Our First Sin : The Shakespearean Scenario

NARAYAN S. SAHU

Each of the four cycles of Miracle Plays that have come down to us opens with the spectacle of "first sin". This is, of course, the original rebellion of Lucifer, and in each cycle, it receives the fullest emphasis of which a well-conceived dramatic tradition is capable. In Chester Plays, Fall of Lucifer the angelic hierarchies stand around God, the Father, who is shown seated on pagelnt or mansion stage.

1. The Pre-Shakespearean Concept of 'Sin'

When Lucifer falls from his high eminence, he makes a visible descent, and his white and golden garments are changed for the black or horrific mask. In the *Ludus Conventriae*[1], Man is introduced as a principal antagonist. After his fall, Lucifer tempts Eve as he had done the Angels :

Of this apple if thou will bite
Even as God is so shall ye be.
Wise of cunning as I you plight
Like unto God In all degree.
Sun and moon and stars bright
Fish and fowl both sound and sea
At your bidding both day and night
All things shall be in your power.
Ye shall be God's peer.

Fall of Man, 11, 182 ff.

In his rejoinder Adam asserts the penalty of an unlawful claim to equality:

I dare not touch thy band for dread
If that we do this sinful deed
We shall be dead by God's judgement.

11. 221-6.

The nature of the fault has been continually re-emphasised by the symbol of the throne usurped or deserved as the case may be. The Chester cycle develops the symbolism in more detail. Throne becomes the sign of the tyrant who usurps or misuses the power delegated by God and thus reflects the sin of Lucifer.

In the later stages of the Christian myth, the earliest type of usurper is anti-Christ. As the Anti-Christ mounts his throne, we hear :

Cousin of Buckingham !..
Give me thy hands. Thus high by thy advice
And thy assistance, is King Richard seated.

Richard III, iv. ii. 1-5,

The King on his throne has been the most vivid symbol of degree possible in simple theatrical terms and all play wrights, Greeks as well as Christian, who wrote of the act of hubris in a hierarchical society. Later the concept had to deal with relationships between man and woman or parents sod children.

Goneril and Regan, who discuss their father's follies, are likewise the direct descendants of a medieval prototype, that of Cain who denies to Adam the respect which Abel gladly pays.

The Morality plays develop the concept of man's proper 'degree' in the cosmos. In nature, Mankind is led to recognise his place on the ladder between the angels and the beasts. He has the divine gift of understanding and "free election''. Reason is his guide to put him on the proper path. Now, with the steady secularisation of the drama during the sixteenth century, the Christian themes which have been considered so far no longer receive direct dramatic expression.

The primordial "sin" remains rebellion, and the arch-rebels are still Lucifer and Adam, who maintain their principal place in man's imagination until long after *Paradise Lost* was written. Such notions can be watched on their gradual progress from medieval to Renaissance stages.

Although the root was recognised to be rebellion against God, it was the fruit, rebellion against the state, with which the Elizabethan dramatist's imagination was particularly concerned. Sir John Cheke's *The Hurt of Sedition*, addressed to the rebels in Norfolk in 1549, serves as a typical statement. All the medieval horrors at man's rebellion against God was transferred to the very thoughts of his rebellion against the King, and the cumulative pressure of disapproval of any form of rebellion in Tudor England is hard to imagine adequately.

As evident from *Richard II*, the difficulty is pointed out by the Bishop of Carlisle - of finding any one fit to judge a king. The bad man will be seeking his own end if he does so and the good will accept a bad prince as God's own chatisement for the "sins" of the people. In view of the chorus of condemnation, Shakespeare's treatment of the rebels in *Henry IV* is more remarkable.

Shakespeare dramatised the myth of Lucifer's rebellion as the archetype of "sin", and like his contemporaries, found an acceptable manifestation of it in the contemporary history of his own country. The Elizabethans were instructed by both homilists and historians to view the fate of *Richard III* as a supreme example of rebellion and its aftermath. With the exception of the anonymous author of *The True Tragedie of Richard III*, the Elizabethan dramatists found their symbols in more remote and less politically explosive material. Among them Shakespeare alone reconstructed his concept of "sin", "justice" and "redemption" such as his fathers

had found in the Biblical myths out of English history, and the Greeks in the legends of Agamemnon and Oedipus.

The True Tragedie of Richard III (1594) depicts the Luciferian hero's despair and death, related to his own wrong doing with both psychological and artistic skill. *The True Tragedie* brings us to the time when Shakespeare was beginning his own history plays.

II

The Sin of Usurpation

In his tetralogy - the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*, Shakespeare reveals both his traditional attitudes and personal idiosyncrasies which develop continuously through his work. In the tetralogy, he is concerned with "Justice'' and finally with "salvation" or "mercy". Man's "sin", however, is stated not in the terms of the archetypal rebellion of Lucifer, but of its derivative, the general breach of degree, and the "salvation" is presented in political terms as the restoration of order within the state. The tetralogy is not centred on either the usurped crown or the rivalry between a de -facto King and a pretender with dejure rights. The characters - Margaret and Richard of Gloucester in their dynamism and Henry in his quietism - would seek or shun power quite apart from the provocation given by York who of course is activated by dynastic ambition.

The conception of the false king becomes central only in the second tetralogy. In the first, it is a genuine factor in the social disorder, but it is incidental, itself as a consequence of an earlier breach of degree, rather than the cause of later ones. That is, it is the failure to observe "degree" which leads first to faction in the commonwealth and finally to civil war.

The opening scene of both Part I and Part II states the theme. The king is incapable of fulfilling his proper function since he fails to dominate the nobility of his realm, and the nobility in their self-seeking pride cannot unite to govern in his place while he is a child or to support him as a young man. *Part I* informs this breakdown of order to be the direct cause of the defeats in France :

> Messenger : Amongst the soldiers this is mattered,
> That here you meintain several factions
> And whilst a field should be despatch'd and fought,
> You are disputing of your generals.
>
> I.I.70-3.

Later, it is the internecine rivalry between York and Somerset which reduces the gallant and disinterested Talbot to impotence and ultimately causes his death in the French wars. In *Part II*, Duke Humphrey - like Talbot in the first - is first made powerless and then assassinated by a faction of men who unite until he is destroyed and finally attack each other. In *Part III*, the Yorkist faction itself splits and reopens the civil war. Warwick and Clarence were both good Yorkists until they thought it would pay them to be otherwise, just as York had earlier allied himself with the

Lancastrians, Beaufort and Somerset, to gain his own ends. These divisions are quite independent of the -weakness of Henry's title or of Edward's. They stem from the failure of men to fulfil their proper roles, and this failure spreads downwards through society like a rot until fathers and sons murder each other without knowing why, and men believe that seven half-penny loaves ean be had for a penny and that three-hooped pots have been ten hoops (cf : *3 Henry VI*, II. v. and *2 Henry VI*, IV. ii).

The horror of disorder is nowhere more passionately presented than in the Talbot scenes of *1 Henry VI.* IV. iv. 28-35).

The scene between the doomed father and son begins with as solemn music as the last act of *Romeo and Juliet* :

> Talbot : But, 0 malignant and ill-boding stars !
> Now thou art come unto a feast of death,
> A terrible and unavoided danger.
>
> *1 Henry VI*, IV. v. 6-8.

