of its truly universal value, a value which can be explained only by viewing the play as an imitation of an actus humanus, an action proceeding from the free will of a character who is "true to life."

Both Stoll and Bradley share the same erroneous view of Othello as so noble and faultless that either his error is improbable or, as Bradley holds, blameless. The truth lies between these extremes. Othello's tragic action is both probable and culpable. As discussed above, the Scholastic doctrine of free will and responsibility influenced Shakespeare and his audi-

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37 Kirshbaum, "The Modern Othello," ELH, 290, 91.

ence, and is therefore implicit in the tragedies. But even in Othello itself we can see that the hero's action is blameworthy, not due entirely to Iago. As Kirshbaum has pointed out,

Othello is not the only noble character in the play who falls because of the wiles of Iago. Cassio does too. But Cassio does not excuse himself of culpability. He too follows the doctrine laid down by Iago above. ('Tis in ourselves that we are thus or thus . . . power and corrigible authority . . . lies in our wills.'<sup>38</sup>). . . Clearly Cassio considers that his succumbing to the devil was his own fault. He does not exonerate himself of responsibility for his own ruin. An Elizabethan audience would not have understood a dramatist who implied that the Devil was man's nemesis. Man had free will.<sup>39</sup>

Othello also recognizes that he is responsible for the murder of Desdemona, but unlike Cassio he does not humbly repent his sin or come to know himself better. He remains self-deluded to the end as he continues to dramatize himself and assume the "god-pose" of nobility in his suicide.

But to what extent is Othello responsible for the death of Desdemona and his own suffering? This is difficult to answer. But certainly he is responsible entirely for his habit of self-idealization, his self-delusion, his refusal to see himself as ordinarily human with regard to sex. These habitual attitudes which he possesses from the beginning lead him to jealousy, lead him to kill Desdemona, and to commit suicide. He is, then,

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38 Othello, I, 111, 322-331.

39 "The Modern Othello," 284-85.

responsible in causa for his tragic error. More than this cannot be safely said; but to say anything less would rob Othello of his true stature as a tragic, responsible, hero.

The next point of criticism concerns the third principle which Bradley has drawn out of Shakespeare: the tragic action is a conflict of spiritual forces both of which are good in themselves. This conflict, as explained in the previous chapter, can take place either within the hero's soul or externally between the hero and some antagonist(s). The spiritual forces are "good" either in the ethical sense or in the sense that they are considered valuable by men generally, e.g., great imagination, ambition, intellectual power, et cetera.

In general the notion of conflict is in no way opposed to the traditional Aristotelian theory. "Conflict" defines tragic action more precisely; "interior conflict" stresses the action as springing from character. With equal truth can we modify Aristotle's maxim to say that the soul of a tragedy is the dramatic conflict, the collision of forces. A truly great tragedy will portray an intense, internal conflict; it is here especially that Shakespeare excels. Of course, this struggle must always, manifest itself outwardly. There can be no tragedy of pure mental states, since these can be inferred only from words and actions.

The forces in conflict--are they both good in themselves? and in what sense? Here Bradley is rather vague with his

terminology and fails to define carefully what he means by "good" and by "spiritual forces." What he seems to mean by "spiritual forces" is any desire or motive which is in itself good or indifferent, e. g., in Macbeth loyalty to the king and personal ambition. In themselves these are not morally evil, and they are of great value and held in great esteem as long as they are not disordered. But why do two such desires in the soul of a man or between men come into collision? In the case of inner conflict there is moral disorder involved. Macbeth has a duty--according to the natural law--to be loyal to Duncan, the rightful king; yet he freely yields to temptation, allowing his personal ambition to over-ride the rights of the king. Moral evil, then, is the center of the inner conflict. Yet Bradley's theory of unconscious error excludes moral evil in the hero himself. The only kind of evil that would be present in the soul of the hero would be the Hegelian dialectical evil, the process of theses, antithesis, synthesis--duty to king, personal ambition negating this duty, and finally in Macbeth's death a harmony or synthesis of the two. Hegel, and Bradley after him, would say that these two "spiritual forces" are in the soul of the hero and are by their very nature contradictory. The collision takes place with logical necessity. This, of course, rules out free will and true human action; hence Bradley's Hegelian theory at this point is to be rejected.

