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Hysteria and Heroism: Tragic Dissociation and the Two Tragedies

ALTHOUGH ITS PROTAGONIST is heroically single-minded and its action unfolds with unique inevitability, tragedy exhibits a divided mind in every respect. Dissociation extends even to the existence of two quite different kinds of tragedy, melodramatic tragedy in which the hero is an innocent victim of forces outside his control and moral tragedy in which the hero is incriminated and shares responsibility for the tragic situation. Opinion about the relative value of the two has been likewise divided, with the division following predictable but irreconcilable channels of public taste. Sentiment favoring melodramatic tragedy originates mainly in the extreme ranges of public opinion, mass and elite. Popular sentiment is evident in the average person's preference for melodrama of all sorts as well as in the everyday usage of the term "tragic" to refer to any unfortunate accident out of the individual's control. Elitist sympathy is apparent in the actual distribution of tragedy since the most melodramatic tragedy is written for select coteries—Seneca's, for instance, or the Jacobean tragedy by Webster, Chapman, Marston, and Tourneur written for the private theatres. Voiced by essentially disaffected groups, these feelings seldom

emerge directly in reputable public discussion, however. Popular feeling remains confined at the level of inarticulate sentiment or only manifests itself in a preference for "low" art forms or other fanatical schisms, while elite coteries deliberately flout approved public and literary conventions. Writing on tragedy therefore tends to be of a piece. Literary critics—humanist, public-oriented people for the most part—are virtually unanimous in their preference for tragedy in which the hero is morally implicated. Melodramatic tragedy, they feel, not only is unnecessarily violent and sensational but follows the path of least resistance rather than the most realistic. Robert Heilman, whose *Tragedy and Melodrama* is one of the most recent and comprehensive humanist treatments of tragedy, argues that in melodramatic tragedy "the less complex, less subtle meaning becomes dominant, for it exacts less of us," and he, like most critics since Aristotle, concludes that only tragedy in which the hero is incriminated—that of Sophocles and Shakespeare in particular—represents a responsible view of the connections between individual and society.[1]

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[1] *Tragedy and Melodrama* (Seattle: Univ. of Washington Press, 1968), p. 23. Critical preference for moralistic tragedy begins, of course, with Aristotle's favoring tragedy of peripety and anagnorisis over tragedy of suffering.

On the face of it the humanist argument seems convincing. Compared to melodramatic tragedy which exempts the individual and projects an essentially magical scene of persecuted innocents, tragedy in which the individual is implicated does seem to reflect a more balanced awareness of the individual's relation to society. Nevertheless there are serious problems connected with the humanist position. For one thing, whatever the attractions of tragic *hamartia* in theory, in practice critics seldom agree either in defining it or in showing its actual operation in individual tragedies. More important, moralistic tragedy is actually no more realistic than melodramatic tragedy. Although humanist critics assume a straightforward correspondence between tragedy and ordinary public life, there is only one feature in moralistic tragedy that suggests a moral context, namely the implication of the hero together with the underlying assumption that there is a predictable, reliable public framework that permits the individual to determine what actions are socially effective and approved. As soon as we move beyond the implicated hero and examine the tragic framework as a whole we are confronted with a world far more akin to magic and nightmare than to everyday reality, more in line, hence, with a melodramatic view of things. The social scene in tragedy is mysteriously over-determined and indeterminate, while the tragic individual, governed by forces outside his power about whose origins and consequences he is uncertain, has no secure sense of his relation to others nor any control over his actions. Indeed the tragic world is presented as so bafflingly multiphasic that any individual response other than passive resignation results in catastrophe.

The disjointedness of the tragic situation is sharply set forth in *Oedipus Rex* when Oedipus, still at Corinth and confused by rumors about his identity, consults the oracle for the first time. Certain to the point of blindness, like all tragic heroes, that his world is predictable and reliable, he confidently expects a straightforward answer and is utterly demoralized that "Phoebus contemptuously dismissed [his] question and spoke instead of wretched, dreadful matters, hard to bear" (vv. 788-90). The relationship between individual and society is so out of kilter, therefore, that incrimination, appropriate only where social interaction is predictable, is a wholly irrational response instead of a realistic or exemplary one. A genre in which the hero imagines that he can act responsibly but finds in doing so that he creates disaster, tragedy is not moral literature, although morals in it prove tragic. That the hero, even so, continues to act as though he were operating in a reliable social system and so implicates himself simply adds one more perplexing element to matters already dreadful and hard to bear.

This is not to imply that tragedy does not, finally, treat the issue of individual responsibility; rather than reinforcing a specific moral code, however, it reflects the individual's anxieties about his power to act and to control his own destiny when his relation to the rest of society becomes confused. In this light, our understanding of tragedy changes considerably. Contrary to the humanist argument that tragedy relates directly to normal social reality, the tragic experience actually embodies a radical distortion of reality. Tragedy expresses a type of alienation that develops only in certain historical situations which strike those experiencing them as catastrophic. The two

kinds of tragedy, moreover, turn out to project complementary impulses of the divided tragic mind, melodramatic trag-́edy projecting the alienated individual's impulse to reject society, incriminating tragedy his need to reconcile himself to it. The difference in public esteem accorded the two turns out, finally, to depend not on the actual value of the two kinds of tragedy but on the inherent limits of public opinion which permits only certain kinds of feelings to surface and relegates the rest to less esteemed, underground forms of expression such as are directed to coteries and sub-cults.

1

Although tragedy as an identifiable literary genre only appeared during four relatively brief historical periods, humanist critics regularly consider it in universal, a-historical terms, an approach that, given the conspicuous absence of tragedy in modern literature, means that they are either reduced to issuing proclamations of literary and cultural decay or to trying fruitlessly to discover examples of "modern," "domestic," "bourgeois," or "tragi-comic" tragedy. Certain recent, more historically sensitive kinds of analysis have made it apparent, however, that an accurate understanding of tragedy involves relating it to a specific and relatively uncommon set of historical circumstances, the same social and psychological conditions, interestingly enough, that also give birth to human-́ism.[2] The most distinctive feature of this

historical situation, moreover, turns out to be precisely the drastic way in which the individual's relations to society are confused, particularly those individuals most closely identifying with humanist attitudes. Generally speaking, tragedy originates in a culture during its transition from a feudal, pre-individualized stage of society to an individualized one, a change involving a shift from aristocratic to middle class institutions and an increasing reliance on fluid rather than fixed social relationships. Specifically, however, tragedy seems to refer only to the earliest or humanist phase of the pro-́cess, the develpment and decline of the gentry, a term meant here to include primarily four groups, the fifth century Athenian "citizens," the Roman "new men," the Tudor gentry, and the courtiers appointed by Louis the Fourteenth. These people are, after the aristocracy, the first identifiable group in their culture to be individualized and to attain social power and prominence. They are likewise the first to experience the kind of dispossession that afterwards becomes an integral feature of mobile middle class society whereby a group in power is displaced by another wave of individualization and ideology (although the situations of the two classical, slave-based cultures seem to have been complicated by the failure of a middle class to con-́solidate sufficiently so that subsequent developments were despotic and baroque). Because their development and decay are so spectacular and so rapid

