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DREAD INSIGHT AND HEALING ILLUSION:

A NIETZSCHEAN READING OF

SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

BY

LUCILLE M. GLEICHAUF

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies through the
Department of English in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
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1975

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is an application of Nietzsche's aesthetic theories, as contained in The Birth of Tragedy, to Shakespeare's work. I have gone beyond Nietzsche's thought at some points, especially in my discussion of comedy. My analysis of various aspects of the Dionysian and Apollonian elements can clearly be seen to be indebted rather to Northrop Frye than Nietzsche, for example (Chapter Five).

There has been little other work done on Nietzsche's relation to Shakespeare. An exception is N. Joseph Calarco's work, Tragic Being, in which he applies the thought of Nietzsche and Mircea Eliade to various literary works, including King Lear. Although I do not totally agree with his analysis, Calarco's work is valuable and quite insightful.

A study of this type is of value, because it provides a context for an exploration of Shakespeare's plays, in which one can acknowledge their pessimism, and yet still avow that they are neither absurd nor nihilistic, but rather display "a pessimism of strength." It also to some extent explains the satisfaction gained from tragedy, and its instrumental value for man.

Chapter One delineates man's basic situation; longing for life yet doomed to die. This paradox is the starting point of both comedy and tragedy.

Chapter Two continues the discussion begun in the previous chapter, focusing on Dionysian insight, and pointing out elements of that insight.

Chapter Three posits a solution to the life-sapping process of insight. The idea of truth is discussed, and illusion is seen to be the basis of man's reaction to his world.

Chapter Four opens with a discussion of comedy, in its movement from superficial illusion to positive insight. It is discussed in both its Dionysian and Apollonian aspects.

Chapter Five contains a more detailed analysis of the insight/illusion movements of comedy and tragedy. A discussion of tragedy follows, with its movement from insight to healing illusion; an

analysis of Hamlet, Othello and Macbeth closes out the chapter.

Chapter Six is an exploration of King Lear, dealing with the language of the play, the problem of identity, Dionysian insight, loss of self through madness, a pessimism of strength, and Cordelia's death.

The Appendix discusses Schopenhauer's pessimism, which is weak because it denies life. It is seen to be an inadequate response to tragedy, and to life itself.

I have explored tragedy in the light of Nietzsche's theory of the Dionysian and Apollonian elements found in Greek culture, and extended that theory to cover comedy as well. My method, to examine the plays themselves, as well as criticism of the plays, to discover a pattern. A clear pattern emerged of the working of insight and illusion; from negative insight to healing illusion in the tragedies, and from sterile illusion to positive insight in the comedies. The "problem" with the problem comedies, then, is that they frustrate us, by not fitting the pattern we are led to expect, either of comedy or of tragedy.

Although Nietzsche's theory is not applicable to all works of art, it does provide a valuable insight into Shakespearean tragedy.

PREFACE

Different translators of Nietzsche have used different spellings and adjectival forms to render his terms apollonisch and dionysisch. Kaufmann writes "Apollinian" in place of Apollonian, and Calarco translates dionysisch as "Dionysiac" rather than Dionysian. I have retained their variant spellings in quotes, but consistently use the forms "Apollonian" and "Dionysian" in the body of the essay.

I wish to thank Dr. Samuel Stollman, my thesis director, and Dr. Henry David Janzen and Dr. Harry A. Nielsen, my readers. I also wish to acknowledge the debt I owe to Dr. Robert J. Miller, who introduced me to Nietzsche, and Dr. David L. Pollard, who opened my eyes to literature, and gave me the Renaissance.

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CHAPTER ONE

Man, Fulke Gre ville wrote, is created sick, but commanded to be sound.¹ The thought is not far from that of Friedrich Nietzsche; it is even less far from the truth. Man is in a peculiar and uncomfortable position ontologically: half angel, half beast, a part of him spiritual, non-corporeal, the other part material, born to die. Man is the animal who thinks. He is the only creature capable of reflecting on his own death. He longs for life, and yet carries within himself the seeds of his own decay: He was born to hope, yet doomed to despair.

There is an ancient story that King Midas hunted in the forest a long time for the wise Silenus, the companion of Dionysus, without capturing him. When Silenus at last fell into his hands, the King asked what was the best and most desirable of all things for man. Fixed and immovable, the demigod said not a word, till at last, urged by the king, he gave a shrill laugh and broke out into these words: 'Oh, wretched ephemeral race, children of chance and misery, why do you compel me to tell you what it would be most expedient for you not to hear? What is best of all is utterly beyond your reach: not to be born, not to be, to be nothing. But the second best for you is - to die

¹ Cited in Geoffrey Bush, Shakespeare and the Natural Condition (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1956), p. 4.

soon.' 2

The primal fact of tragedy is man's mortality, and his awareness of the inevitability of death. As men, we are faced with the terror of life and the utter absurdity of being born at all if our existence must have an end. The first reaction is one of rejection, nausea, a turning away from life.³ We become Hamlets, longing for death because death is after all inevitable; in the face of that knowledge, we do not have the energy to live.

This is, of course, an unhealthy state, yet it is a state in which every reflective man has found himself at one time. We run up against the borders of our existence, the temporal boundaries that keep us from being as gods. The Genesis story contains a very deep truth: all men desire to be more than mortal. Man is doomed to failure in this quest. He inherits, through the knowledge of good and evil, not only death - but life. Knowledge, suffering, death, life, are all inextricably bound together in man's existence. He must "act and believe in the face of the pain and death that [his] knowing implicates [him] in."⁴ He must learn to accept, to embrace, the horrifying reality of death and suffering in order to live. It is tragedy,

2 Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tragedy, in Basic Writings of Nietzsche, trans. and ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: The Modern Library, 1968), p. 42. All further Nietzsche citations, unless noted, are from this text.