Similarly, the external conflict--ambitious Macbeth



versus the men loyal to Duncan--is also caused by moral evil, by a free will which violates the right of another. Bradley and Hegel would explain the external conflict with the dialectical process again--and again this would rule out free will and true moral evil. The evil that Bradley talks about seems to be only physical evil--"a privation which mars man's completeness or hinders his proper activity: in a word, pain of body or soul," as Father McCabe, S. J., defines it.<sup>40</sup> Moral evil, on the contrary, is the disorder that results from a free will act against the natural law, the norm of man's action. With this distinction clearly in mind, we can say that tragedy is a conflict of spiritual forces, desires, motives. These forces collide, not out of a dialectical necessity, nor because they are morally good (for in that case there would be no collision at all, since loyalty to a king rightly ordered is in no way opposed to personal ambition rightly ordered). They collide because one of them violates the natural law, and hence becomes morally evil. Thus moral evil is the center of the conflict in tragedy.

Since Bradley has not stressed the idea of conflict in his analysis of Othello, it will not be necessary to delay long on this idea, except to remark briefly that the external conflict in this play, as Bradley interprets it, has been over-balanced. Iago's importance is greatly exaggerated. Bradley

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<sup>40</sup> "The Tragic Theodicy," Modern Schoolman, XII, 30.

gives him twice as much attention as Othello. So much stress is placed upon the diabolic intellect and vast powers of Iago that Othello is almost eclipsed. Obviously, this is untenable. There is no tragic action in Iago; he is bad from beginning to end. As F. R. Leavis explains,<sup>41</sup> Iago is a necessary piece of dramatic machinery; he is subordinate and ancillary to Othello. The tragedy is Othello's character in action, not Iago's. The exaltation of this villain by Bradley and other modern critics is the corollary of their sentimental view of Othello's nobility. Having made Othello so noble and faultless, these critics sought the entire evil of the tragedy in Iago and spent page after page searching for his motives. Actually Iago is sufficiently convincing for his function in the play; there is no need of motive-hunting. Othello is the chief personage; the critics time and study should be spent on him.

Closely related to the principle of conflict is the next step in Bradley's theory, namely, that Shakespearean tragedy is a conflict which leads essentially to the death of the hero, his catastrophe. The validity of this principle is doubtful. Even granting that the hero dies in the great tragedies of Shakespeare, one can understandably object that it is not essential to tragedy. The Oedipus Rex, the greatest of Greek dramas, does not end in the death of the hero; and there is nothing in the

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41 Common Pursuit, 138.

Poetics to indicate its necessity. Bradley's insistence on the death of the hero indicates once more his Hegelian background, especially the dialectic. The catastrophe resolves the antithesis between the conflicting spiritual forces. Negatively, it is the act of the moral order, inflicting death on the hero because he has contracted evil and because it (the moral order) is alien from and necessarily rebels against evil. Positively, the catastrophe brings harmony because the hero is united in death, in a moment of exultation, with this moral order.

Once more the problem of evil is involved in Bradley's theory. Again he confuses physical and moral evil. The hero by his free will act has contracted moral evil, not physical evil. The moral order or ultimate power of the tragic order need only be concerned with moral evil; in fact the tragedy itself is centered around moral evil. But death is a physical evil. How can the moral order of which Bradley speaks inflict death on the hero and thereby destroy the hero's moral evil? How can the hero's moral evil ever be harmonized with the moral order, since it is "alien from evil" and rebels against it? The infliction of death upon the hero is clearly incapable of securing a moral harmony, and is therefore not essential to tragedy. What is essential is that the hero be humbled, recognize his tragic error and his responsibility for it.

Bradley's interpretation of Othello's death verifies his general theory. Othello dies in a moment of exultation; in

his suicide—he is greater and nobler than ever; he is brought into magnificent harmony with the moral order. For a critic with a background in Scholastic ethics, this interpretation is completely unacceptable; there is nothing noble or great about a Christian's committing suicide, and certainly an Elizabethan audience would not have exulted over Othello's death. Bradley sees Othello's death only through Othello's eyes. This is unfortunate because Othello is self-deluded. He is once more dramatizing himself in the closing scene: "Behold I have a sword," et cetera.<sup>42</sup> He is a pitiful sight and sees himself as such: when his sword is easily wrested from him.