[2] Psychohistorical analyses of the origins of tragedy appear in E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1951), pp. 28-50; and Zevedei Barbu, *Problems of Historical Psychology* (New York: Grove Press, 1960), pp. 69-179. See also Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy* (Stanford:

Stanford Univ. Press, 1966), pp. 45-84; Paul N. Siegel, *Shakespearean Tragedy and the Elizabethan Compromise* (New York: New York Univ. Press, 1957), pp. 3-78, particularly his discussion of the gentry; and my own "Jacobean Drama and the Literature of Decay: A Study of Conservative Reaction in Literature," Diss. Univ. of Michigan 1969, pp. 38-107.

(usually a matter of only two or three generations) and because they experience in dizzying succession both great expectations and great anxieties, the gentry's fortunes are unique, so much so that subsequent generations never quite overcome the feeling of living in the shadow of these humanist cultures nor cease to challenge their exclusive rights to literary tragedy.

Albeit spectacular, neither humanism nor tragedy is an unmitigated blessing. Indeed the rise of a gentry means the creation of a highly distinguished but remarkably vulnerable class whose members, hybrids half-way between feudal aristocrats and middle class citizens, consistently exhibit dissociated patterns of thought and feeling, as does, hence, the humanist point of view. On the one hand, the humanists are imbued with an impressive sense of public destiny and individual dignity, so apparent in their intense public consciousness, philosophical idealism, and worship of literacy, art, and personal honor that are the distinctive creations of early individualism. And it is these qualities that inevitably attract the admiration of subsequent generations. Unfortunately, historians and literary critics usually pay less attention to the series of radical confusions that the gentry experience, although these confusions underlie their cultural "renaissance" to a large degree. For one thing, they suffer acutely the social and psychological disorientations that accompany large-scale mobility, both the anxieties caused by feeling one has violated the old order and those generated by being thrown on one's own and of having to act without clearly defined sanctions. Initially, therefore, their energies are mainly devoted to establishing new institutions and a new type of personality that reflect the new

relationships between the individual and society. And since the largest share of this effort at self-justification and self-identification is performed by the humanist intellectuals, the abundance of their arts and letters suggests how pressing the gentry's need is to establish themselves.

In addition to the anxieties inherent in their own individuation, the gentry are also confronted, increasingly, with the disorientations posed by the threat of further individualization and mobility, the disorientations, in short of reactionary rather than revolutionary developments inherent in the situation. Once in power the gentry attempt to close the floodgates and consolidate their position, although unlike the aristocracy of birth that precedes them they allow for a gradual assimilation of the best from below as they do for the best that has been thought and said in the past (hence the strong conservative strain in humanist art and letters which serve as much for self-defense as self-justification). For all their prominence, the gentry are actually only a small group whose authority is due less to permanent sources of social power than to their temporary historical role as vanguard and buffer in the emerging middle class's displacement of the feudal aristocracy. A point is quickly reached, therefore, where assimilation proves impossible and the gentry is displaced as a determining social force, although their tradition lingers on strongly in the "inherited conglomerate" that constitutes middle class culture, generally in the form of the love-hate relationship of "the two cultures."

Like their rise, the gentry's dispossession has to be understood primarily in psycho-social terms, particularly as it affects tragedy. Historically, tragedy

arises when the gentry are threatened with the loss of their only recently established institutional and individual identity, an event that utterly confuses the humanist individual's already pre-carious relation to his society. The actual historical experience of expropriation, however, is made even more traumatic because the humanists do not understand the social and historical role of this kind of alienation, they being even less able than later generations to adjust to the mobility that is the most prominent but frustrating feature of our tradition. Fail-ing to understand that social change, often on a large-scale, is an integral part of the development of an individualist culture and that, as a result, individuals have to relate and identify with changing rather than fixed social structures, dis-possessed groups tend to distort an al-ready demoralizing situation by interpret-ing change in terms of decay, a reaction that is especially virulent when it is ex-perienced for the first time historically and where it follows a period of unusual energy and promise as it does in human-ist periods.

Because individuals learn to identify only with a specific social frame of ref-erence, they perceive emergent patterns of behavior only as deviations and de-basements of what is established and normal. In individualist societies, estab-lished individuals and groups regard fresh spurts of individualization as either criminal and violent or upstartish and foolish unless they are extremely gradual. Change is thus moralized rather than analyzed and in effect cannot be under-stood at all. Particularly when drastic, change has to be interpreted in terms that are essentially magical and hysteric, a tendency that is further intensified be-cause individuals involved feel that the whole basis of their personality is threat-ened. In mobile cultures, therefore, in-dividuals begin by attributing their ex-propriation to deviant individuals. Since moralistic explanations only lead to fan-tasies of immorality on an anarchic scale, however, moralism inevitably turns mag-ical. Unlike more archaic societies which project wholly magical or mythic agen-cies, divine or demonic, in similar situ-ations, in these cases blame or determina-tion is projected in terms of dehumanized individuals, either subhuman villains or superhuman agents, and of equally de-humanized forms of human interaction such as widespread conspiracy, alien in-tervention, or large-scale loss of moral fiber. Alienated individuals therefore adopt an essentially paranoiac attitude, seeing themselves either as innocent vic-tims overwhelmed by forces outside their control or as innocent agents of disaster. The distortion is intensified to a critical point, finally, when displacement is experienced by an identifiable group accustomed to power and prestige. Feel-ing themselves overwhelmed with de-viance and assuming, like any established class, that their values are absolute and universal rather than related to the lo-calized practices of a historical social group, the members confuse a threat to their own authority as a threat to the whole civilized world and so are swamp-ed with a sense of collapse and decay.