This is admirably designed to suit the playwright's purpose of demonstrating the disastrous results of disunity in the commonwealth, and the visual picture of the dying father with the dead son in his arms at the climax is evidently a foretaste of Shakespeare's later dramaturgy as is the blank-verse at the very outset.

The moral of the whole episode is well-asserted by York's messenger in a soliloquy in Act IV, Scene iii (lines 47-63).

It is noteworthy that Queen Margaret's contribution to the turmoil begins before there is any threat to the Lancastrian title. Her role is not that of a bold woman daring everything to protect the threatened rights of husband or son, but of one who breaks the order appointed by divine law for womankind. In the first place, she is unfaithful to her husband, and this breach of the moral order directly contributes to civil disorder through the jealousy of her favourite Suffolk shown by his rival peers. This is clearly her "first sin", treated in the play in a curious way. No sympathy with adulterous love is ever shown in Shakespeare except in the ambiguous case of Antony and Cleopatra. Margaret is a portentous figure because she brings unusual strength to her evil designs. She brings the same strength to her passion, and Suffolk reciprocates it. At their farewell, the true grief and true love are revealed marvellously :

> Margaret : Go, speak not to me; even now be gone.
> 0, go not yet ! Even thus two friends condemn'd
> Embrace and kiss and take ten thousand leaves,
> Loather a hundred times to part than die.
> Yet now farewell; and farewell life with thee !
>
> *2 Henry V.I*, III, ii, 352-6.

Suffolk, an aggressive bully elsewhere in the play, is given in this scene notes of Borneo's own music :

Suffolk : Well could I curse away a winter's night,
Though standing naked on a mountain top.
For where thou art, there is the world itself,
With every several pleasure in the world,
And where thou art not, desolation.
I can no more.

III, ii, 336-65.

This sympathy for the lovers betrayed by some of those cadences is of course contradictory to the playwright's attitude towards them in their main roles of disruptors of order and degree.

Margaret is further guilty in her attempt to rule the state in the place of the husband whose proper duty this is. Suffolk promises her that after Humphrey's fall :

You yourself shall steer the happy helm.

I, iii, 96.

As a matter of fact, he is proffering a thing both wrong and impossible. On the plain of Tewkesbury she first bitterly condemns her husband and then claims his place herself :

Yet lives our pilot still : Is't meet that he
Should leave the helm and like a fearful lad
With tearful eyes add water to the sea
And give mere strength to that which hath too much,
Whiles, in his moan, the ship splits on the rock,
Which industry and courage might have saved ?
Ah, what a shame ! ah, what a fault were this !..
Why, is not Oxford here another anchor ?
And Somerset another goodly mast ?
The friends of France our shrouds and tacklings ?
And, though unskilful, why not Ned and I
For once allowed the skilful pilot's charge ?

3 Henry Vl,V, iv, 6-20

This is the wanton and ruthless challenge to superior forces that follows ensures the murder pf both son and husband. In her ambition to rule, before provoking the battle at Tewkesbury, she had broken the compromise between Henry and York, which could have been prevented.

Ultimately, Margaret not only fights but kills, and she herself inaugurates the terrible pattern of murder for vengeance, which makes the end of her story so horrific. She has already instigated the murder of Humphrey, but with the hypocritical decency of concealment. The murder of York is openly gang vengeance in lieu of justice, and she herself participates in it :

Margaret : What, weeping - ripe, my Lord Northumberland ? Think but upon the wrong he did us all.
Clifford : Here's for my oath, here's for my father's death.
(Stabbing him
Margaret : And here's to right our gentle-hear ted king.
(Stabbing him

I, iv, 172-6.

The main cause to the disasters of his reign is however Henry's own. Unlike Margaret he makes no violent breaches in the social order. His "sin" is the negative one refusing the responsibility his "degree" cast upon him. He fails to afford the justice and protection due to his Uncle Gloucester, when he was falsely accused by his rival peers.

My lord of Gloucester,' tis my special hope
That you will clear yourself from all suspect:
My conscience tells me you are innocent.

2 Henry VI, III, i, 139-41.

In spite of his belief, however, he allows his own royal power to be used by Gloucester's enemies for his destruction.

My lords, what to your wisdoms seemeth best,
Do or undo, as if ourself were here.

III, 1, 195-6.

Henry does not simply refuse to exercise judgment in a neutral case but refuses to mke the effort to know that the arrested man is innocent. He repeatedly behaves thus on another occasion.

In dispute with York in the parliament House, he admits the legitimacy of York's claim to make York his heir. This is morally acceptable on the ground that it saves York from the "sin" of rebellion against his anointed King. While at the same time admitting it also justifies his claims. Henry fails to exert his royal power. He tries to avoid facing his wife, but when, this is impossible or inevitable, he pleads cowardly :

Pardon me, Margaret, pardon me, sweet son;
The Earl of Warwick and the duke enforced me.

3 Hengy. VI, I, i, 228-9.

Sure of Margaret's success at the battle of Wakefield, he absents himself from the fatal molehill on which York is hurdered. He accepts passively the fruits of deeds which he should, as King, have prevented.

The failure of nobility, the queen and king to observe "degree", causes the chaotic situation fraught with peril because of the seizure of the throne by Henry Bolingbroke two generations before. However, the throne is Henry's by possession and York's by inheritance. That is, the fact of Henry IV's usurpation is implicit in the plot of the play as evident in *3 Henry VI* :

King Henry : Henry the fourth by conquest got the crown.
York : Twas by rebellion against his King.
× × × × × ×
Clifford : King Henry, be thy title right or wrong,
Lord Clifford vows to fight in thy defence :
May the ground gape and swallow me alive,
Where I shall lend to him that slew my father !

I, i, 132-62.

Though the legitimacy of his claim is stressed in a similar way, no sympathy is accorded to Edward IV at his accession. He is certainly no glamorous hero returned at last to the throne of his fathers. Beside his brother, he foreshadows the weak and decadent figure-head to become in Richard III.

The emotional tone of the play depends upon the senselessness of its tragedy and no cogent reason can be advanced for the civil war. After the battle, the son, who has killed his father mourns :

Pardon me, God, I know not what I did !

II, v, 69.

The father who has killed his son is equally ignorant of any objective behind his act, and the king himself fails to justify the cause in which the soldiers so unnaturally fight. In the face of their anguish and remorse, he can only feel:

Woe above woe ! grief more than common grief !...
Wither one rose, and let the other flourish;
If you contend, a thousand lives must wither.

II, v, 94-102.

The "deadly quarrel" is seldom for good cause. Margaret, the foreigner, the adulteress, the man-woman, must always be condemned, and whenever they are seen unkingly in action, so must Henry. In conflict with them York is the wronged victim, but when the Yorkist King is the "machiavel", Richard, it is quite natural to endorse our sympathy for the murdered Henry.

While offering Richard's crown to Richmond, what Derby at the end of *Richard III* (V, v, 4-6) calls the "long-usurped royalty", cannot be applicable to Richard's recent seizing of the crown from his nephew. It merely, also, implicitly informs his family's rebellion against Henry VI. The play-wright's indictment is not that the dynasty has been changed, but that wickedness committed has been punished and peace restored by the Tudor King. We are emotionally involved not in the righting of an ancient wrong, but in the future prospect of harmony and prosperity :

Richmond : England hath long been mad and scar'd herself;
The brother blindly shed the borther's blood,
The father rashly slaughter'd his own son.
The son, compell'd, been butcher to the sire...