Man but a rush against Othello's breast,  
And he retires. Where shall Othello go?<sup>43</sup>

He is essentially unchanged; "the tragedy doesn't involve the idea of the hero's learning through suffering."<sup>44</sup> In his famous last speech he still sees himself as "not easily jealous."<sup>45</sup> He contemplates the spectacle of himself, and is overcome by it. T. S. Eliot has made a penetrating comment on Othello's last speech:

What Othello seems to me to be doing in making this speech is cheering himself up. He is endeavouring to escape reality, he has ceased to think about Desdemona,

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<sup>42</sup> Othello, V, 11, 259.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 270.

<sup>44</sup> Common Pursuit, 151.

<sup>45</sup> Othello, V, 11, 345.

and is thinking about himself. Humility is the most difficult of all virtues to achieve; nothing dies harder than the desire to think well of oneself. Othello succeeds in turning himself into a pathetic figure, by adopting an aesthetic rather than a moral attitude, dramatizing himself against his environment. He takes in the spectator, but the human motive is primarily to take in himself. I do not believe that any writer has ever exposed this bovarysme, the human will to see things as they are not, more clearly than Shakespeare.<sup>46</sup>

Contrary to Bradley, then, Othello's death is not noble and great; it is tragic, he dies undecieved, still refusing to face the reality of his nature. There seems to be no foundation here for a Hegelian catastrophe--harmony and exultation at the moment of death.

Bradley departs from his concept of exultation and harmony in the catastrophe when he considers the central tragic impression, the tragic emotions. Pity and fear unite with and merge in a profound sense of sadness and mystery at the waste of so much good. Man's nobility only tortures itself and throws itself away, and we know not why. This impression of waste is for Bradley the central tragic emotion. As he interprets Othello, this impression seems to be mainly pathos at the spectacle of noble beings suffering and unable to escape, pathos at the suffering of Othello and Desdemona. The only fear involved seems to be a shudder of fright at Iago's evil mind and intrigue, a

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<sup>46</sup> T. S. Eliot, "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Seneca," Shakespeare Criticism 1919-1935, Anne Bradby, ed., London, 1941, 213.

feeling of oppression and confinement to a world of dark fatality.

This interpretation puts too much stress upon pathos and fate. The true emotion of fear is caused by the catastrophe of a "man like ourselves." That is, the audience fears for the hero because like themselves, he has free will, and with his own will he has brought upon himself--to some extent--his suffering. The audience fears also for themselves because, like the hero, they could bring upon themselves a similar calamity, commit a similar error because of some character weakness. Bradley's stress upon the pathetic and pitiful aspect of tragedy in Shakespeare is a logical corollary of his principle of unconscious error. If the hero falls unwittingly, we can experience great pathos for him, and shudder at the oppressiveness of fate, but we cannot experience fear "for a man like ourselves." Such a tragedy is centered around physical evil imposed from without, whereas Shakespearean tragedy, especially as we have seen it in Othello, is mainly concerned with moral evil which proceeds from the free will act of the hero. In saying this, however, we must be careful not to deny that much evil and suffering are imposed from without, and that the hero suffers (together with other characters) much more than he deserves. In fact, Desdemona's suffering is entirely undeserved. We are faced with the problem and mystery of evil which Bradley has described as the impression of waste. However, it is essential to stress also an important

element in this mystery--the free will and responsibility of man. This Bradley has neglected to do.

The last step in his analysis of Shakespeare is directly concerned with the problem: How do we explain this waste of good? Who really causes this suffering and evil? Initially, Bradley assigns a dual causality, the human will with the character flaw and the error, and the external necessity of the moral order. But in the end he reduces this dualism to one all-embracing cause, the omnipotent moral order which includes within itself--as its parts, expressions, or products--all of the characters, good and evil. This pantheistic moral order is described as "akin to good and alien from evil"; yet it engenders through the characters the very evil it seeks so violently to destroy. "It is not poisoned; it poisons itself." It is responsible both for the good in Desdemona and the evil in Iago. The characters do not really cause the evil since they are merely parts of this moral order; they are not outside it so as to be able to attack it or fail to conform to it.<sup>47</sup> And in the catastrophe, this moral order suffers and wastes itself, destroys the evil and in so doing loses a part of its own substance, because the goodness in the characters is destroyed along with the evil. This waste of good is the real tragedy.<sup>48</sup>

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47 Shakespearean Tragedy, 37.

