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ANCIENT AND MODERN TRAGEDY AS  
EXEMPLIFIED BY  
THE TRILOGY OF AESCHYLUS AND THE MACBETH OF SHAKESPEARE.  
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Reason aims to raise  
Some makeshift scaffold-vantage midway, whence  
Man dares for life's brief moment, peer below:  
But ape omniscience. Nay! The ladder lent to  
Climb by, step and step, until we reach  
The little foothold-rise allowed mankind  
To mount on and thence guess the sun's survey -  
Shall this avail to show us world wide truth  
Stretched for the sun's descreying? Reason bids  
Teach, Man, thy beast his duty first of all  
Or last of all, with blows if blows must be, -  
How else accomplish teaching? Reason adds,  
Before man's First and after man's poor last,  
God operated and will operate.

Browning's Ferishtah's Fancies.

We peer and pry into the night of chaos, nor find we a  
beginning but that it too seems to have a point of commencement,  
and so it runs on to infinity until our brain is in a whirl  
and cause seems to totter.

The race of man being a fact in the world's activity,  
for an indefinite period of time, we view language in a more  
or less perfected type of expression, even from the days of  
myth. By language we here mean the vehicle of conversation. To  
gain any idea of the real source of tragedy, we would neces-  
sarily have to go back to a condition of civilization where  
speech was very crude, and not sufficiently developed to facili-  
tate expression in moments of great excitement. In truth,  
this was when the first impetus was given to the practice of  
gestures, which are the most natural and spontaneous of all  
human motions.

Regularity of movement in walking accompanied by a rhythmical musical chant soon arose and rapidly grew with the growth of language into that source of all music and verse, the Ballad Dance. Beyond this stage all is mythical, but here we have the foundation stone upon which to build historically the whole vast superstructure of music and verse, in their manifold forms of massive plinth, rugged buttress and florid frieze.

Had mental development but kept pace with gymnastic, how much precious knowledge from the vast twilight realm before tradition was, might have been revealed to us. Mystery enshrouds all things most to be desired, and those subjects which are dim in obscurity are peered at and examined by aid only of the candle of the imagination. Thus nothing but subjective suppositions and reflections in myriads of styles exist to be a light to our feeble research. Humanity with all its strange commingling of passion, in mental, social and spiritual struggle, is one great contradiction, one enormous mass of crazy atoms in the universe, aiming, without individual exception for the morrow in a continuous strain of events more or less unplanned. In view of this general fact, we can scarcely credit anyone of the multitude of theories propagated, hence let us make our comparisons along an analytical and historical basis.

In comparing the Trilogy of Aeschylus with any of Shakespeare's plays, it is necessary to form such a union of the modern tragedies as will serve to bring out into relief the

definite impressions gained from the separate units in the classical tragedy. While we word the subject with the unit play, "MacBeth"; yet the affinity between Hamlet and MacBeth is so very close that one can scarcely be considered without the other, and especially when taken as an exemplification of the peculiar class of tragedy which is characteristic of Shakespeare. MacBeth is clearly the only modern tragedy which in outward technique resembles ancient drama, and if our criticism were limited to mere form, we would discuss it alone. However, we shall endeavor to portray phases of the life problem with which all tragedy is rife, and in doing so we are compelled to use Hamlet as the relief figure in the picture.

The essential formative power behind the impetus towards the creation of a national drama (or tragedy), is the moral and intellectual state of the national life.