0, now let Richmond and Elizabeth,
The true successors of each royal house,
By God's fair ordinance conjoin together !
And let their heirs, God, if thy will be so,
Enrich the time to come with smooth-faced peace,
With smiling plenty, and fair prosperous days !

V, v, 21-34.

The play, *Richard III*, completes the dramatic pattern begun with *1 Henry VI*. The tetralogy embodies a single situation in which, by a classical notion of peripeteia, violence breeds its own destruction and damnation.

In the tetralogy, in his treatment of English History, Shakespeare follows the orthodox concept of time. He deals mainly with the "sins" of social disorder, and in so far as he is concerned with "Justice", his play demonstrates the simple truth that he who draws sword perishes by the sword. The following dialogue of Queen Margaret exquisitely expresses the intense pity for human suffering :

I had an Edward, till a Richard kill'd hlm;
I had a Harry, till a Richard kill'd him ;
Thou hadst an Edward, till a Richard kill'd him;
Thou hadst a Richard, till a Richard kill'd him...
Thy Edward he is dead, that stabb'd my Edward;
Thy other Edward dead, to quit my Edward,
Young York he is but boot, because both they
Match not the high perfection of my loss.

IV, iv, 40-66,

Young Clifford's lament anticipates the music of Cordelia's agonised utterance, the griefs of father and son at Towton poignantly expressed :

.....Wast thou ordain'd, dear father,
To lose thy youth in peace, and to achieve
The silver livery of advised age,
And, in thy reverence and thy chair-days, thus
To die in ruffian battle ?

2 Henry VI,V, li, 45-9.

The tender feeling is touched by the inhuman killings and deaths in war. And perhaps Shakespeare's thought found best expression in *Richard III* rather in religious than in political terms. As Richard awakes screaming : "Have mercy, Jesu ! - Soft ! I did but dream" (*Richard III*, V, ill, 178), he is more like a guilty man than a particular guilty king. His "sin" springs from man's universal desire to defy the limits ordained for him.

Shakespeare profitably deploys myth and symbols of political sort in defiance of the king, rather than its religious equivalent - the defiance of God. And, when he

handles the epic of York and Lancaster, his emphasis is no longer on general social disorder and disruption but on the individual's original sin. He expresses them in the traditional terms of usurping a throne and goes on dramatising the proliferation of such an act in the hopes, fears and agonies of every man and woman.

III

The Sinners as the Usurpers of Thrones

It is surmised that Shakespeare at the age of eleven actually witnessed the performance of the Coventry Cycle at Kenilworth in 1575.[2] And, it was, perhaps, his spectacular hearing of Lucifer's rhetoric that inspired him to write about such blind and arrogant rebellion against the divine purpose, not once but several times, in terms of illicit assumption of a throne as a symbol as evident at the end of *3 Henry VI*. The design of the regicide is more vividly revealed in Richard of Gloucester, but his murder of Henry VI is only one incident in the pattern of civil strife and does not seem as more significant to Richard himself than his other murders. Richard is among the other killers of a king.

In *Richard II*, the divine pattern is hinted to provoke our willing acceptance of its propriety, and this is done by the poetry, which describes it or alludes to it. We seldom see in existence the ordered kingdom ruled with justice and mercy in accordance with the divine scheme of God. The chorus-like figures of the gardeners, like the father and son to Henry VI, make the analogy of state and garden in a style as formal as that of disordered knot and wholesome herb gardens that belonged to Elizabethan times :

Gardener : Cut off the heads of too fast growing sprays,
That look too lofty in our commonwealth :
All must be even in our government.

Servant : Why should we in the compass of a pale
Keep law and form and due proportion,
Showing, as in a model, our firm estate,
When our sea-walled garden, the whole land,
Is full of weeds...
Her knots disordered and her wholesome herbs
Swarming with caterpillars ?

III, IV 3.4-47,

Richard himself does not conform to the pattern. That is both his "sin" and his tragedy, and the divine scheme is once again thwarted and violated as it had been in the primordial garden of our first parents. The commonwealth, thus, first betrayed from within by the man, who frivolously left empty the place he had been divinely deputed to fill, was defenceless before the external attack of Bolingbroke, who stooping to fraudulent practice and foul design and force, defeated and assassinated his annointed king.

It is true that Piers Exton actually shed Richard's blood, and that Bolingbroke allowed Northumberland, the "haught insulting man" to do much bullying for him, but he is none the more acceptable for that, and this "silent king" shrewd enough to await his rival to be entrapped into the net spread for him, is obviously himself responsible for the "trenching war" and "the intestine shcok and furious close of civil butchery" which he laments at the beginning of the *1 Henry IV* (I, 111, 145-70). The forceful dissyllabic of his name occurs thrice in thirty times of Act I scene iii. And, before the scene ends, the name of the rightful heir is echoed fourteen times. We hear of noble Mortimer, revolted Mortimer, foolish Mortimer, downtrod Mortimer, until Hotspur seems to have become the very startling to 'speak nothing but "Mortimer"' to keep the king's 'anger still in motion'.

The crime focused in the first play becomes the moving force and centre of attention at the very outset of the second. The rebel-hero's ambivalence reaches its peak in the character of Henry V. This no playwright, save Christopher Marlowe, could afford to do in the 1590s. It was potent in Shakespeare's imagination, which leads to some queer and increasing ambivalence in his own attitude also, as vividly hinted in the character of Henry V.

The spectacle of rebels, however, does not emphasise the legitimacy of their cause. But, as Hotspur and his allies define their aims (*1 Henry IV.*, III, i), they do not mention the restoration of the Yorkist line but only the division of England into three estates for themselves. In this, they blunder like Richard's own when the latter leased his revenues and turned his realm Into a "tenement or pelting farm". Later, Hotspur does support their claims as representatives of the disinherited Earl of March, but vividly recapitulates Henry's treachery to Richard. Like Lady Macbeth, who, for a moment, faces the full implications of her full purpose (*Macbeth* I.v. 51-5). The Earl of Worcester warns Hotspur :

..stop all sight-holes, every loop from whence
The eye of reason may pry in upon us :
This absence of your father's draws a curtain,
That shows the ignorant a kind of fear
Before not dreamt of.

1 Henry IV, IV, 1, 71-5.

Facing the Northern lords, Prince John voices the claims of the reigning family with force and dignity :

You have ta'en up,
Under the counterfeited zeal of God,
The subjects of his substitute, my father,
And both against the peace of heaven and him.
Have here up-swarm'd them.

2 Henry IV, IV, 11, 26-30.

The substitute of this God substitute soon afterwards perpetrates the most cold-blooded treachery in Gaultree Forest. And, Shakespeare perhaps adapts his source to give the treachery to a member of the royal house itself. In fact, critics like Honor Matthews[3] are of the opinion that something seems to be compelling Shakespeare to cloud the issue and indeed the Tudor horror of rebellion is obviously at work in the play, muddying the clarity of its design. The playwright never forgets, however, the origin of these dilemmas, and this is perceptible from the fact that he never allows Henry himself to forget that the chief cause of all his misfortunes and also paradoxically of other men's "sins" of rebellion against him be a "sin" - is his own action. As he says to his son :

I know not whether God will have it so...
But thou dost in thy passages of life
Make me believe that thou art only mark'd
For the hot vengeance and the rod of heaven
To punish my mistreadlngs

1 Henry .IV, III, 11, 4-11.

His mind is obsessed with the memory of the past. Again and again the past intrudes upon the present. There is no play where more brilliant vignettes of past scenes are conjured up often by Henry, and sometimes by the rebels too. He considers it for himself the excuse of necessity, but he always imagines himself and his past in terms of a guilt the Dead-Sea fruits of which he finally admits :

You, cousin Nevil, as I may remember -
When Richard, with his eye brimful of tears,
Then check'd and rated by Northumberland,
Did speak these words, now proved a prophecy !
'Northumberland, thou ladder by the which
My cousin Bolingbroke ascends my throne,
Though then, God knows. I had no such intent,
But that necessity so bow'd the state
That I and greatness were compelled to kiss;
'The time shall come[1], thus did he follow it,
'The time will come, that foul sin gathering head,
Shall break Into corruption' : so went on,
Foretelling this same time's condition,
And the division of our amity.