The reactions to alienation suggested so far are characteristic responses to so-cial change in Western, individualist cul-tures and still operate intensely today, though our social theory if not practice is becoming increasingly sensitive to them. Tragedy, however, only appears during the earliest phase of individuali-zation when these distortions are ex-perienced with such intensity as to create

an absolutely convincing illusion of ca-
tastrophe. Two factors in particular tend
to make this the only historical period
geared for tragic reaction: a character-
istically distorted version of the con-
nections between individual and society
and an equally primitive historical per-
spective of an established class's relation
to a changing society. Because they are
the first group to self-consciously ex-
perience individualization and its heady
but threatening sense of freedom, the
humanists for reasons both of pride and
fear overestimate the power of the indi-
vidual for good and ill and give him an
autonomy tantamount to omnipotence at
the same time that they radically under-
estimate his dependency on social in-
stitutions. Hence their chief innovation
in historiography is the study of "great
men" while their main concern in social
theory is with individuals (the courtier,
the governor, the good ruler, the tyrant,
the philosopher-king) and with individual
restraints (reason, decorum, self-control,
sophrosyne, the golden mean). On the
other hand, there is a conspicuous ignor-
ance or evasion of economic and other
institutional determinates in their think-
ing. Given their distorted estimate of in-
dividual autonomy, therefore, humanists
are forced inevitably to explain mobility
in terms of deviant individuals and to do
so with such intensity that they are not
only the people chiefly responsible for
giving currency to public and literary
images of individual heroes and villains
capable of rescuing and destroying entire
societies, but also the only people to ex-
perience them with tragic conviction.

Humanists also overestimate the im-
portance of their own class and ethos as
much as they do the autonomy of the
individual and are therefore unusually
disposed to confuse their displacement as

a class with the decay of the world. Once
expropriation becomes a recurrent phe-
nomenon in a culture, it begins to be
recognized as the bicultural conflict it is
while the alienated individual is aware
of himself as a dissociated sensibility
rather than the last whole man over-
whelmed by apocalypse. Although the
Romantic individual alienated by middle-
class consolidation may go his own way
to bohemia or the woods, for example,
he does not confuse public destiny with
his own fate or that of his group, and
knows, in his more realistic moments that
it is he and not the world at large that
is decadent. In the humanist period, how-
ever, historical awareness of social change
is at a primitive stage, history, like hu-
manism and tragedy, being essentially a
product of the rise of the gentry and
the first experience of major social
change. The humanists are acutely con-
scious that their age is a giant step beyond
the dark age of barbarism that precedes
it but are inclined to see further develop-
ments only as a return to barbarism.
Given their lack of historical experience
together with the spectacular character
of their society and their intense identifi-
cation with it, humanists inevitably suf-
fer widespread visions of public as well
as personal tragedy, at least in the semi-
privacy of literature.

2

Tragedy is not moral, but reflects a
situation in which a particular social sys-
tem is changing so that the individual's
relation to society turns from a moral to
a magical one in a uniquely confusing
manner. In literature this unique rela-
tionship between individual and society
is projected chiefly in terms of a de-
humanized dramatic scene and a pro-

tagonist who initially asserts himself heroically in order to avoid feelings of dissociation but has, when heroism proves illusory, either flatly to reject or reconcile himself to the world. Like the personality of its hero, the tragic literary structure is also apparently whole but actually divided, which accounts for the existence of two types of tragedy, each of which projects the tragic hero in a different relation to society, melodramatic in the case of rejective tragedy, moralistic in the case of reconciling tragedy.

The dramatic scene in tragedy portrays a society out of joint, obscurely determined by forces outside the individual's control. The basic psychological process operating in the scene is hysteric dehumanization, hysteria being the state of mind of the alienated individual who feels powerlessly trapped in an incomprehensibly disastrous situation while dehumanization, we have noted, is the way such a person accounts for his dispossession when he is unable to explain it realistically and is forced to project the causes outside the strictly human sphere of interaction into the province of magic. In rejective tragedy, which we shall deal with first, the tragic scene is melodramatic. One of the least respected literary frames of reference, melodrama is actually not only the most recurrent but one of the most important since it projects that part of the alienated mind that feels innocently victimized and forced to reject the world. Hence the distinctive features of the melodramatic mind, in which dehumanization takes the form of villains (dehumanized individuals) and intrigue (dehumanized human interaction), and hysteria appears as Gothic sensationalism.

The melodramatic scene is spectac-

ularly apparent in Jacobean coterie tragedy which, borrowing from Seneca and adding much of its own, exhibits the most intensely melodramatic structure of any tragedy. Its typical scene features hordes of bloodthirsty, maniacal villains who overwhelm the innocent hero together with, perhaps, his fiancée or a small group of loyal retainers. Intrigue likewise occurs on a massive scale and appears mainly in two dramatic patterns, both of which pose human relations wholly in terms of force and fraud (rape and seduction where women are involved). In one of the patterns, projecting the fear that all authority is lost and mere anarchy rules the world, a ruler is dispossessed from his throne by usurpation and treachery, while in the other a young man of merit is disinherited or thwarted by intrigue from obtaining a position he deserves or that is rightfully his, a plot that projects the fear that all sources of individual opportunity and identity or what Chapman's hero in *Bussy D'Ambois* calls "reward" and "honor" go backward and on their head (I.i.2).[3] The two plots are usually combined, moreover, so that in Tourneur's *The Atheist's Tragedy*, Marston's *Antonio's Revenge*, Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and indeed in most revenge plays an old king is displaced and the young heir is disinherited. In more heroic tragedies like Chapman's the same evil councilors who prevent a deserving soldier-scholar from reforming the king's corrupt council and achieving reward and honor also intrigue to usurp the throne. Political intrigue is usually compounded with sexual intrigue in these plays, particularly cockoldry and incest

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[3] Citations from Chapman are to *The Tragedies of George Chapman*, ed. Thomas M. Parrott (1910; rpt. New York: Russell & Russell, 1961; 2 vols.).

(the sexual forms of dispossession) or thwarted romance (the sexual version of the plot in which a youth is politically frustrated). All told, therefore, intrigue is presented on a notably large and terrifying scale.