In looking upon Greece in the days of Aeschylus, we see a nation in its childhood, simple, primitive and fun-loving. Yet, even here we note a striving towards something beyond mere existence. We see a departure in manners from the traditions of mythical ages, and most important of all, there is apparent a reform spirit in politics and a broad-minded thoughtful view of the relation existing between divinity and humanity. Pagan Greece with its impure religious rites, its narrow-minded servility to its gods, actually begins to lay superstition aside, and gropes towards the new light, the gleam of "reason", which is to explain through mind, things undreamt of, in moral, political, and religious spheres. A national creed which

explains the motive of extant Greek drama is the denial of individual responsibility. In the Greece of Aeschylus, this moral unit is a house, not an individual, and sin with its curse, acts and reacts back and forth from generation to generation in such a way that man seems to be impelled by temptation which comes upon him as a punishment for the sins of his fathers. Courage rules life, despair is of divine origin, sacred and not chafed under. Hope is rarely found, but appears to be dawning in the day of Aeschylus, who creates out of it the main action of his tragedies. Form was perfection to a Greek mind. Beyond sculpture there was no art more sublime and in this fact is seen the foundation of Greek dramatic technique.

Greek tragedy deals almost entirely with form and externals. The nation saw beauty and divinity in every graceful movement, and so cultivated bodily motion that it became pregnant with expression. Even as music to us conveys vague suggestions of beauty and strange mysterious gleams from realms of dreamy romance, so did the art of gesture, preserved in sculpture to the Greece of Aeschylus.

Like all races in their childhood the Greeks were profoundly religious. Their paganism was assuming a beautiful form when we first find its reflection in tragedy. Merry, careless in all things, they carry a spirit of gaiety even into the ceremonies performed before the altars of their gods. Here we find the whole town gathered before the shrine of some local deity performing in a most elaborate arrangement, obse-

quies to the divinity. In the very heart of the whole affair, we have the source of tragedy. The Greeks were lovers of nature, lived within its hallowed influence, conversant with each unfolding shade and mood from childhood to old age. They laughed and played and reveled in her sunshine, in her flowers and fruits. They wept and sympathized with her in her sorrowful or wild moods. As the seasons changed, so the attitude of nature, and so the spirit of their religious festivities. Their ceremonies at the shrine of Dionysius or Bacchus, the god of nature, had, therefore, a double aspect,- joyous and sorrowful. The joyous feasts were held in celebration of the happy, merry seasons of spring and summer, and the sorrowful were connected with the gloomy darkness of autumn and winter. From the latter custom sprang Tragedy. The Greeks were idealists in life. They did not aim to become perfect as some ideal man was perfect, but their national life being the unity of individuals, they aimed at making the white light in the prism of humanity purer, by perfecting the character of the parts. This idea grows in beauty as we contemplate it. We see the noble Greek in that morn of thought, in that day before reason dawned on chaos, endeavoring according to his light, to cultivate his own capacity and thus add his quota to the sum of beauty in the world.

Before the rise of Aeschylus in tragedy, we find the Greeks elevating everything truly Hellenic, to the highest position, and purging all art of foreign elements. The very cult of Dionysius was an intrusion from without. Before Aeschylus the vigorous Greek mind had been at work for several

decades rendering this cult more beautiful, more entirely Greek. During this process, we find mysticism creeping into their mode of thought, which might have destroyed Greek genius, if, eventually the Persian war had not brought back to life the spiritual convictions of the race. The balance was soon righted and Aeschylus was the mightiest agent in its re-adjustment. However, these alien influences had their effect on Greek tragedy which really is the mirror of Hellenic art, philosophy and theosophy.

In discussing the tragedy of the Greeks, we must never forget that of all things, they as a people, were natural. They lived in an adolescent age, before mankind had reached spiritual self consciousness. Their doctrine of sin is summed up in the general notion of "Violation of the beautiful", and Aeschylus, in his Trilogy, has illustrated this in a most elaborate fashion, dealing as I have said before, with the whole vast life-problem of his age.

Now let us turn to the same problem in the England of Shakespeare. The task of analyzing the question here is not so simple, but being a modern situation, is easily understood, even from a twentieth century point of view. We find a successful fun-loving people, in the full high color of prosperity, beholding the whole world opening up for their use. We see learning taking a most gigantic stride, and education is being made the common property of the masses. Freedom reigns as it did in Greece, but, how vastly modified and differentiated from the unconscious existence of childhood among the Greeks.