2 Henry IV, III, i, 65-79.

While he winces at a hint of his past by others, in his hasty interpretation of Northumberland, he sublimates his pain by an outburst of temper. The continuous references to the past extend only to the first three plays. The last of them occurs in the mouth of Henry V on the eve of Agincourt. It is the force with which the plays depict as the passage of time during which a single evil deed prolongs its influence

and proliferates in unforeseen directions. As a result, this tetralogy becomes so impressive that the full implications of theme are poignantly worked out.

The opening scene of *1 Henry IV* presents the spectacle of the loyalty of men like Blunt attaching himself sincerely to the new king, but the pattern is continually broken or flawed by the old evil. However, there is a moving scene at Shrewsbury when Douglas despatches one simulacrum after another, and discovers no true king, even when he encounters Henry himself.

Douglas : ...what art thou,
That counterfeit'st the person of a king ?
Henry : The king himself, who, Douglas, grieves at heart,
So many of his shadows thou hast met,
And not the very king, I have two boys
× × × × × ×
Douglas : I fear thou art another to counterfeit;

1 Henry IV. V, iv, 27-35.

The theme of regicide and its consequence are unfolded in the first three plays. However, the fourth play has certain ambiguity in its pattern.

However, Henry IV's dying advice to his son was to distract human thoughts from his doubtful title by foreign conquest and to follow this advice is the son's first major decision of policy after ascending the throne. It does not seem plausible to disbelieve that Shakespeare was deliberately ambiguous here. As we see *Henry V*, it appears that Henry had considered even the rewinning of the Holy Sepulchre as a means of securing his own usurped throne. He admits :

I... had a purpose now
To lead out many to the Holy Land,
Lest rest and lying still might make them look
Too near unto my state. Therefore, my Harry,
Be it thy course to busy giddy minds
With foreign quarrels, that action, hence borne out.

2 Henry IV, IV, v, 210-16.

Such "machiavellism" cannot possibly have been intended to win approval, yet it is in principle identical with Henry V's later conduct :

Bates : ... for we know enough, if we know
We are the King's subjects. If his
Cause be wrong, our obedience to the
King wipes the crime of it out of us.
Williams : But, if the cause be not good, the
King himself hath a heavy reckoning to
Make ,when all those legs and arms and
Heads, chopp'd off in a battle, shall
Join together at the latter day and cry

All ‘we died at such a place’ - some
Swearing, some crying for a surgeon,
Some upon their wives, left poor behind
Them, I am afeared there are few
Die well that die in a battle; ...Now,
If these men do not die well, it will be
A black matter for the King that led them
To it; whom to disobey were against all
Proportion of subjection.

Henry V, IV, 1, 130-46.

Richard’s murder followed by the wars in France is really as clear an example of violence breading violence as any that Macbeth itself shows and by Henry’s agonised prayer before the battle, Agincourt is indissolubly linked to Promfret :

Not to-day, o Lord,
0, not to-day, think not upon the fault
My father made in compassing the crown !

IV, 1. 310-12.

Henry V fails as completely as do his father and son to give his people the peace which is the intended and decorous pattern of social life, and the main reason of the failure of all these three men lies in their wrongful title to the throne, which accounts for the foreign wars in the one reign as completely as it does for the civil wars in the next.

Like his father, like Claudius, like Macbeth, Henry V succeeded in establishing a temporary order on an unsound foundation, but in spite of its glamour it was as spurious as the ceremonial of Claudius’ stately court or Macbeth’s ghost-haunted banquet - a sheer mockery of the god-ordained order which had been violated. The price of Henry IV’s rebellion was paid in full not by himself or his son but by bis grandson and the people of his realm. And this must have been known to Shakespeare when he wrote of the wooing of Katharine :

Shall not thou and I, between Saint Denis and
Saint George, compound a boy, half French, half
English, that shall go to Constantinpole and
Take the Turk by the beard ? Shall we not ?
What say’st thou, my fair flower-de-luce ?

V, ii, 219-24.

Such a hope was soon to be believed. Though the motive for the treachery of Cambridge, Scroop and Grey has been, under-estimated but it is not quite insignificant because the three men, in the light of *Henry VI* alredy written by shakespeare, it is evident, that represent the cause of the murdered Richard. Perhaps the child of Henry and Katharine fulfilled his destiny, when, instead of taking the Turk by the beard at Constantinpole as his father had hoped, he died in the Tower, a vicarious sacrifice, that the “sins’’ of his grandfather might be atoned.

When Shakespeare wrote the two historical tetralogies independent of each other, he was not oblivious of Bosworth. Perhaps, he was quite aware of the shadow of the future events as he approached the end of *Henry- V*. His theme dictated - in his view -condemnation and failure for the archetypal rebel, the king-murderer. The triumph of Henry V implied not only military victory, but also a full measure of admiring affection for this ‘star of England’. Within the framework of the second tetralogy, the two purposes are mutually exclusive, that the hero-king, as the history of the land reveals, too, has ever been loved and such kings were assured of the fulfilment of the pattern of justice to their subjects.

Macbeth depicts the most striking example of the reassertion of a theme left ambiguous in the history plays. In it, the theme is again of the usurper, and since Shakespeare is quite capable of shaping his plot more freely, it is quite worthwhile to discover in what ways *Macbeth*’s structure differs from that imposed by historical fact on the earlier plays. Each modification draws the character closer to their Christian prototypes. In the first place, Shakespeare adapts his story so as to take from Macbeth all genuine grievances against the King as were prominent in the case of Bolingbroke. He takes all care to ensure that the assassinated King is wholly attractive, unlike Richard II, or Henry VI, and also gives him worthy heirs of age to rule. Though Malcolm was young, he was unlike the children of Edward IV, old enough to fight in the battle to be declared Prince of Cumberland. He allows Macbath a full measure of popularity, reputation, honour, charm and also the conjugal happiness which were denied to Richard III. Like Lucifer’s and indeed like Adam’s, his rebellion lacks any more motive than the rebel’s own self-assertion.

Richmond is simply introduced as a child blessed by Henry VI, but Malcolm is not only developed as a character. He is the eldest son of the King and the declaration that he is his father’s heir, is what directly precipitates Macbeth’s treachery. This situation is not used in the miracle plays of Luclfer’s rebellion.

In *Macbeth*, the role of Lucifer is conflated with that of Herod for when the King’s heir has escaped his designs, the tyrant seeks and finds a substitute victim. The outrage of innocence, symbolised by the murder of a child, is an important element in Shakespeare’s thought, and the killing of the young Macduff is peculiarly brutal because it is of no possible use to Macbeth. But, in committing this bloody, foul deed, he is baser even than his biblical forerunner, for he knew the life he wanted to take was safe from him, and he murdered from mere hysterical vindictiveness.