Dehumanization of this kind and extent is in itself hysteric; the most spectacular expressions of this mood in Jacobean coterie tragedy, however, are projected in terms of Italianate Gothic sensationalism. Hence its projection of the villains as Machiavels and its obsessive elaboration of intrigue in terms of alien exotica like poison, pox, panders, and all forms of Senecan and Italianate violence and horror. Hence, too, its use of haunted and decaying castles, night scenes and midnight massacres, graveyards, ghosts, and villains who are not only alien and violent but motivelessly malignant and ghoulish. The more thoroughly melodramatic Jacobean tragedies like *The Atheist's Tragedy* and Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* are almost wholly Gothic. In the former, for instnce, the old ruler is murdered in a gravel pit at night amid torch-lights, thunder and lightning while his son Charlemont is disinherited and imprisoned to starve and rot; subsequently, Charlemont escapes to a monastery graveyard at midnight where he fights among the tombs with a henchman sent by the villain to murder him and then, having killed his assailant, hides in a charnel house; meantime the villain D'Amville pursues to the same graveyard his daughter-in-law Castabella (once Charlemont's fiancée until D'Amville forced her to marry his own sickly son) and attempts to make her commit incest in order to perpetuate his lineage; at this point Charlemont, disguised as a ghost, frightens him away and rescues Castabella, whence the two lovers, driven to despair, "bid . . . sweet death . . . welcome" and lie down among the graves, "each of them with a death's head for a pillow" (IV.iii.180-81; and 204: stage direction).[4] An equally massive display of Gothic, including extreme motifs like lycanthropy and necrophilia, appears in *The Duchess of Malfi* whose fourth act alone condenses in one scene the whole range of Gothic sensation; thus the Duchess' apartment, the home in which she and Antonio tried to live secretly despite the persecution of her demonic brothers, becomes in short order prison, charnel house, horror house, madhouse, torture chamber, and grave. The scene represents the limits of horror after which one can only die willingly, and at the end the Duchess exclaims, "tell my brothers that I perceive death (now I am well awake) best gift is, they can give or I can take" (IV.ii.229-31).[5]

The Gothic sensationalism in Jacobean and Senecan tragedy is regularly pointed out, of course, generally in order to suggest the decadence of this drama. What is not observed by critics is that sensationalism is an essential, indeed defining feature of alienated literature where it is the main means of expressing the alienated individual's hysteric sensations of social disjointedness and personal powerlessness. Even where, as in *The Atheist's Tragedy* or in Boulevard Melodrama and the Gothic Novel, the sensationalism is more grotesque than horrible, it is the silliness of hysteria. In Jacobean tragedy, Italianation, by itself, represents a frantic attempt to define the sources of expropriation by projecting them onto

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[4] Citations from Tourneur are to *The Atheist's Tragedy*, ed. Irving Ribner (London: Methuen, 1964).

[5] Citations from Webster are to *The Complete Works of John Webster*, ed. F. L. Lucas (London: Chatto & Windus, 1927; 4 vols.).

alien individuals and conspiracies. Together, Italianation and Gothic express the sensations of the innocent mind, the anguish and impotence of the person who feels that he has been magically divested of power and place in a collapsing world and of all capacity to act or feel save for a wholly immobilizing sense of primitive fear and self-pity. Gothic, indeed, ultimately represents the transformation of alienation into a longing for death and utter immobility, as is suggested when the heroes of *The Atheist's Tragedy* and *The Duchess of Malfi* gratefully bid death welcome. In a world in which all sources of public authority and personal interaction and identity seem to have collapsed, the individual feels himself in a graveyard where there is no reason for living at all.

The figure of the innocent is also crucial to an understanding of the alienated tragic hero, although the relationship between them is usually no better recognized than the relationship between melodrama and tragedy whose heroes they are. Hysteric in terms of his sensations, in terms of action the alienated individual is a split personality. Because his character was shaped in accordance with patterns of behavior being displaced, the alienated individual is torn between two contradictory impulses. He can continue to conform to older standards, thus preserving his integrity of character and sense of innocence. To do so, however, means that he acts in a compulsive, self-destructive manner and eventually has to cease to act altogether since what he regards as approved actions no longer bear any effective relation to reality; his ceasing to act, moreover, is less a voluntary response than a paralyzing apathy resulting from complete mental conflict. If he actually wants to assert himself

and maintain an active identity in social interaction, therefore, he has to act in ways that feel violent and out of character, in which case he not only is overwhelmed with a sense of deviancy and guilt but feels that he is defying the gods and overthrowing all order and legitimacy. The alienated hero in later literature, or even in comedy written concurrently with tragedy where dehumanization takes the less immobilizing form of grotesque fools rather than Gothic villains, often attempts to' act out of character; hence the trickster hero in Jacobean coterie comedy of intrigue (who is, in fact, an alter-ego of the tragic hero) and such figures of Romantic literature as the Byronic hero-villain and the dandy who either defy all standards or else attempt to establish an antagonistically cooperative relation with society. In tragedy, however, where the scene is projected in violently melodramatic or moralistically awe-ful terms, the hero never deliberately attempts to act out of character since to do so would turn him into an intriguing villain, costing him his innocence and immersing him in the destructive. Hence the tragic hero is always, consciously, an innocent and as such immobilized. And for this reason the dissociated personality of the alienated hero emerges less prominently in tragedy than in other or later kinds of alienated literature, although it does appear clearly in certain unusually self-conscious tragedies, in *Hamlet,* for example, in the hero's remarkable need yet hesitancy to act and in his explicit perplexity "whether to suffer in the mind the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune or to take arms against a sea of troubles" (III.i.57-59), or in Chapman's *Bussy D'Ambois* where the hero knows from the outset that innocence can only

be preserved by withdrawal in a "green
retreat" but is utterly unable to prevent
himself from acting out · of character
(I.i. 45).[6]

At the same time, however, the tragic
hero is clearly different from the silly
or passively suffering innocent of Boule-
vard Melodrama and the Gothic Novel.
Indeed, the most distinctive feature of
tragedy is the way in which its pro-
tagonist not only acts but acts heroically,
a fact that critics invariably point out
without, however, fully acknowledging
to what extent tragic heroism is delusive
in origin and horrible in its consequences.
For one thing, in a world in which de-
termining power is in the hands of de-
humanized agents, *any* action, not just
special actions of large magnitude and
effect, must be heroic. Tragic heroism is
not the romance or fairy-tale variety in
which special individuals perform rescues
but the minimum required of any per-
son who wants to preserve his individual-
ity or to do anything more assertive
than submit passively. It is true that the
innocent mind in such a situation does
imagine that its actions are of this ro-
mantic type, but the aura of nobility is
only the compensatory self-enhancement
of the individual who actually feels pow-
erless. In reality such a person's actions,
when not mere shiftings for survival,
are reactionary attempts to restore a
changing society to its former dimen-
sions so that it will again correlate with
the individual's lagging character. Tragic
heroism, therefore, is a confused, com-
pulsive reaction that originates in indi-
viduals who feel inferior and powerless
because they are tragically unable to
change their personality to conform to

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[6] Citations from Shakespeare are to *Shake-
speare: The Complete Works*, ed. G. B. Har-
rison (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1948).

changing social conditions and so react
to them only in melodramatic catas-
trophic ways.