Centuries have not rolled by without leaving many stains and sears on the mind and spirit of the race that we have viewed above. Christ has died and risen again. Sin has become the conscious birthright of each human being. From the cradle to old age, it is one constant struggle against external and internal temptations. The condition of tragedy has reached its height with this ultra civilization. Almost every influence possible in the breaking down and building up of empires, in the destruction of races, religions, creeds, and governments have beaten upon the form and matter of this faithful portrait of human life. The unity of man with nature had been abruptly broken; the theory of the family of divinities under the sovereignty of Zeus had been entirely overthrown and man's union with God was no longer an actual earthly state, but a mere hope of his spirit, to be won after earth was past, and after flesh had been annihilated. Beauty, the creed of Greek life, the foundation of its civilization, had become, long before Shakespeare's advent, a curse to life not its aim. In the light of Christianity, this was how man was struggling and is struggling yet, until through science, art and culture, we shall have slain the flesh and attained unto the simple faith of our Greek forefathers.

Down to the end of the Roman drama, Greek tragedy maintained its leading characteristics of limitation of matter to heroic myths, odd scenic unity, lack of human interest, the definite confidence of opinion in regard to all things human and divine. Even at the close of the Roman empire, it had



already reached the two fundamental varieties of plot, action drama and passion drama; and the combination of many actions in one had been carried to a high degree of complexity. Between the Roman tragedy and that of Shakespeare, we view a tangled mass of History when for a time, drama is popularly dead. Let us sketch the course briefly until tragedy again revives. In the meantime all Greek and Roman plays are relegated to the monasteries.

The terms, tragedy and comedy, remain to the people through tradition, consequently we find their dramatic meaning gone, and the words misapplied to the strange tales and performances of the troubadours. We are quite certain it was popular error that caused Dante to call his serious moral poem, a comedy. The mass of literature compiled by these minstrels, consisting of heroic tales, saintly legends applied to existing circumstances, and weird myths concerning giants and their doings, oddly enough bore the name of Romance. Probably the reason for this was the lasting influence the Roman empire exerted over the European mind for centuries after its fall. We have noticed the separate existence of classical drama among the literary clergy, and of the story amongst the people. In the tenth century these two phases of literature were united and drama was revived in its ancient form by the church. The priests in order to cater to the people, made the religious ceremonies most elaborate in form, introducing into the Latin ritual, on special occasions, scenes from Roman plays. Out of

this arose the Mysteries and Miracle plays. This developed and broke away from the church and soon we find that the acting became the chief aim, the matter was of no account, events themselves being the subject of this drama. Two or three decades later, we find plot being emphasized in the allegorical plays, "The Moralities." And further, the aim of this drama, namely, of clearly picturing scriptural truths to the vulgar people, was emphasized to such an extent that the very life of modern drama was at that time introduced. This was the advance in realism and outward art exemplified so strikingly in the Old English Moralities and interludes.

Then just before the day of Shakespeare the Renaissance arose upon these crude creations of the church, and what was the result? We pause for words! The upheaval of inertia was so massive that all former things passed away as if they had not been, and a new modern world arose. The vast wealth of an ancient literature was suddenly overwhelming Europe. The world's mind was being trained in this light, the rich through the schools, the poor by the pageants, representing classical stories, which moved in glorious array before their eyes. The popular drama of the old days meanwhile lingered and was affected. Elizabethan drama arose all quick and brilliant with the morning glow of vim and color. The period went mad with its very superfluity of wealth, peace, learning, invention and discovery and what not; for never has the world seen before or since, such a marvellous period of light in the greatest and broadest sense of the word.

Elizabethan dramatists were educated in the classical drama; all were Oxford and Cambridge men really enthused with the old spirit. Shakespeare came when the unity of popular and ancient drama had been perfected and the crudities of both had worn off in the amalgamation. Romance broke down the stage unities of the classical and made the story an essential to the drama. Free change in scene with change in thought was introduced. No invention was used here any more than among the Greeks; a favorite story was the popular theme among the dramatists. On the other hand, modern drama gained the strict dramatic form of the classical. It has added nothing new in form, but has merely diversified matter. The Shakespearean tragedy starts with the multiplication of actions with which the Roman closed. The idealism of the Greeks and the realism of the Moderns, are blended most harmoniously in Shakespeare.