Finally, there is in *Macbeth* a new and more potent use of the “supernatural”. The history plays had, of course, touched on such material in varying degrees. In *Henry VI* witchcraft had blackened La Pucelle in the eyes of her audience, and conjuring was fully integrated into the plot when the accusations against his wife were used by Gloucester’s enemies to ensure his down-fall.

In *Richard III*, the visible dreams of the rival leaders had demonstrated the characteristically ambiguous method by which Shakespeare presents events in such

a way that they may be construed either metaphysically or naturalistically, at the spectator's (or reader's) choice. There were few places in the history plays where such a suggestion of "super-natural" influence on the human situation could be made of structural significance to the plot. In *Macbeth*, Shakespeare could achieve this to screw up to an unusual pitch the tension between predestination and freewill, so conspicuously remarkable a feature of the play.

Thus, allowing his work to approximate more intimately than before to the ancient myth of Lucifer and the Lord, of course, with his artistic concern with the significance of absolute Good and Evil is embodied in characters of excelling individuality and realism, yet the play's implications are universal :

Malcolm : Comes the King forth, I pray you ?
Doctor : Ay, sir; There are a crew of wretched souls,
That stay his cure : their malady convinces.
The great array of art; but at his touch
Such sanctity hath heaven given his hand -
They presently amend . ...
Macduff : What's the disease he means ?
Malcolm : 'Tis call'd the evil :

IV, III, 140-7.

The word is all-inclusive.

Julius Caesar is another instance which manifestly deals with an attack on a throne. Its story of murder and 'justice' demands some consideration at this point of our analysis. *Julius Caesar* can be viewed as a Roman version of the "sin" of regicide or as a vindication of egalitarianism, and the theatrical production can swing to either pattern. Despite a vivid characterisation and well-conceived plot, vivid imagery, and verse's limpid clarity rarely equalled, the play is perhaps the most ambiguous of all Shakespeare's plays. However, the story moves in the clear daylight of the classical world with its dramatic personae in their pagan civilization untrammelled by either the mystic illumination or the haunting guilt of a later age.

Even in Plutarch the story is equivocal. In North's translation of the *Life of Brutus*, Shakespeare is said to have read, 'It is also reported that Brutus could evil away with the tyranny, and that Cassius hated the tyrant... for Cassius, even from his cradle, could not abide any manner of Tyrants'. Also, Ligarius hated Caesar 'for that he was brought in danger of his tyrannical power'. The word "liberty" has been several times used in the contexts clearly implying approval. "For myself then", said Brutus, "I mean not to hold my peace, but to withstand it, and rather die than lose my liberty".[5] Cassius, being bold, and taking hold of this word : "Why", quoth he, "what Roman is he alive that will suffer thee to die for thy liberty".

Plutarch's narrative clearly attributes the failure of the rebellion to the fact that it was contrary to the divine will. Shakespeare was deeply concerned with the problem of rebellion and its fruits. He must have found in this Roman material two

figures who must qualify for what the homilist would have called the "Luciferian" role. Caesar himself certainly aspires to a crown, though 'it was not a crown neither, it was one of those coronets'. Plutarch describes it as "a laurel crown" with "a royal band or diadem wreathed about it which in old tide was the ancient mark or token of a King".[6] Nevertheless Caesar desired it and Shakespeare must have noticed that when Caesar had refused it a third time he 'commanded the crown to be carried unto Jupiter in the Capitol[7] presumably because such a symbol properly belonged there. However, the throne Caeser desired was empty. He is an image of ambition certainly, but not of rebellion or disloyalty in any obvious sense. He is also courageous, public-spirited and never tyrannical or cruel. He is certainly no Richard of Gloucester.

His henchman, Antony, is of a similar 'mingled yarn', an opportunist if not a charlatan. He has been given the certain seal of the verse rhythms for the genuineness of his distress at Caesar's death :

0 mighty Caesar ! dost thou lie so low ?
Are all thy conquests, glories, triumphs, spoils,
Shrunk to this little measure ?

Ill, i, 148-50.

And, it is the same man who cynically orders :
Fetch the will hither, and we shall determine
How to cut off some charge in legacies.

IV, i. 8-9.

This the avenger, who carries dead Caesar's cause forward, and his partisans are the raffle, who leave a poet's body battered in the market-place simply because his name is Cinna, and the laconic Octavius finally destroys him.

Brutus and Cassius may like Caesar 'be motivated by ambition, but they are like him also in that they betray no owed allegiance. Despite this duality in the Conspirators, Shakespeare does seem to adapt his source to endorse the medieval indictment and condemnation of Caesar's murderers.[8] Plutarch narrates Brutus' vision thus :

Looking towards the light of the lamp that waxed
Very dim, he saw a horrible vision of a man, of a
Wonderful greatness and dreadful look, which at
The first made him marvellously afraid ... at length
He asked him what he was. The image answered him
I am thy ill-angel. Brutus and thou shall see me
By the city of Phillippes.[9]

Shakespeare modified this account and made the spirit the ghost of Julius Caesar, perhaps to suggest the Christian implications of the revenge play.

The ghost of Caesar with Ate by his side, as a figure in *The Spanish Tragedy*, might have been introduced to suggest the design of the "revenge play", itself is

symbolic of the working of the divlne justice, which, in the person of the avenger, waited until the wicked made the trap into which he blindly walked. This is exactly what Brutus does by his ill-conceived decision to fight at Philippi. The dramatic pattern here depicts Brutus and Cassius as the wrong-doers, punished by the divine forces in the universe for mortal "sin".

Cassius manifests the trait typical of the arch-rebel. His ambition has been mentioned several times, and he delights in openly defying the divine powers. He plays the role of the serpent when he tempts both Casca and Brutus to join the conspirators. He wins Casca by cunningly misinterpreting the divine purposes as shown in the "super-natural" events of the storm-(I, iii, 57-71). This is certainly a diabolical nay Satanic strategy. The treatment of Brutus is ambiguous. Cassius has "whetted" his friend against Caesar to do something he himself considers to be wrong :

therefore it is meet
That noble minds keep even with their likes;
For who so firm that cannot be seduced ?

I, ii, 314-16.

This is a temptation scene. As Iago tempts Othello, there is no possibility of misapprehension. Cassius is mighty convincing in his infectious vigour :

Why, man, he doth bestride the narrow world
Like a Colossus, and we pretty men
Walk under his huge legs.

I, ii, 334-6,

Like that of Cassius, the portrait of Brutus, too, is equivocal. Both before and after the assassination suffer the sleepless-ness typical of a troubled conscience :

Our enemies have beat us to the pit.

V, v, 23.

Nevertheless, he strives to be honest to himself and others. He is an idealist, a loving husband and an adored master. Of course, Brutus' true "sin" is never wrongful self-assertion. Man's blindness is the clue which leads to the central significance of *Julius Caesar*.