Delusory as it is, heroic action is the
inevitable reaction of the tragic hero and
the most identifying feature of tragedy.
Unlike later alienated heroes who, more
aware of their split personality, are less
inclined to define their relationship to
society in totally catastrophic terms, the
tragic hero is confused to the point he
is incapable of making any distinctions.
He inevitably acts heroically, therefore,
heroism being especially characteristic
of the humanist phase of individualism
and its overestimation of individual au-
tonomy and unusual disposition for decay
anxiety. Confronted with apparently uni-
versal degeneration the tragic hero can
only cling compulsively to his char-
acteristic ways of thought and action.
Initially he imagines that he can act in-
nocently; the Duchess of Malfi simply
wants to marry and have children, Bussy
D'Ambois only wants to avoid poverty
and achieve a measure of self-esteem,
while Hamlet seems merely to have want-
ed to remain a student at Wittenberg
while waiting for his regular succession
to the throne. Save where he remains a
passive victim, however, the hero quick-
ly realizes that he will have to take
special actions in order both to survive
and to react against a world that offends
his deepest sense of integrity and de-
stroys the bonds he depended on most
profoundly. He therefore resorts to two
forms of heroic action or "rescue," re-
venge and reform, which correlate rough-
ly with the two patterns of intrigue de-
scribed earlier, revenge being a reaction
to the displacement of an established
ruler, reform the heroic reaction of the
youth prevented from achieving his due
reward and honor in a decadent world.

Both are attempts of a lone individual to prevent alienation and restore a just society and both, to begin with, seem innocent and justified. Notions of rescue in either form, however, are distortions which superhumanize the hero as much as the villain is dehumanized. Besides being reactionary and not within the power of the lone individual, they are, when put in practice, neither innocent nor heroic since the means required to effect them in a dehumanized world must be as violent and deviant as those of the villain. Much to his own amazement and horror, therefore, the tragic hero inevitably ends by acting out of character and overwhelming himself with guilt and confusion, at which point he either destroys himself and others or becomes immobilized and withdraws from the world in bewilderment and disgust.

In Jacobean revenge tragedy, for instance, the hero either discovers that his efforts are taboo and is paralyzed, the case with Hamlet and Charlemont, or else becomes immersed in intrigue as in *Antonio's Revenge, Hamlet*, and Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy*, where the heroes take innocent lives, perform Gothic deeds of violence, and trigger a complex chain of unforseen accidents that hoist the engineer on his own petard. In plays like Chapman's *The Revenge of Bussy D'Ambois* and *Hamlet*, where revenge is actually committed without entirely contaminating the hero, it is performed with such extreme fastidiousness and hesitancy as to be almost passively done and the deed is inevitably moralized so as to suggest the existence of "a divinity that shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will" (V.ii.10-11); even so, the hero, who has never found reality anything but stale, flat and unprofitable, ends disgusted with the world, Cler-

mont in *The Revenge* dying by his own hand while Hamlet feels it a felicity to absent himself from a harsh world. The same patterns appear in Jacobean tragedy where the hero more ambitiously attempts to reform or restore society. In Chapman's *Chabot* the hero tries desperately to save his country from the machinations of intriguing politicians only to have all his heroic efforts not only frustrated but misunderstood even by his best friends. Chabot therefore ends in a manner archetypical of the tragic hero, dying of a broken heart and proclaiming that "death is the life of good men" (II.ii.64). Elsewhere the reformer, like the revenger, becomes implicated in crime and violence. Although he knows that his integrity can only be preserved in withdrawal, Bussy D'Ambois also deludes himself in thinking that he can "bring up a new fashion and rise in court with virtue" (I.i.129-30). He therefore leaves his seclusion at the outset of the play to reform the court only to be caught up in courtly intrigue and completely thwarted. In certain extreme examples of this kind of play like Webster's *The White Devil* and Chapman's *Byron* plays (and, in a more reconciling, "moralistic" vein, *Macbeth*) heroic effort is so intensely mixed with intrigue from the beginning that the hero is an indistinguishable blend of innocent and villain while the impression of the play as a whole is one of madness, madness being the inevitable result of the confusions generated by the tragic situation. Notions of innocent, heroic action therefore prove illusions in practice and the tragic hero ends immobilized by guilt and an overwhelming sense of the futility of action. Nevertheless it is this unique combination of apocalyptic situation making inevitable both heroic action and a final

explosion in which death, madness and grandeur are indistinguishably mingled that constitutes tragedy and not only differentiates it from other alienated literature but prompts later alienated individuals to admire it nostalgically and feel themselves epigones precisely because the heroic delusion in tragedy seems so whole-hearted and the hero's action so intensely unified in comparison to the fate of later alienated heroes whose main problem is the self-consciousness generated by their dissociated personality.

The tragic hero in coterie tragedy, however, not only ends acknowledging the futility of action but making a characteristic gesture of contempt and defiance. Although he becomes implicated in crime and violence in his effort to take innocent action, he blames this on others and typically dies affirming his innocence in defiance of the world, a defiance that may take the form of Stoic contempt, "heroic" resignation and willingness to die, or a faith that future or past generations will appreciate the hero, granting him a posthumous fame that, as Webster puts it in *Malfi*, "nobly, beyond death, will crown the end" (V.v.146). Coterie tragedy, at any rate, ends with a flurry of self-glorification and wish-fulfillment in which the dying hero rejects the present world and achieves a measure of compensatory identity by heroically erecting an illusion of splendid isolation. This rejective attitude is the distinguishing feature of melodramatic tragedy, whose whole dramatic apparatus is designed to reflect the rationalizing process of the rejective frame of mind: its emphasis on the hero's innocence, its handling of dehumanization in terms of wholly alienating villains and Gothic horror, and of heroic action so that its frustration serves only to further

convince the hero of the rottenness of society. It is this emphasis on rejection, moreover, that distinguishes melodramatic tragedy from "moralistic" tragedy where the emphasis is instead on the alienated individual's need to reconcile himself to society.