Shakespeare's mind must have been dwelling upon the harmonious form and unity of classical tragedy when he evolved his MacBeth in its artistic mould. The chorus, the lyric matter of the ancient stage, is visible even on the surface of the play. As in the Trilogy of Aeschylus, so in MacBeth, we behold lyric and dramatic, the chorus and the actors, the odes executed in dancing and the dialogues in blank verse. For our present purpose we should forget the modern purport of MacBeth and consider it as a beautiful poem, perfect in its art, not tense with life problem. Accordingly we shall view it as an expansion of the idea conveyed through the opening chorus.

As Zeus overrules the whole course of the Trilogy, so Hecate guides the procedure of events in MacBeth. Several deities serve the great father in this venture as the witches carry out the plans of a higher power. As the goddess, Artemis, for whose propitiation Iphigenia was sacrificed, caused the ground work of the Trilogy, so Hecate, by whispering a wicked incantation within the hearing of MacBeth, formed that beautiful drama. The lyric portions of the Trilogy are in regular order, in the form of odes, while in MacBeth, they are scattered, typical of the effect of the Renaissance and of the perfected Elizabethan tragedy. In regard to the unities Shakespeare has crowded in many details of matter and interest, while Aeschylus glories in the simple singleness of his poem.

Beginning with our opening chorus, the story must centre about MacBeth. The under plot with Banquo as hero must disappear as being most unclassical. We could consider this if we were treating MacBeth as a character sketch, not as mere poetic form. Hecate's servants, the witches, open the scene as does the chorus in Agamemnon. The very appearance of these supernatural creatures and their mentioning MacBeth's name, warns us of impending doom to MacBeth. In Agamemnon, the words,

"Chant the dirge uplift the wail,  
But may the right prevail.",

sung in the strophe, antistrophe and epode, tell us of some dire event in store for this house of Atreides. Let us follow up the thought gathered here and note how in form this is fulfilled in each tragedy. In MacBeth the second time the witches

appear is in a storm, and through the thunder they hail him as king, and intimate in a vague way, the course of his rise. In the next chorus in the Trilogy, we find the cause and the course of the Trojan war described, but, "blind to deeds of blood the gods are not," and so we feel the chorus trembling for fear, even in the joy of victory. In the following chorus, which in feeling is closely allied to this, we feel that even the arrival of Agamemnon has but increased this feeling of foreboding in regard to the justice required by Zeus,

"But when on earth the crimson gore  
Of man hath fallen, never more  
May charm or spell the vanished life evoke."

Cassandra in short passionate lines even as the act occurs, prophesies the murder of Agamemnon, to the chorus, who become filled with deep dismay. We note the strange omens recited at every turn by the chorus, omens which gradually become darker and darker as the play progresses. In MacBeth the part of the chorus is taken at this juncture, by that passionate scene where Lady MacBeth receives the letter from the husband, telling of the fulfillment in part of the witches promise. The strange revelation of her character as she unfolds the dark plan for the completion of this weird tale, is emphasized the more by the speeches of the king and the clansmen on their approach to the castle. Amidst all this grandeur of nature, there is an air of ill omen in the movement of the heavy verse.

In the Agamemnon, after Cassandra disappears, dire confusion prevails; each member of the chorus rushes to and fro in restless excitement, but soon all is silence, the hush of

awe prevails. Then when the queen confesses her guilt, the chorus rise in horror and condemn her as an outcast, but again subside into timid fear as they recognize the hand of the Furies in the indomitable will of Clytemnestra. At the close of the Agamemnon the chorus is in confusion and horror.