48 Ibid., 38.

Before rendering a criticism of this pantheistic interpretation of Shakespeare, we must in all fairness to Bradley consider the gigantic task which he set before himself--to solve or explain to some extent the mystery of evil as it is found in Shakespeare's tragedies. Even Scholastic doctrine explains very little of this mystery, and it would be foolish to maintain otherwise. Fr. McCabe, S. J., has very pointedly rebuked those Catholics who think they have explained away the mystery:

There is too much simplicity in the facile supposition that Catholic theology abolishes the problem utterly, that it clears up all details of the relations between Almighty Providence and man's use or misuse of free will in his quest for happiness. For instant proof of the opposite, recall the white heat of the Banez-Molina controversy on Grace in the late sixteenth century, a high refinement of speculation on the Problem of Evil, the inherent supernatural interest of which must not obscure the perseverance of the riddle for Catholics on a this-worldly, natural plane as well.<sup>49</sup>

If theology itself cannot solve the riddle in all its details, obviously we must not expect the dramatist or the critic to do so. "Intellectually, tragedy at its best does for man regarding the Problem of Evil what philosophy does for him regarding, for example, the Trinity: shows him the non-repugnance to reason of a mystery that it cannot explain."<sup>50</sup> Non-repugnance to reason--this much we can expect from a critic who seeks to analyze the cause of evil in tragedy; therefore a true criticism of Bradley

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49 "The Tragic Theodicy," Modern Schoolman, XII, 32.

50 Ibid., 30.



will reject whatever contradictions there are in his theory.

To analyse Shakespeare's presentation of the mystery of evil, the critic should conceive truly the elements of the problem. Most important of all is the nature of evil itself. As we have already observed, Bradley confuses physical and moral evil. He uses the word "moral" but seems to mean only an act proceeding from one's character such as Desdemona's suffering and perplexity of mind, or Othello's anguish--in other words pain of soul which is a physical evil. Nowhere does Bradley include within the notion of moral evil a free will act in so far as it is disordered.

The omnipotent moral order causes both good and evil through the characters in such a way that it is responsible for the suffering and calamity (again, physical evil). This is the only possible meaning of Bradley's statement: ". . . the spectacle we witness scarcely warrants the assertion that the order is responsible for the good in Desdemona, but Iago for the evil in Iago."<sup>49</sup> From the context, the implication is that the moral order is responsible for both. "It is not poisoned; it poisons itself."<sup>50</sup> Since the characters are part of this pantheistic moral order and not outside of it, they are not free to attack it or fail to conform to it. In bringing about evil, the moral

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49 Ibid., 37.

50 Ibid.

order acts from a necessity of its nature; <sup>51</sup> this logically leads to a denial of free will and true responsibility in the hero's tragic action.

This interpretation of tragedy leads Bradley into a patent contradiction. At one and the same time and under the same aspect, the omnipotent moral order or ultimate power is "akin to good, alien from evil" yet causes evil; but if it causes evil then it is immoral--"it is untrue to its own soul of goodness," as Bradley himself admits. <sup>52</sup> This explanation puts evil in God; it is the inevitable weakness in a pantheistic explanation of evil and the universe. Bradley follows Hegel here; and, as was noted in the second chapter, the Hegelian God (the Absolute Mind) is always giving birth to self-contradictions according to the rigid dialectical law of thesis, antithesis, synthesis. Likewise Bradley's moral order begins in a state of goodness-thesis; then it gives birth to a self-contradiction by causing evil--antithesis; and finally it destroys this contradiction by inflicting death on the hero--synthesis or harmony restored. As with Hegel, so in Bradley's explanation, free will is logically excluded.

The only way in which these intrinsic contradictions--which are repugnant to reason--can be avoided is by asserting the

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51 Ibid., 36.

52 Ibid., 38.

doctrine that man has free will and is the cause of moral evil. The moral order is really the natural law; passive sumpta it is merely the individual human nature of each man, the order of man to his end; active sumpta, this law or moral order is in God's intellect and will, really separate from individual men. True, man is the product, the expression, in a very profound sense, of God's mind, but a product really separate from Him and endowed with free will so that he can as it were attack this order and fail to conform to it. Hence, God as the ultimate power is not responsible for moral evil. He does not cause it; He permits it. Thus, man alone is responsible for moral evil. This Scholastic explanation of moral evil involves no contradictions. It is not repugnant to reason--although it may not (in fact, does not) explain all the elements of the mystery. Why is it that man suffers more than he deserves? What is the reason for permitting this particular suffering? We simply cannot give the reason for the permissions of evil in a particular situation. God may be testing someone, or inflicting punishment for sin--but we cannot be sure. All we know is that somehow God will draw good out of evil--this is the necessary condition for permitting it in the first place.