3

Rejection and reconciliation are the alter-impulses of the alienated individual and the final forms in which his divided personality manifests itself. Like innocence, heroism, melodrama, tragedy and other literary and psychic conventions that develop when established social conventions break down, however, these responses are often misinterpreted. For one thing, they tend to be confused with moral responses because on the surface reconciliation appears to be socially integrative while rejection seems anti-social. Actually they are both forms of resignation characteristic of alienated individuals who have to adjust their destiny wholly in isolation and by essentially narcissistic, magical means. Even when it is understood that they are, like revenge and reform, hysteric reactions of the lone individual improvising in a situation of social disorientation, however, casual observers have a strong tendency to approve reconciliation and condemn rejection since the former seems to contribute to public tranquility while the latter apparently foments further trouble. But this kind of thinking radically confuses cause and symptom. Not only do most alienated people gravitate between the two impulses, neither reconciliation nor rejection seriously affects the real causes of alienation, both being strictly personal defense mechanisms which have no public benefit. Even the

marginal differences between them seem of doubtful value. If rejection seems a more violent reaction it is only because the dominantly rejective person vents his frustrations and resentments externally whereas the reconciling individual, as we shall see, commits an act of self-violence by suppressing such feelings. Moreover, not only are the illusion of harmony and the delay in confrontation granted by reconciliation obtained at great psychic cost to individuals involved, but also the suppression required probably only causes the underlying frustrations to be the more violent and contagious when they finally erupt publicly—we seem desperately to forget in times of crisis that peace and tranquility are anomic goals, a well-integrated society having less anemic aims. The main point here is that it is futile to esteem reconciliation more than rejection when they are both debilitating reactions individually and publicly, just as it is futile to confuse them both with other, more satisfactory and satisfying responses.

Nevertheless the tendency to confuse the two is deeply rooted in public and private consciousness in Western culture, which, since its introduction to individualism under humanism, overestimates individual autonomy and self-control and makes them the main if not sole sources of social stability. Hence, although most people (women, children, white and blue-collars, sects, minorities, elites, etc.) are alienated to a fair degree in even the best integrated societies, rejection or overt alienation of any kind is never permitted to emerge consciously or publicly save in highly distorted forms. Reconciliation, which is not felt consciously to be appreciably different from socially integrated responses, will therefore inevitably feel more acceptable and be more approved publicly than will rejection which we tend to find less acceptable and relegate to underground, fanatical forms of communication, either coterie or mass cult. This is even true of literature and art, although as mixtures of public and private thinking and as vehicles capable of high distortion they are more permissive forms of expression and serve as means of voicing alienation and even of recombining our dissociated tendencies to some degree. It is therefore no accident that the most approved writers, the "greats" like Sophocles, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton, Goethe, and Dickens are ultimately reconciling, although the full picture of literary "greatness" seems to involve the fact that, at the same time, these writers avoid all simple-minded piety and are remarkable for the amount of rejective material they incorporate in their work short of going over to the devil's party.

Whatever the breech between our public and private lives, from the point of view of the alienated mind reconciliation and rejection are complementary if contradictory forms of resignation. If anything, indeed, rejection is the more natural impulse of the individual who finds himself alienated from society for no apparent fault of his own. Confronted with having to cut himself off from all sources of identity, however, the individual is also moved to reconcile himself with society. For one thing, he realizes that isolation is not splendid but intolerable, so attenuated, in fact, as to be morbid, the case with death in rejective tragedy and all forms of romantic or decadent withdrawal. Moreover, not only does rejection isolate the individual, it is also experienced as a hubristical and destructive defiance of all that is holy. In this light rejection is utterly intoler-

able and the individual is awed into sub-
mission and silence.

Reconciliation, however, is achieved
at a cost as psychologically disastrous as
rejection and by a process that distorts
reality as much as the rejective person's
hysteric emphasis on his own innocence.
Indeed the reconciling mind goes to pre-
cisely the other extreme. Overwhelmed
with feelings of abandonment and *hubris*,
and limited to having to pin the blame
exclusively on individuals, the alienated
person arrives at the notion that he him-
self is somehow the party guilty of caus-
ing disaster. Instead of projecting blame
on alien individuals, he therefore intro-
jects it and assumes a guilt that is not
rightfully his, preferring to doubt himself
rather than cast all else in doubt. Self-
incrimination is unusually articulated in
The Atheist's Tragedy, which is worth
looking at both for this reason and be-
cause it shows unusually well how dis-
torted and disastrous an act it is. A
strange play in all respects, *The Atheist's
Tragedy* combines rejective and recon-
ciling features in abrupt, jarring ways
that, if unaesthetic, probably reflect ac-
curately the disjointedness of the highly
alienated mind. Horribly persecuted, the
innocent hero Charlemont's reasoning
leads him to the verge of rejecting the
"heavens" since when "our afflictions do
exceed our crimes," the heavens them-
selves must be unjust; precisely at the
point of defiance, however, he turns
volte face, begins manufacturing crimes
and incriminates himself, declaring that
it is his own "afflicted soul" that is at
fault:

> O my afflicted soul, how torment swells
> Thy apprehension with profane conceit
> Against the sacred justice of my God.
> Our own constructions are the authors of
> Our misery. (III.ii.12-16)

The passage makes clear that it is exactly
when the individual fully realizes that
rejection entails not a splendid isolation
but a sundering from all creation that
he begins to think of reconciliation. But
it is also clear that reconciliation involves
equally drastic consequences, namely a
surrender of self that amounts to a com-
plete loss of individual identity or "our
own constructions." To be obsessed with
notions of total catastrophe means that
the individual has either to reject the
whole world or his whole self. Recon-
ciling tragedy therefore involves a rad-
ical rejection of all individuality and a
reduction of the person to utter apathy.
The one identity that the reconciling
hero is able to salvage when he sur-
renders all sense of esteem is that pe-
culiarly distorted identity obtained from
self-abasement done deludedly in the
name of public welfare, an act that how-
ever much it is glorified as noble self-
sacrifice, "common sense," moderation,
or religious renunciation, is as violent a
gesture as the rejective hero's projection
of his apathy in terms of splendid isola-
tion.