IV

The Character of the Sinners

In the Shakespearean history plays, with the ambiguous figures of Henry V, Octavius, Brutus and Cassius set aside, there remains a homogeneous group with similar characteristics who all aspire to gain kingship by unlawful means and who, thus, fulfil the familiar Luciferian role. Edmund, who is the most self-conscious and therefore articulate of them all, can legitimately be referred to in interpreting the others, for although he never achieves kingship he is clearly an aspirant to its power and very nearly a successful one. As the husband of either Goneril or Regan, he

would be king of half Britain and if Albany's wife had successfully arranged her husband's 'taking off' Edmund would have been in a fair way to securing the absolute power he craved. As Edmund declares :

Thou, nature, art my goddess; to thy law
My services are bound.

King Lear, I, ii, 1-2.

His conduct shows that in reality he is bound to nothing apart from his own desires, and that the only law he serves is his "own appetites'', with which he identifies Nature. To Edmund, the bonds of blood are no more sacred than the bonds of allegiance. To him, "a credulous father.. and a brother noble" are simply fair game, and what he proclaims, 'will persevere in my course of loyalty, though the conflict be sore between that and my blood" is to him no more than counters, false coin, which will serve to defraud a man as unscrupulous as himself.

Richard III vaunts a like independence and dispatches brother and nephew with equal gusto. Richard's character, drawn from the traditional Tudor orthodoxy concerning this Yorkist "usurper", is developed consistently throughout the second and third part of *Henry VI* and the play of which he is the eponymous hero, it is quite fascinating to realise how early Shakespeare had made up his mind as to the precise character of the destructive forces, which later are imparted their supreme expression in Iago and evoke Othello's terrible cry :

But yet the pity of it, Iago : O Iago, the pity of it, Iago :

Othello, IV, i, 206-7.

Richard's very first line written to indicate his intent to overstep his elder brother's is completely 'in character':

Margaret : He (York) is arrested, but will not obey;
His sons, he says, shall give their words for him.
York : Will you not, sons ?
Edward : Ay, noble father, if our words will serve.
Richard : And if words will not, then our weapons shall.

2 Henry VI, V, i, 136-40.

Richard's language sometimes expresses a gratuitous callousness: More important is his refusal to accept the metaphysical sanctions recognised by his own community. To him a blow is stronger than a plighted word, the wisdom of the seer folly and the teaching of the Church beneath contempt :

Sprawl'st thou ? Take that to end thy agony;

3 Heary VI, V, v, 39.

A bitter irony in his wooing of Anne is evident, as she weeps beside the bier of his eldest victim, which remains unnoticed, when Richard III is acted in isolation. As Richard says :

That hand, which for thy love, did kill thy love,
Shall, for thy love, kill a far truer love;

Richard III, I, ii, 190-1.

He has already expressed the value of the love he offers :

And this word 'Love', which grey beards call divine,
Be resident in men like one-another
And not in me.

3 Henry VI, V, vi, 81-3.

He is fully conscious of the pattern he breaks. As he takes into his arms his baby nephew he is soon to murder, he protests:

And, that I love the tree from whence thou sprangst
Witness the loving kiss I give the fruit.
(Aside) To say the truth, so Judas kiss'd his master,
And cried 'all hail', when as he meant all harm.

V, vii, 31-4.

Perhaps he realises ultimately the futility of life that the divine sanction forces on the human life. The central tenet of his creed is evident :

I have no brother, I am like no brother ...
... I am myself alone.

V, vi, 80-3.

Macbeth is a more tragic figure than either Edmund or Richard because he realises more fully the sacredness of the bonds he is nevertheless determined to break.

.. He's here in double trust;
First, as 1 am his kinsman and his subject,
Strong both against the deed.

Macbeth. I, viii, 12-14.

The price paid for the breaking of the ties which unites a man to an ordered society is,very naturally, loneliness. Rilchard, who once accepted this with such confident pride, feels the inkling of actual horror before he dies :

I shall despair. There is no creature loves me;
And if I die, no soul shall pity me.

Richard III, V, ill, 200-1.

Edmund faces the same horror by clinging to the self-confidence that comes from the satisfaction of his lust. He mutters : "Yet Edmund was beloved". But Macbeth realised too late that he had unwillingly sacrificed love - the known and valued love between him and the wife, who, through his own action, died alone and left him alone at last.

She should have died hereafter :
There would have been a time for such a word.

Macbeth, V, v,17-l8.

Earlier, he felt panicky about his
... way of life
Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf;
And that which should accompany old age,
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
I must not look to have.

V, iii, 22-6.

Henry IV suffers a smaller measure of this same loneliness in his estrangement from his eldest son, and like the other two, pays the penalty of sleeplessness, though not of bad dreams. His wife's words best describe Richard's nights :

For never yet one hour in his bed
Have I enjoy'd the golden dew of sleep,
But have been waked by his timorous dreams.

Richard III, IV, i, 83-5.

He himself admits the reason; "O coward conscience, how dost thou afflict me !" (V, iii, 179).

Henry makes no such confession. Both Richard and Macbeth are finally lost because their isolation makes them realise the "sin" of despair. As Richard says :

...I am in
So far in blood that sin will pluck on sin;

IV, ii, 64-5.

And later :
All several sins, all used in each degree,
Throng to the bar, crying all, Guilty ! guilty:
I shall despair.

V, iii, 198-200.

Likewise Macbeth's words also re-echo his :
I am in blood
Stepp'd in so far that, should I wade no more,
Returning were as tedius as go o'er.

Macbeth, III, iv,136-8.

And, to him life becomes
... a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing.

V, v, 26-8.

Henry IV tries to indulge himself to console by a kind of fatalism :

Are these things then necessities ?
Then let us meet them like necessities.

2 Henry IV. Ill, i, 92-3.

In this despair, repentance becomes impossible. Richard and Macbeth do not even attempt it, but Henry does. And, the most revealing comparison in this case is one with Claudius. Claudius prays, like Henry, for forgiveness, and like him, he would make some restitution, if he could. As Henry would prefer to pardon the rebels, so Claudius would like to win Hamlet's friendship - provided that the price were not too high. But both men allow their hands to be forced. Claudius, like Henry's tacit acceptance of prince John's unscrupulousness at Goultrea forest, supports Laertes' treachery. Henry IV prays :

How I came by the crown, O God forgive;

2 Henry IV, IV, v, 219.

It was exactly the same petition that Claudius was making for his personal salvation. However, he eschews a false front of religion, and is self-critical enough to recognise the inefficacy of his repentance, which Henry never does :

....Then I'll look up;
My fault is past. But, O, what form of prayer
Can serve my turn ? 'Forgive me my foul murder' ?
That cannot be; ...
My crown, mine own ambition and my queen.
May one be pardon'd and retain the offence ?
In the corrupted currents of this world
Offence's gilded hand may strove by justice;
...but 'tis not so above;
There is no shuffling, there the action lies
In his true nature.

Hamlet, III, iii, 50-63.

Mercy, at the cost of not 'retaining the offence' is offered both Claudius and Macbeth 'between the stirrup and the ground', but neither grasps it. Also, there is no sign in the dialogue that either of them is capable to see the opportunity. Nevertheless, the plot obviously defines it as offered, approached and then, refused :

King : Gertrude, do not drink.
Queen : I will, my lord; I pray you, pardon me.
King : (Aside) : It is the poison'd cup : it is too late.