Although it is necessary to reject Bradley's explanation of the mystery of evil as presented by Shakespearean tragedy, we should also point out the element of truth in his Hegelian theory of self-contradiction. Because of original sin--a fact

ascertainable by revelation only--there is a sort of contradiction in man's life, another law fighting in his members. Original sin darkened man's intellect and weakened his will. Man's sensible appetites are no longer subordinate to reason. In such a state man cannot long abstain from sin without supernatural help. "In statu naturae corruptae non potest homo implere omnia mandata divina sine gratia sanante."<sup>53</sup> Without this help man will certainly sin, but this doctrine in no way denies free will or culpability. However, Hegel and Bradley accept man merely as he appears in real life; they try to explain his strange conduct, his constant waywardness, without the facts of revelation, especially the fact of original sin and its consequences in man. They interpret man (and the whole universe about him) as something essentially contradictory and corrupted, whereas in truth he is changed only accidentally (in the philosophical sense of that word).

This criticism of Bradley has drifted momentarily away from Shakespeare. Recall here the initial question Bradley set out to answer: What is Shakespeare's concept of the tragic? Bradley warned against beginning with an a priori theory; he insisted that one should begin with Shakespeare's tragedies and slowly induce the tragic view of the poet. But it is difficult, if not impossible, to make such an approach; one's philosophical

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<sup>53</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologiae, I-II, 109, 4.

bias enters in. This happened to Bradley. He answered his initial question with a Hegelian explanation that denies free will, and excludes true responsibility in the hero. If in our criticism in this chapter the philosophical bias of Scholasticism has entered in (as it no doubt has) it can nonetheless be claimed as an historical fact that the same bias is implicit in Shakespeare's tragedies as a heritage of the Middle Ages--the free will and responsibility of the hero for his tragic action.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

In summary of the work of the preceding chapters the following conclusions can be listed. Bradley's life reveals certain philosophical influences--mostly Hegelian--which contributed to his analysis of Shakespeare's tragedies. His teachers, T. H. Green and R. L. Nettleship (both neo-Hegelians) profoundly influenced Bradley's intellectual life with an idealistic, pantheistic concept of the world along with a deterministic view of human activity. A brief survey of Hegel's theory of tragedy revealed that the tragic action was a dialectical process ruled by a rigid logical necessity; each of the characters, protagonist and antagonist, represents some universal ethical value, and in the collision both are subjectively in the right. Bradley adapted this theory to apply more easily to Shakespeare by stressing the conflict as one of personal passion, especially within the soul of the hero; in other respects the theory remained unchanged.

In his introductory lecture in Shakespearean Tragedy Bradley set out to analyse the tragedies and arrive at the poet's concept of the tragic, stated in propositional form. The results

of this analysis--which have been called "Bradley's theory of Shakespearean tragedy"--involved the following principles: (1) a noble but one-sided hero is the center of the tragic action; (2) the action of the hero proceeds from his character in such a way as to involve no conscious breach of right; (3) the tragic action may be viewed also as a conflict of spiritual forces both of which are good in themselves, and this may be and should be both internal in the soul of the hero and external between the hero and an antagonist; (4) this conflict is resolved in the catastrophe by the death of the hero which is necessary to restore harmony to the tragic world; (5) the central tragic impression or emotion is that of sadness at the waste of so much good; (6) the cause of this waste is really the ultimate power or moral order which engenders through the characters both good and evil, and in the catastrophe destroys this evil and thus restores harmony.

We exemplified these general principles by showing how Bradley interpreted Othello in accordance with them. Othello is a noble and romantic hero who nonetheless is a man of vehement passion and of an overtrustful nature. He commits his tragic error in a full conviction of right. His trust in Iago is not blameworthy, and Bradley agrees with Othello that he was not easily jealous--Iago was to blame. Iago, the antagonist in the conflict, is a man of great but perverted intellectual and volitional power; his motive, discussed at great length by Bradley,

is a thwarted sense of superiority. The conflict is resolved in the catastrophe by the death of Othello, who in his suicide is greater and nobler than ever; he dies in a moment of exultation and is "harmonized" with the moral order. The play leaves us with an impression of great pity and sadness at the spectacle of noble beings, Othello and Desdemona, caught in toils from which there is no escape. The responsibility for the good in Desdemona and Othello, and for the evil in Iago, falls upon the moral order which has caused the conflict by a necessity of its nature.