The chorus in MacBeth is still his clansmen. Listen to their speech now, there is no joy, no beauty left, the omens have matured and strange things have taken place in the royal household, - the king has been slain. The condemnation is as strong here as in Agamemnon, and even as much suppressed. The form of the Trilogy and of MacBeth must strike us all as being strangely similar in this place. The voice of the chorus holds the keynote to what follows. Up to this point we have gone minutely into the detail of the form as linked by the chorus. Further we will merely note the progress.

In the voice of the chorus there rings hope. Orestes, the avenger, has come, the furies will have vengeance for shed blood, and here in the Choephoroi, we see the chorus directing the maidens to pray that some god or mortal may come in vengeance. Apollo has sent the son to avenge his father's murder; the chorus sanction his purpose. In MacBeth, the chorus formed of the doctor and attendant, bear witness to the confession of the regicide; vengeance follows even through conscience. Blood has been shed and will be evoked. This is the burden of Lady MacBeth's utterances as well as of the chorus in the Choephoroi.

In the Trilogy we hear the chorus singing the cruelty of the queen's deed and the immutability of Justice. Expectation

is in their chant as they pray to Zeus to accomplish the deed, and when it is done, exultation predominates in the hymn they sing. But not for long has joy the dominion. Soon the short warning wails of the chorus presage that the furies are now in pursuit of the shedder of blood. Even in his frenzy, Orestes is blest by the chorus. Hope seems triumphant while they sing,-

"Full accomplished, when shall Fate  
Lulled to rest, her stormy ire abate?"

In MacBeth the witches again appear but even here we find strife rampant; Hecate, their chief, chides them for dealing in riddles with MacBeth. Amends must be made for this, so in order to rectify wrong, they plan to meet MacBeth. This is the second main instance; dramatic irony is splendidly portrayed in this speech of Hecate's. Justice must triumph. As in Aeschylus, so in Shakespeare. In this planned meeting, the witches fill MacBeth with hope, by showing an apparently sure way of escape from the lowering vengeance. But the chorus fills him with horror when it discloses to him its knowledge of his deed through the revelations of Lady MacBeth. The new king is beside himself and cannot soon again meet the witches. From the chorus here we learn of the descent of the furies in the form of conscience now in turn upon MacBeth. Destruction seems imminent for everything. The cry of woe from the chorus announces the death of the queen, yet immediately the tone of expectation is heard again as news from England is recited. The chorus is silent for a period, but again breaks out with -

"Thoughts speculative their unsure hopes relate,  
But certain issues strokes must arbitrate."

War has come, the usurper must be overthrown. The chorus, left behind when MacBeth went out to combat, sing of the deceptiveness of oracles. There is no safety save in the path of righteousness. Even the sure support that was gained in the words, that none of woman born could harm MacBeth, is now a delusion since there is a secret respecting McDuff's birth. This charm is despaired, MacBeth is overthrown; in a lyric outburst, they wail the news, but Malcolm entering, re-assures them, he the rightful heir, the king's son, has warred in the cause of justice, not against the land but only against a tyrant. The chorus while lamenting their leader, recognize that the will of heaven has triumphed over hellish wrong.

In the Eumenides, the groans and moans and shrill shrieks of the furies in chorus strike dissonantly upon our ear; vengeance has come to judgment. Orestes is pursued. Perhaps no chorus could be more fitting the great climax of the strife, than the magnificent hymns chanted in combat with Apollo. The great political strife here waged is most powerful. Strophe thunders upon antistrophe in magnificent peals of oratory. Both powers seem equal, yet there is a strange calm confidence in the attitude of Apollo. The next time we hear the chorus it is in Athens. Anything more terrible than the intense malignity of this ode is difficult to imagine. The witches in MacBeth are awful from their weird grotesqueness, but these furies as they dance with every gesture of greedy hatred, are even more awful in their solemn determination. Again we hear them threatening all sorts of evil on man if in the court they