Hamlet (V, ii, 300-3)

It was not too late. Claudius could have dashed the cup from her hand, as a few minutes later, the dying Hamlet dashes it from Horatio's. But such an act meant exposure and certain death. It would have saved him as well as Gertrude, whom he

loved, and, who in her fashion, loved him, but Claudius loved himself and his usurped crown more than his wife. The moment of his choice is like the one in which Portia makes her offer to Shylock of his last chance and is refused :

Portia : Be merciful,
Take thrice thy money, bid me tear the bond.
Shylock : When it is paid according to the tenour.

Merchant of Venice, IV, i, 233-5.

Macbeth likewise is given this final chance, but he no longer cares to keep the 'top of sovereignity'. There is another barrier to his repentance which is the hardest of all for 'fallen' man to overleap. The Luciferlan pride remains dominant in him even in defeat :

Macduff : Turn, hell-hound, turn :
Macbeth : Of all men else I have avoided thee :
but get thee back; my soul is too much charged
With blood of thine already.
I will not yield,
To kiss the ground before young Malcolm's feet,
And to be baited with the rabble's curse.

V, viii, 3-29.

In each case the price is too high to be payable. And, life offers the opportunity to pay it. However, Henry V is the last man to make sacrifice that could bring his conscience peace :

More will I do;
Though all that I can do is nothing worth.
Since that my penitence cooes after all,
Imploring pardon.

IV, i, 319-22.

As firmly as Claudius did, Henry 'retains the offence'. The Christian tradition of the rebel angel and the 'glazing' serpent, who by his cunning was successful in seducing Eve, has in these plays, been conflated with the contemporory Renaissance, 'machiavel'. Henry IV has been identified with this dual figure. This identity reinforces the interpretation of the whole of the second tetralogy, concerned with regicide and usurpation. Thus, this also reveals that prime anomaly among Shakespearean heroes is Henry V.

V

The Sinner As Ambiguous Character

Henry V and Octavius Caesar are the two ambiguous characters who share the sin of being cruel and machiavelian. Henry's crown is stained with blood (of *HenryV*, IV, i, 300-19). In him, Shakespeare visualised a valiant, modest and successful hero in war as in love. The country was living through a prolonged period of crisis. Men

were fighting and dying in France. Henry V accepted his crown from his usurping father with his eyes open.

To Shakespeare, perhaps Henry's place in the historical sequence was that of successor to the man who killed a king and who had repeatedly been presented as the direct and visible symbol of God himself :

Yet I will remember
The favours of these men : were they not mine ?
Did they not sometime cry, 'all hail' to me ?
So Judas did to Christ;

Richard II, IV, i, 167-70,

Many such references are there in Richard's own mouth. As Henry IV realises (*2 Henry IV*, IV, v, 184-225) his claim which exists in the realm of 'Realpolitik' and nowhere else, Hal knows what his inheritance is and accepts it in that knowledge. The non- sequitur of 'Then plain and right must my possession be', serves only to emphasise the original jib from Richard.

Hal claims the crown by discent but knows that he must be prepared to defend it by force :

Lo, here it sits,
Which God shall guard; and put the world's whole strength
Into one giant arm, it shall not force
This lineal honour from me; this from thee
Will I to mine leave as 'tis left to me.

2 Henry IV, IV, v, 43-7.

As 'it is left to me' : this means doubtfully and only to be held by force ruthlessly applied. Henry's son proved an unsuitable recepient of such a sinister legacy. Henry occupies the throne not by inheritance only but by conscious choice, too, the throne of a murdered king. He repents, but through Claudius as Shakespeare shows the petty value of such self-repentance and through Macbeth the emptiness of a stolen crown.

Henry V has many virtues which are of value in the body politic, but he 'retains the offence', and though during his reign stability is achieved, rebellion crushed in embryo and the nation united in a foreign war, yet the recovery is temporary, and the payment of the price of blood is only postponed. Apparently, a very different man from his father, Hal shares with him one dominant characteristic : He deliberately chooses to emancipate himself from the bends to which humanity should yield. Hal admits both in letters and spirit his bond to God, but like the other 'machiavels', he cultivates a deliberate 'non-attachment' to humanity ;

I know you all, and will awhile uphold
The unyoked humour of your idleness :
Yet herein will I imitate the sun,

Who doth permit the base contagious clouds
To smother up his beauty from the world,
That, when he please again to be himself,
Being wanted, he may be more wonder'd at.

1 Henry IV, I, ii, 219 - 25

This is the declamation of a man who takes from others exactly what he wants - crown, or championship, love, or amusement, the kingdom of England or the kingdom of France. He dismisses Falstaff, forgets Poins, executes Bardolph, sends Cambridge, Scroop and Grey to death, all with equal ease :

What shall I say to thee, Lord Scroop ?
... Thou that didst bear the key of all my counsels,
That knewst the very bottom of my soul,
× × ×
May it be possible, that foreign hire
Could out of thee extract one spark of evil
That might annoy my finger ?

Henry V, II, 11, 94-102,

Nevertheless, Henry was not a man with the right to condemn anyone for practising on another for his use. Also, despite his gaiety and ease of manner it was not an obstacle to identify him one with the "machiavels". And, in his portrait of Henry, Shakespeare was never completely detached from a myth of "man's ingratitude". The speech reveals a fleeting glimpse not of Henry's mind but of his creator's.

In Henry V, Shakespeare presents a man whose deliberately adopted machiavellian 'non-attachment' may fall him in a crisis, so that he becomes involved with humanity against his will, and momentarily loses his defences. Perhaps, Shakespeare felt that only by exceptional charm could such men hope to blind their fellows to their essentially predatory purposes. Even Falconbridge, from his ebullient first entry to his temporary adoption of a machiavellian allegiance to 'commodity' has not a more delightful buoyancy than Edmund. Richard III's animal spirits under the stimulus of risk are infectious. Despite Hal's character as a son well- developed in the story of Agincourt, as indicated in *2 Henry IV*, (II, ii, 37-55), where his relationship with his father is given exceptional overtones, he is genuinely stirred by bis own accession to the crown :

God witness with me, when I here came in,
And found no course of breath within your majesty,
How cold it struck my heart !

2 Henry IV, IV, v, 150-2.

With the peculiar intensity the crowding emotions sway a young monarch mounting his father's throne, we are reminded of the modest words of Malcolm after the death of Macbeth, which reveal the former's quivering sensibility before

his sucession to the crown. Shakespeare allows the words to touch the usually cold heart of Henry Plantagenet, giving him an unwonted gentleness :

This new and gorgeous garment, majesty,
Sits not so easy on me as you think.
Brothers, you mix your sadness with some fear;
This is the English, not the Turkish court.
Not Amurath an Amurath succeeds,
But Harry, Harry...
I'll be your father and your brother too;
Let me but bear your love, I'll bear your cares.

2 Henry IV, V, ii 44-68.

Such tenderness stirs in on the night before Agincourt. In spite of the mordant jesting with Williams and Bates, he is suddenly touched by the plight of the tiny army surrounded in the darkness by its enemies, by the pathos of his lonely, help-less soldiers, by his vision that the victory he hopes to win is not for himself alone, but for them all, by his unexpected realisation of his commitments and concerns for everyone there :

The day, my friends and all things stay for me.

Henry V, IV, 1, 325.

The line conveys an humble, vibrant acceptance of the role of leadership. The same sudden involvement partially redeems the wooing of Katharine from the coarse, political bluster, which it is sometimes said to be. There is a real feeling as he takes her into his arms with the words : "Therefore, patiently yielding. (Kissing her) YOU have witchcraft in your lips, Kate" (V, 11, 274). But a few minutes later, he has altogether escaped from his emotion, and is seen driving his hard bargain and making his bawdy jokes with Burgundy and the King.