Criticism of Bradley's theory revealed that the concept of action proceeding from character agreed substantially with the Poetics--a concept unjustly attacked by Stoll, who considers the characters as psychologically improbable and inconsistent. Bradley's concept of the noble but one-sided hero seemed on the face of it to agree with the dicta of Aristotle, but his theory of unconscious error showed that he had in fact exaggerated the hero's nobility to such an extent as to exonerate him from all blame. Historical study by Farnham revealed that it is part of the medieval heritage in Shakespeare that the hero's action is a human act, a free will act, and that he is responsible for his tragic error in cause at least. The same faults were found in Bradley's interpretation of Othello. Actually, Othello was not quite as noble or romantic as Bradley suggested. He was easily jealous, not habitually so, but in the sense that he had never been tested before. His habits of self-



idealization, self-dramatization, and self-delusion, along with a lack of self-knowledge, made him peculiarly vulnerable to Iago's temptation. Othello is responsible for these habits, for his character weakness; hence he is responsible in cause at least for his tragic fall. Iago is sufficiently convincing as an antagonist, but his is not the tragic action. He is ancillary to Othello; hence Bradley has exaggerated his importance, over-balanced the play--the corollary to Othello's exaggerated nobility. The hero's death is not glorious but tragic; his suicide, an instance once more of Othello's self-dramatizing habit. Moreover, if one considers Bradley's theory in the abstract, death is not necessary to tragedy; it is powerless to destroy moral evil.

Sadness at the waste of so much good--this is certainly true to our experience of Shakespeare's tragedies, but this seems to be more pathos than "fear for a man like ourselves." Such fear is an important factor in our tragic emotion, but depends upon tragic action for which the hero is responsible, and upon suffering which the hero has to some extent brought upon himself. Bradley's tendency toward mere pathos is no doubt the corollary of "unconscious error."

In his attempt to sound the depths of the mystery of evil, the waste of good, in the tragic world, Bradley adopted a position which was found to be unacceptable because it is repugnant to reason. Because the pantheistic moral order is akin

to good, yet causes evil, it is a contradiction in terms. This contradiction arises from the fact that Bradley makes all the characters in the play parts or expressions of the moral order so that they are not free to commit evil; this throws the burden of responsibility entirely upon the ultimate power itself. This contradiction can be avoided only by giving the characters free will so that they, and not God, are responsible for moral evil. This is much truer to our experience of Shakespeare.

The element of truth in Bradley's Hegelian theory of self-contradiction is the fact of man's corrupt nature, the result of original sin; the fact that man cannot be morally good without supernatural help from God because his powers of soul are now disordered, at war with one another. However, man's will is still free, and still responsible for its good and bad acts.

Unfortunately, the burden of this study has been rather negative. This emphasis was necessary, however, because the very heart of tragedy is man's free will activity, an activity which is logically excluded in Bradley's theory. Here at the end of our criticism it is only fitting to point out a few of Bradley's many good qualities as a critic. Along with his scholarship, he has a fine intuitive grasp of the intellectual and emotional nuances in Shakespeare's tragedies. He is keenly aware of the spiritual nature of the conflict, and of the fact that Shakespeare reaches the full height of his powers when he portrays the

conflict in the interior of man's soul. Bradley's idea of the impression of waste shows that he is highly sensitive to the presence of evil, of suffering, of calamity in the tragic world. His description of this mystery has been frequently quoted by modern critics. He is humble also in admitting that his own explanation of the cause of suffering and evil is not altogether satisfactory, and that tragedy is an unfathomable mystery.

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APPROVAL SHEET

The thesis submitted by **Mr. Thomas Charbeneau, S.J.**, has been read and approved by three members of the Department of **English**.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the thesis and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated, and that the thesis is now given final approval with reference to content, form, and mechanical accuracy.

The thesis is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Nov. 1, 1954  
Date

H. S. Hughes  
Signature of Adviser