As a rule, however, the act of self-
incrimination is not set forth so explicitly
in tragedy as it is in *The Atheist's Trag-
edy* but is simply embodied in the dra-
matic pattern, a dramatization that in-
volves inverting the way rejective trag-
edy handles the dehumanized scene and
tragic hero so that they reflect the ra-
tionalizing processes of the reconciling
mind. Instead of projecting the deter-
mining forces in human affairs as sub-
human villains, therefore, dehumaniza-
tion in tragedy projects a dramatic scene
that is controlled by superhuman or mys-
terious powers in relation to which the
individual is always inferior and pre-
sumptuous, never innocent or superior.

Reconciling literature is therefore moralistic or, more commonly, pietistic, and necessarily tends to revert to an archaic, pre-individualist frame of mind in which mysterious, fideistic forces determine human destiny (in a more secular form it is patriotic rather than pious). Hence the dramatic materials of reconciling tragedy are myth and taboo rather than intrigue and villains (though the myth is usually a matter of divine intrigues) while mystery and religious machinery like the *deus ex machina* substitute for Gothic and Italianate sensationalism, the hysteric mood in this case being awed and submissive rather than horrified and rejective. In Greek tragedy, for example, the scene is one in which human affairs are dominated by mysterious forces, chiefly divine will or interference (*phthonos*) together with pollution and inherited guilt which are indirect manifestations of the supernatural in space and time. Altogether they constitute a network of relationships so complicated and arcane that any individual action can only trigger disaster. All human action is blind and presumptive and men, unable to understand beforehand either their prophets or oracles, are inevitably reduced to learning too late by a process of *pathos mathos*. Hence philosophy and morality are reduced exclusively to inculcating inhibition.

Although supernatural forces are the determining agents in reconciling tragedy, the dramatic scene is generally not nearly so prominent in it as in rejective tragedy where the plays are saturated with villainy and Gothic sensationalism. In Greek tragedy, for instance, the operation of divine forces lurks in the background as a rule, appearing only in the anxious speculations of the chorus or the occasional appearance of a god or an oracle. This peculiar subordination, however, precisely reflects the individual's innocence of the environment in which he operates and also his thinking when, ultimately, he submissively accepts blame himself rather than projecting it outward. Dramatic attention is consequently focused almost exclusively on the tragic hero and his reactions, which in these cases seem more voluntary than reactive. In the classical situation of reconciling tragedy, a political crisis erupts which demands heroic measures. The initial feeling is that the situation can be handled in strictly human terms, although the chorus is usually ambivalent and needs to be led while a few people like soothsayers intimately associated with the gods are outrightly sceptical. The protagonist, in any event, is confident and therefore acts heroically only to discover, too late, that his good intentions put into action are intricated in an amazing network of superhuman intentions. The result is a mysteriously paradoxical effect in which the good-intentioned hero turns out to be a monstrous criminal whose crimes are innocently parricidal and genocidal. Oedipus sets out to discover the cause of the plague and finds by a short circuit of cursed events that it is he himself, while Creon in *Antigone* attempts to stabilize a war-torn kingdom and instead leaves it leaderless at the same time that he kills his dearest kin (indeed the figure of his wife Euridice and her suicide are introduced abruptly at the end solely to demonstrate how the tragic effect proliferates uncontrollably). The forces outside man's control are so mysterious and complicated, in fact, that even the simplest gesture triggers catastrophe: Oedipus' initiating inquiries, Creon's forbidding a funeral, Lear's need of pomp and

ceremony, Othello's desire to marry. Equally paradoxical, tragedy develops chiefly in the bosom of the individual's family, precisely the place where he expects the greatest security and control. That this is, in tragedy, also a royal family and dynasty, however, makes the hero's gesture disastrous publicly as well as privately, and the collapse that follows every attempt to rescue the commonwealth (Oedipus' saving Thebes by deciphering the Sphinx's riddle and discovering the cause of the plague, Creon's efforts to restore public order, and Heracles' gigantic labors that lead only to slaughter and madness) implies the futility of all human intelligence and power to control destiny, private or public.

Reconciling tragedy therefore projects a situation in which, paradoxically, it is heroic action itself that is responsible for catastrophe, in contrast to rejective tragedy in which heroic action, although it proves incriminating when put in practice, is not viewed as a main cause of disaster. The basic dramatic pattern of reconciling tragedy therefore turns out to be one of self-dispossession, and the final reaction of hero and viewer is not one of horrified disgust and contempt for the world but an awed sense of our need to resign ourselves quietly to our fate, and forego all assertion of our individuality. Reconciling tragedy therefore ends with counsels of futility which, however they may be rationalized as acts of faith or wisdom, are nothing more than respectful rather than contemptuous forms of apathy.

4

To speak of reconciling and rejective tragedy as if they were discreet types is inaccurate, however, since most tragedies actually combine the two, a mingling that, if it makes understanding more difficult, more accurately reflects the confused mind of the alienated in a tragic phase.[7] Jacobean coterie tragedies, for example, often incorporate reconciling materials in their resolutions if not more extensively. Although *The Duchess of Malfi* is primarily rejective, its heroine ultimately modifies her Stoic contempt and partially reconciles, exclaiming to her stranglers, "Pull, and pull strongly, for your able strength must pull down Heaven upon me" (IV.ii.237-38); complete rejection is left to the foil Bosola who, typical of this kind of mixed coterie play, would appear a villain were it not evident that he is "an actor in the main of all much against [his] own good nature" (V.v.106-107). Reconciliation, accompanied by strong fideistic infusions and appearing distinctly abrupt and strained, also characterizes *The Atheist's Tragedy* and even the resolutions of Marston's *Antonio's Revenge* and *The Malcontent* whose heroes are the most violently split personalities in tragedy (both assume frantic alter-dispositions and even two different names). Even at

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[7] There is also a "third" type of tragedy in which the hero is manifestly a divided personality torn between public and private claims, whether reason and passion, honor and duty, or duty and love. Since the "private" claim is usually projected as an uncontrollable urge, the distinctive feature in these cases is that the hero is at once incriminated and exempted. The sharp division between public obligation and private will or affection in this kind of tragedy plus its tendency toward "neo-classicism" suggests that it is "late" tragedy in which the authors, Euripides and the French Neo-classicists in particular, are becoming too historically and psychologically self-conscious of alienation to experience the tragic confusion in its full intensity; hence the impression of "artificiality" and the hero's tendency to debate his dissociation rather than heroically enact it.

its most rejective, therefore, coterie tragedy wants desperately to hope that the "stars shine still" rather than use us for their sport.