do not triumph. We hear their broken verses of warning between each vote, and then the furious clang of their outburst tell us plainly that their cause is lost. - Sin is expiated, right has prevailed, the curse has been lifted from the race of Atreus. Finally in a new strain they sing a sweet song. They have been converted into kind deities, Eumenides instead of furies. And so in both MacBeth and the Trilogy, the ominous prelude has introduced us to deep and dark crime which, however, in the end is expiated and justice rules. Thus we see in both tragedies the beautiful unity of action maintained throughout by the mainspring, the chorus which summarizes the progress as we go forward. It is this fact, the presence of a connecting link, the chorus, which is the basis of ancient tragedy that so accurately classifies MacBeth as a simple Greek play. In the matter of form then, we have proved the MacBeth of Shakespeare to be as much an inspired harmonious classical drama as is the Trilogy of Aeschylus.

If the drama as we have noted at the outset is to mirror the age, it will not only have to reflect the thoughts, tendencies and motives which lie most clearly within view, but will also have to shadow forth the deep silent underthrob of life, which determines the fate of men and of nations. And where the poet has based the course of action represented, more especially on those motives which slumber in the depths of the soul, the leading thoughts of the representation will, of course, not appear so clear as to prevent there being manifold ways of conceiving and viewing them, although one be the true centre to

which all are subordinate.

Of Hamlet this is especially confirmed. As Macbeth and the Trilogy were similar in form, so Hamlet and the Trilogy are alike in matter. The same theme animates the action in both; the development of one is decidedly classical while in the other it is relatively modern. In studying Aeschylus when we penetrate below the surface, we find that the solution of problems, ethical and religious, bearing upon man's nature and destiny, constituted their essence, an object to which the delineation of character is made subservient; whereas in the dramas of Shakespeare, the development of character constitutes the primary aim to which he subordinates the underlying idea of the whole. So in the characters of the classical dramatist, we seek vainly for that marvellous insight into human nature which imparts so intense an interest to the production of Shakespeare. In the Trilogy the great rupture and collision of moral principles is set forth by personages, mortal and immortal, whose characters are drawn in bold relief, with one dominating principle, and one only; while in Hamlet it is the delicate shadings in character which give the charm.

The Greek play is profoundly religious. It was at the command of the gods that Agamemnon sacrificed his daughter, Iphigenia, and in so doing, violated the family tie. Clytemnestra, representing the goddess of retribution, vindicates the spilled blood in avenging her child by the wilful murder of Agamemnon. We find Aeschylus in this condemning the custom of human sacrifice and thus placing himself in the front rank

of reformers. The main idea of this tragedy is the duty devolving upon Orestes of avenging his father's death. In Hamlet it is especially the same. By following out the course of their actions, we shall discover the fundamental spirit of the individual ages which insinuates itself into the tragedies.

In Hamlet we find a man born to be a king, with an abnormal intellect which he has cultivated to the highest extent. Unfortunately, in conjunction with this, he was not endowed with great natural force of character and perhaps even balance is lacking in his mental structure. He is sensitive to discord in any sphere, moral or physical, but has lacked the opportunity in his peaceful home in Denmark, of executing any of the huge ideas for reform, which his great mind has propagated. Accordingly impressions have so forged upon his brain, that in their intricate intertwining, they have destroyed its executive faculties. The brain, <sup>can think,</sup> philosophize, and no more. Its power is within itself limited. This man has been given a most stupendous work of horror to perform and all the struggle for its completion is to be internal, not waged with opposing forces, for none exist, but with his own nature.

Orestes is the agent in divine hands for maintaining the moral order of divine government, and like Hamlet, has supernatural visitations to urge him to the deed. A vacillating character of Hamlet's description would have been impossible in classical drama where character was subservient to action, and where speech is only a vehicle for the great movement of the whole. His father's ghost appears to Hamlet and relates the tale of bloodshed which is to be avenged, tells of the vio-