If Henry is indeed the individualist, the unscrupulous "getter," his allegiance to "commodity" could nevertheless occasionally be pierced by an attack on his heart. In the earlier scenes with Failstaff, Shakespeare intended to show us Hal responding to Falstaff's wit and light-hearted iconoclasm -as their very similar philosophies of life dictated - simply self- sufficient and self-seeking. But Henry, free of the two worlds for a while, soon made his choice and had re-established his independence of his friend long before he publicly rejected him. Falstaff's own attitude is a genuine and brilliant example of ambivalence. He bears no malice for the snub. His conscious philosophy of life is as machiavellian as Hal's own, and his marauding expeditions to Gloucestershire show him as ruthless as ever his prince could be :

If the young dace be a bait for the old
pike, I see no reason in the law of nature
but I may snap at him.

2 Henry IV, III, ii, 355-7

The lines of Sonnet No. 95 (11.5-8) suggest such ambivalent attitude to the royal hero. The critic like Traversi[10] interprets Henry as a man deeply divided within himself by a consideration of the abnormally violent and unpleasant emotionalism of some of the young prince's speech on war. The only man who rivals Henry in the violence of his language about the ravages of war is Timon, who in the desparation of his misanthropy urges Alcibiades to ravish Athena in words hardly stronger than Henry's own :

Timon : If Alcibiades kill my countrymen,
Let Alcibiades know this of Tlmon,
That Timon cares not. Bat if he sack fair Athens,
And take our goodly aged man by the beards,
Giving our holy virgins to the stain
Of contumelodious, beastly, mad-brain'd war,
Then let him know, and tell him Timon speaks it,
In pity of our aged and our youth.
I cannot choose but tell him, that I care not.

Timon of Athens, V, i, 172-80.

The parallel is sufficiently startling to suggest that Shakespeare thought of his hero-king that could not be openly proclaimed in the play of victories, but which could be insinuated so as to make the judicious grieve. According to Prof. Traversi, Henry's habit of endeavouring to shift the responsibility of his own act of violence on to others, as he does at Harfleur and also before declaring war on France, is another realistic touch in the portrait of a neurotic, who has deliberately suppressed his more honest and generous qualities, but has by no means inhibited them entirely.

Besides Henry V, we have the figure of another successful politician, Octavius Caesar. His place in history was, like Henry's, a peculiarly honourable one, to the Elizabethan imagination. Not only was his name associated with the greatest era of Latin literature, but he had made the world [to] usher into the age of peace in which the Christ was born. The following lines are very much definitive to suggest his power as Shakespeare actually intended :

But let determined things to destiny
Hold unbewail'd their way.

Antony and Cleopatra, III, vi, 88-4.

Also, the issue of the struggle with Antony is admittedly one on which the fortune of the world depends :

The time of universal peace is near :
Prove this a prosperous day, the three nook'd world
Shall bear the olive freely.

IV, vi, 4-6.

But as a person, Octavius is even more inadequate to his historical role than was Henry Plantagenet. He shares the English King's basic "machiavellian" heresy that personal righteousness is irrelevant to the affairs of state, and he succeeds in

identifying himself so completely with Rome that he believes Antony has to be condemned mainly because in all his "lascivious wassails" he "hardly ... vouchsafed" to think he had partners.

Although he admits his obligations to Lepidus with the significant words, personal loyalty means nothing to him :

I know it for my bond;

I, iv, 84.

He liquidates the 'slight unmeritable man' as soon as he safely can. He genuinely expects Cleoptra to be willing to buy safety by betraying Antony :

The Queen
Of audience nor desire shall fail, so she
From Egypt drivers her all - disgraced friend,
Or take hs life there.

III, xii, 20-3.

He himself gives his sister whom he apparently loves sincerely to a man whom he both despises and mistrusts, in order to win a political advantage. To Cleopatra's messenger he says :

Bid her have good heart,
She soon shall know of us, by some of ours,
How honourable and how kindly we
Determine for her; for Caesar cannot live
To be ungentle.

V, i, 56-60.

Also, to his own envoy, he speaks :

Go and say,
We purpose her no shame : give her what comforts
The quality of her passion shall require,
Lest, in her greatness, by some mortal stroke
She do defeat us; for her life in Rome
Would be eternal in our triumph.

V, i, 61-6.

And, this is the man whom Cleopatra finally defeats.

With her love certainly very differently from Juliet's or Cordelia's, Cleopatra drew Mark Antony into a perilous country in which he destroyed himself as well as her, but the world from which he was lured-by his, "serpent of old Nile", was neither innocent nor gracious. It was the world of hard bargain and the proscription list, the loveless world of the "machiavel'' from which it was surely good for him to escape, though lie was adjudged by his peers to have failed so calamitously in that Egypt where he became "passion's slave'', "apipe for Fortune's finger to sound what stop she please".

It is perhaps very likely that Shakespeare might have thought that the "sin" of machiaveilism was a necessity for any successful ruler. Volumnia urges it upon her son, Coriolanus with immense persuasiveness.

You adopt your policy, how is it less or worse,
That it shall hold companionship in peace
With honour as in war;

Coriolanus, III, ii, 48-49.

This advice must have sounded well on the lips of Henry V or Octavius Caesar. Coriolanus fails to put it into practice. He causes great suffering and he dies miserably. As a ruler, he was a complete failure.

Thus, it aeems that the pattern to which the reader's attention is invited as laid down in the teachings of the Christian Church formed the raw material of a powerful drama on the medieval stage. Miracle and morality plays were acted until the last decade of the sixteenth century, and Elizabethan audience were interested in the principal ideas and values of a united view of life which the contemporary drama depicted. Basic elements in their outlook were their conception of man's place in a divinely created universe and of his ability to know and choose between good and evil. Hence came the belief in the reality of sin bringing with it the fear of God's justice, the desire of his mercy and the realisation of a clash between them.

The first (or primary) sin, committed by Lucifer, was conceived as ambition - the desire to be as God, and. this sin was reflected iu all man's lesser attempt to transcend the limits imposed on them by their creator. The only excuses liable to be pleaded in mitigation of man's admitted failure were the temptation by the forces of evil outside himself and the human frailty which made him a ready prey to deception. The man was liable to be condemned unless he received the help of a saviour.

Upto the writing of *Measure for Measure*, there is observable a passionate interest in what an Elizabethan homilist called the "Luciferian sin" and an almost obsessional concern with the irreconciliability of justice and mercy. No longer do the Christian symbolism and prototypes stand imperceptibly. Of course, they never disappear. What does disappear fully is the finality of Doomsday and the cataclysm of damnation

Notes and References

1. *Early English Text Society, Extra Series*, CXX.
2. Honor Matthews, *Character and Symbol in Shakespeare's Plays*, Cambridge : University Press. 1962, p.26.
3. Ibid., pp. 29-30.
4. Ibid., p.34.
5. *Shakespeare's Plutarch* ed. W.W. Skeat Macmillan, 1875. See also *Character and Symbol in Shakespeare's Plays*, p.39.
6. *Life of Antony*.
7. *Life of Julius Caesar*.
8. Cf. Dante's *Inferno.*
9. *Shakespeare's History Plays*, 1968.

Department of English
Gorakhpur University
Uttar Pradesh (India)