The same ambivalence, save stronger, is apparent in the reconciling tragedy of Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Shakespeare where rejective tendencies generally permeate all but the resolutions of the plays. In these cases the tragedies incorporate a number of melodramatic features such as villains and revenge but modified in strategic ways. Villains, for instance, appear only singly or in small numbers rather than in hordes; hence the world is not portrayed so horribly that the hero is forced to reject it while he can still retain his reconciling role as the primary agent of catastrophe, the villain being only a contributing factor. Revenge, likewise, is severely restricted in reconciling tragedy. The hero either inhibits the impulse as soon as it occurs, as in *The Atheist's Tragedy*, or performs it so selflessly and with such rigid decorum and ritual purification that it does not get out of bonds. Hence *The Choephori* is nothing more than a series of rigidly performed rituals while the *Oresteia* as a whole shows revenge sanctified as an instrument of cultural evolution, an interesting twist in which heroic reform is used to achieve institutional rather than individual reconciliation. Indeed, Aeschylus' tragedies generally combine rejective and reconciling impulses in distinctive ways. In both the *Oresteia* and, apparently, the Promethean trilogy rejection is allowed to dominate so long as it leads to a more integrated society and decreases the dependency of the established society on "force" which is for Aeschylus, as Shakespeare, the main cause of man's inhumanity to man. Reconciliation as a strictly individual re-

action is actually frowned upon in these plays and characters like Oceanus and Mercury in *Prometheus Bound* who counsel prudence and submission to the gods are not sympathetic figures. Where, on the other hand, there is no possibility of social sea-change, Aeschylus is profoundly ambivalent. *The Seven Against Thebes* exhibits a radical uncertainty about where to place the blame for tragedy. Having considered Eteocles, the curse on the House of Laius, and the gods, it finally settles, for lack of anything better, on an inanimate object, Eteocles' sword, mysteriously personified as "the Northern Stranger."

Like Aeschylus, Sophocles works to reconcile the individual to his fate in a vast, divinely inspired design; whereas Aeschylus is almost exclusively interested in reconciling social institutions such as the law (albeit in terms of heroism and mystery), Sophocles justifies the unique individual to such an extent that he is virtually a rejective writer save that he expects that such a person will be exalted not through violent rejection but through a combination of personal patience and suffering plus divine intervention. His plays are therefore more tragic than Aeschylus but less realistic and more hysteric. Indeed, they remain reconciling tragedies only by becoming miracle plays. Hence at the same time that his drama conforms to the classical pattern of reconciling tragedy by featuring a hero who acts confidently to save the state only to find himself incriminated in tragedy, his plays also feature an innocent hero whose persecutor usually turns out to be the confident, active hero rather than a villain (who, when he appears, as Ulysses in *Philoctetes*, is a secondary figure). The innocent hero is usually an outcast figure and the play is

often titled after him rather than the more classical type hero, which suggests the way in which Sophocles' sympathies are divided; hence *Antigone, Philoctetes,* and *Electra,* as well as *The Women of Trachis,* in which Deianira is the outcast and Heracles the hardly recognizable classical hero, and *Oedipus Rex* in which Oedipus, with overwhelming irony, turns out to be both incriminated and outcast. Outcast on account of his uncompromising integrity, often with respect to the values of an older way of life, the innocent hero maintains his honor to the death or until a miraculous epiphany occurs, although in either case he tends to be severely warped by the experience of alienation and to behave fanatically like Electra. In *Ajax,* the hero, although playing both roles like Oedipus, is mainly a rejective figure who refuses to suffer shame or give up his sense of self in order to rejoin the community and dies by his own hand in defiance of men and gods. Generally, however, rejection and reconciliation merge in a mysterious way so that society is reconciled with the hero as much as he to it. Hence at the end of *Ajax* Ulysses recognizes Ajax's nobility together with his own vulnerability to divine fate and so takes Ajax's part in defiance of the other Greek leaders. The same pattern appears in most of Sophocles' plays. The outcast Philoctetes convinces Neoptolemus to join him in rejecting the Greeks but then is himself convinced by the mysterious appearance of the demi-god Heracles to reconcile with society and accept a hero's role. The pattern is ironically complicated in the Oedipal plays where the hero is both innocent and incriminated. The result in *Oedipus Rex* is a paradoxical mixture which makes only one thing clear, the necessity of an

elaborate mystical apparatus in order to rescue the individual from mysterious obliteration; hence the typical Sophoclean pattern, particularly evident in *Colonus,* in which an exiled, suffering, and misunderstood innocent is reintegrated into the community and exalted through the agency of miraculous intervention.

A variant pattern of this kind of thinking appears in Shakespeare's tragedies which likewise acknowledge rejective impulses to a high degree. Indeed *Romeo and Juliet* is wholly rejective save for its "tacked on" reconciliation of the two families after the death of the hero and heroine. Rejection is likewise dominant in *Antony and Cleopatra,* save that in this play public and private claims have become overtly polarized in the manner of "late" tragedy (cf. note 7). But in both plays "gentle" Shakespeare characteristically softens the situation by making his protagonist a pair of lovers, a modified rejection that is the base of all courtly love. All Shakespeare's tragic heroes, however, are strange blends of innocence and guilt, heroism and inhibition, and naiveté and violence, while his tragedies as a whole are unique in the extent to which they admit a high degree of rejection at the same time that they avoid its harsher implications and also admit the possibility of eventual reconciliation. This is due mainly to the fact that the Shakespearean dramatic scene is one in which all men, heroes and villains, are alike frail creatures whose feeble efforts, whether good or ill intentioned, trigger a series of catastrophic accidents and errors over which they have no control save through patience and forgiveness of others. Hence the final realization in his plays, comedies and tragedies of errors alike, is that men

are universally frail and that mercy and reconciliation are the only "comforts of despair," a recognition, it is hoped, that will prove mysteriously redeeming, although the fear is that this hope is a tale told by an idiot signifying nothing (*Measure for Measure*, IV.iii.114).

Whatever form it takes, however, tragedy reflects the individual at his greatest point of confusion, whence his deepest fears (loss of place, identity, and trust) surface bringing in their wake delusion, madness, and despair. Tragedy allows for the most spectacular range and intensity of emotion of any literary genre short of romance or pure fantasy, but its notions of heroism and nobility and of terror and pity are radical distortions of reality while its "solutions," albeit the only options open to the alienated, are of doubtful public or personal value. Hence as viewers we, like the whole tragic process, are strangely dissociated and our response both to experiencing an individual tragedy and in acknowledging that tragedy is no longer a historical possibility is a peculiar mingling of regret and relief.