lation of the sacred tie which is to be vindicated. The excitement of the moment disarms the man of his boasted poise, and conscious of this, he delays action to gain self control and to philosophize over it. Some might consider it sacrilege to say that Hamlet was selfish, but surely nothing else can express so simply his real character. He forgets in the self-same moment the ponderous mission entrusted to him, in thinking of his own disposition. Surely he must have been a very self absorbed mortal when this supernatural visitation and revelation could do nothing more than excite him for a passing moment; and this fact shows one of the tendencies of the age of Shakespeare as it seems reflected in his Hamlet. It was an age of harmony, of philosophy, when all things were judged by a standard of classical (so-called) dilettanteism. England was at peace; her ministers played at learning in a most inordinate way, until finally they were scarcely able to grapple with affairs of state; fortunately for the country, with a new king arose a new generation of statesmen.

As soon as he is told of his father's death by Apollo, Orestes rests neither night nor day until he reaches the tomb of Agamemnon and registers his vow of vengeance. His intellect is surely as highly cultivated as is Hamlet's, since he plans his course of action so cleverly. The manner in which he reveals himself to Electra and the straightforward accusations of heinous sin which he pours out in condemnation of his mother before her face, surely reveals a noble, conscientious nature. He has performed his duty with a profound sense of responsibil-

ity as an agent in rectifying moral disorder. He has fulfilled the highest function of a Greek citizen in adding to the harmony and beauty of the world. In this we behold the dramatist's art. He has caused his character of Orestes to mirror the ancient traditions of perfection, the goal of existence.

Hamlet might have succeeded in his task, had he been able to maintain his self control in moments of great strain, but it was this inability that brought about his downfall. Had he lured on that person behind the curtain instead of thrusting his sword in blindly, he would have saved Ophelia's madness, Haertes' rebellion and the general destruction at the end of the play. His mind had run itself out in misty theories, instead of decisive action, and hence the result. Probably no scene in Shakespeare vibrates more strongly with dramatic irony than the one between the gravedigger and Hamlet. Their stupid philosophies on nonentities strangely bring into scorn the really serious role Hamlet has played through life. The whole is a parody on our hero's character. What has philosophy done for Hamlet, what for the gravediggers? They are both as a class useless in the life problem. It has brought them nothing.

Hamlet was to avenge an act of wilful wickedness, Orestes an act required by the gods. Shakespeare has portrayed a free being hampered only by his mind, while Aeschylus pictured an agent of the divine will, the deities light in combat with those of darkness. Another phase in the character of Orestes was his clear bright purpose so like the implicit faith of a child: this too was characteristic of his age in Greece. In

Hamlet we view a different scene; a man, sad, full of regret and pondering, who miscarries all things. This is typical of the England of Shakespeare, when men lived luxuriously in their own thought, and not in the serious struggle for the improvement of the race. In the closing scenes of each of the plays, both dramatists do the same thing; Shakespeare in allowing the combatants to be annihilated, brings about a new era of history for Denmark; a bright promise for the future beams in upon us, after the darkness, the strife and the gloom. So it is in Orestes after the storm and the strife and the bloodshed, the piece ends with the brightness of promise, the curse on the race has at last been expiated and Orestes is vindicated. This fact shows a clear portraiture of existing historical conditions in the two countries. England has just passed through a period of great upheaval and renaissance, and a future of bright promise was opening up before her in every sphere. Art based on classical models demanded optimistic views, even in the plays presented for their amusement. Greece had been passing through a great struggle for reform; mysticism was on the point of ruining the established customs of the race when reason, born of the experiences of the Persian war, decided in favor of conservatism in fundamental principles.

Aeschylus was at this time in combat with Pericles and his confederates concerning the reform or abolition of the high court of the Areopagus. In this highly artful way, the dramatist causes Pallas, the guardian of his native City, to form a mode of trial and sentence which completely turned opinion

against the former popular party in favor of the views of Aeschylus.

The politics of Shakespeare are entirely in favor of reform, but it is reform of a peculiar kind. He considers and mirrors his idea in Hamlet. Denmark, through peace, had become slothful and had allowed the canker worm to eat into the fabric of the state so that a revolution in principles was needed to bring it back to a healthful normal condition. Learning was a fad in England, its growth was rank, crimes were overlooked and neglected, man arose in his self satisfaction against the customs of higher humanity, freedom was abused in its extravagant use and a shock was what was needed to restore a rational sort of existence. Some even go so far as to say that in this strange collision in Hamlet, Shakespeare is prophesying the great revolution which eventually brought about the needed balance in English politics. His is a modern spirit.

The theology of Aeschylus is Attic, he has a firm conviction in the fatherhood of Zeus who governs the universe well, and adds his opinion to the action of each god in turn. The dramatist however, is no monotheist. Even beyond Zeus is Fate, a higher but a dying power. Zeus was the one who held a rein of power over human interests. Aeschylus, who had viewed the overthrow of the Persian hosts, felt a firm and immovable confidence in the supreme sway of Zeus, who in the far past had overcome and beaten down the competition of deities and the insolence of the earthborn. In Shakespeare, we have reason dominating all, a nature spirit of reason and unity which

judges humanity and which follows and slays the evil. In Shakespeare we see the dread factor of Christianity, unknown to a Greek mind, which believes that ever in the downfall of evil, the good is effected. The innocent suffer as well as the wicked. In Hamlet one might almost gather from the main theme that Shakespeare was a fatalist of the extremest kind, in allowing a character to exist in this modern age, so much a prey to circumstance, so limited in his purpose and ideals by his environment. But on looking deeper, we find this to be false; we see that Hamlet made his own environment by not performing duty and selfishly and foolishly allowing the current of events to pass on with him until without effort he was dashed over the precipice of annihilation.

Clytemnestra shows forth the strong type of Grecian woman, and in following her action we see the great power women exerted in the Greek world, the power to wield vengeance and retribution. Her intellectual ability is far superior to any modern Lady MacBeth. Aeschylus embodies the Greek ideas of womanhood when he places the power of Iphigenia and of Clytemnestra on such a high pedestal. In Hamlet, we have a different picture of the queen and Ophelia, weak, without balance or intellect. The queen is too vapid and insipid to be considered anything but a poor slave to a higher mind, while Ophelia is a delicate, dainty, brainless creature with an intense love for Hamlet ruling her mind and nature. This play was written near the close of Shakespeare's literary career, and consequently is a true picture of women in the England of the time. With



the advent of James as king arose a lack of respect and loyalty for all women. They forfeited the higher courtesies tendered them during the reign of Elizabeth. As in Hamlet, they served merely minor purposes in the great life problem.

The final retribution in Hamlet is accomplished much more by accident than through free action. When the fearful deed upon which the drama turns is finally accomplished, Hamlet dies in the calm hope of a better existence; and herein consists the tragic pathos of the whole piece, that with the purification of our noble hero and through his downfall, arises the bright future for Denmark and for Fortinbras.

"There's a divinity that shapes our ends,  
Rough hew them how we will."

Milton speaks of the glorious, the magnificent uses which may be made of poetry, both in divine and human things, but what more beautiful use has ever been made of literature than to mirror the whole problem of existence, social, spiritual, and aesthetic, unconsciously into its form and character. The Tragedy and Macbeth stand in the foremost rank amongst the gems of literary art, left us by the Masters of time. No soil of civilization can ever tarnish their unequalled brilliancy or mar the note of harmony which peals forth at our enquiring touch. Let us leave in silence this shrine of beauty where Orestes suffered and Hamlet died, and where Macbeth was overthrown. May the seeker after beauty ever remember that only through agonies and bloodshed can beauty accomplish its reign here on earth, nor be sovereign now as in the days of Aeschylus.

"The glistening doors move gently to the latch  
And diamond flashes disappear in light;  
The treasure of the unprobed ages flies

Away before the curious vulgar gaze  
Of cold cruel calculating man.  
May Zeus in kindness pardon these  
Unsympathetic masses rude in  
Intellect, and vouch some light  
Upon the sealed chest of ancient songs."  
Omar Khyam.