3 See Appendix, "Schopenhauer's Denial of Life," for a more extensive exploration of this thought.

4 Bush, p. 102.

according to Nietzsche, that allows him to do so. Tragedy leaves the spectator with a

metaphysical comfort...that life is at the bottom of things, despite all changes of appearances, indeluctably powerful and pleasurable...(BT, p. 59.)

This is a difficult task, yet one that Nietzsche felt art was capable of performing. Philosophers are often suspicious of art, since it appeals to the intuition rather than the intellect, yet Nietzsche reserved nothing but the highest praise for the Dionysian artist.⁵ He felt that "art represents the highest task and the truly metaphysical activity of this life" (BT, pp. 31-2). Art can supply an ultimate truth,⁶ an understanding of life and the universe; posit a meaning for existence; can, in fact, perform these activities better than can philosophy. Nietzsche is perhaps stretching things a bit far, but his statement is more justifiable if one notes that he is working in a different context from most philosophers. His aim is not to discover what is true; it is to discover what is healthy.

The belief that informs The Birth of Tragedy is a belief in Art, against the background of yet another belief: that it is impossible to live with Truth... The will to illusion...is pro-founder, (more 'metaphysical' than the will to Truth, Reality

⁵ The concept of the Dionysian as contrasted to the optimistic artist will be discussed in a later chapter.

⁶ Insofar as truth is possible. See below, Chapter Three.

and Being." 7

He feels that man cannot endure too much reality. Man could not survive if his Dionysian insight into the horrors of existence were not mediated by Apollonian illusion.

Nietzsche does not believe that one should become an optimist, ignoring the harsh realities of life, living with "a senile, unproductive love of existence" (BT, p. 109). Rather, one will love one's fate,⁸ acknowledging all the while its depth, significance, and terror. One sees its horror, but recognizes life as the true testing ground of man's spirit, as a thing of beauty. It is through illusion that one accepts this fact. It is illusion, the transformations of naked reality into art, that makes the struggle significant.

"It is only as an aesthetic phenomenon that existence and the world are eternally justified..."⁹ (BT, p. 52) because it ^{is} only through art that life as it is can be accepted and rendered meaningful. There is no justification for suffering and death beyond the tragic beauty that they paint. Tragedy exhibits a beauty that is sometimes unbearable; the image of Lear bearing the dead Cordelia is so surcharged with loveliness and pain that we must

7 Nietzsche, quoted in Erich Heller, The Disinherited Mind (New York: Barnes and Noble Inc., 1971), p. 175.

8 Amor fati, a later concept, tied in with his conception of Eternal Recurrence.

9 Italicized in original.

5
turn away. We watch tragedy to be reconciled to life, to find in the depths of despair an awe-inspiring beauty - beauty not as the pleasant or agreeable,¹⁰ but as the Mystery before which we are silent.

There are at least two artistic reactions to the horrifying insight which is the legacy of man: comedy and tragedy.¹¹

Comedy and tragedy are opposing techniques of poetic consolation. Each attempts to reassure us. Each recasts experience so that it seems meaningful....¹²

The meaning supplied by comedy and tragedy is contained within their movement. Shakespearean comedy generally moves from a negative Apollonian state of illusion (more equal to delusion) to a positive Dionysian insight. Comedy unites the hero with his world, after comic sufferings and often after a process of education. Tragedy, on the other hand, moves from a horrifying Dionysian insight to a healing illusion. The tragic hero is progressively isolated from his world; he must endure his sufferings and face his death essentially alone, though nominally he may be a member of a society. Each mythos, however, attains the same goal, a reconciliation to life. In

¹⁰ Aquinas' "id quod visum placet" - "that which, when seen, pleases."

¹¹ I feel Nietzsche might reject the other two mythoi, irony and romance, as unhealthy; irony because it does not affirm, romance because it denies the negative.

¹² Thomas McFarland, Shakespeare's Pastoral Comedy (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1972), p. 3.

6
each, life as it is is accepted, embraced. The world is justified.

Through art, the wisdom of Silenus is ultimately transformed into a hunger for life: "to die soon is worst of all for them, the next worse - to die at all."

(BT, p. 43). In this work I will explore how this transformation takes place: from rejection to acceptance.

CHAPTER TWO.

Nietzsche formulates his conception of tragedy's Dionysian/Apollonian composition by investigating Greek culture. The pre-Homeric Greek began with an insight into

...the terror and horror of existence. That he might endure this terror at all, he had to interpose between himself and life the radiant dream-birth of the Olympians...It was in order to be able to live that the Greeks had to create these gods from a most profound need. (BT, p. 42)

Homeric man, then, was Apollonian, with a delight in appearances (his gods were appearances, illusions) and a hunger for life. Achilles' lament in The Odyssey that it was better to be a swineherd, so long as one were alive, than to be lord of the dead, is a prime example of this.

The Apollonian contentment was challenged, however, by an Asian influence.¹ The cult of Dionysus sprang up, its wild orgiastic rites contrasting with the meaningful restraint of the Apollonian Greek. In time, the two tendencies were reconciled. This is the stage of tragic culture.

The Apollonian and Dionysian are necessary to one another. Without the Dionysian, the Apollonian tendency leads to artificiality, too much restraint, a damming up

¹ Euripides' The Bacchae illustrates the struggle between the two tendencies. Pentheus is Apollonian, resisting the barbaric Dionysian influence.

of vital instincts; all turns to surface. Without the Apollonian, Dionysian abandon soon degenerates into barbarism, lawlessness and ultimately disgust and world-weariness. Together the tendencies form a great creative force. They "continually incite each other to new and more powerful births" (BT, p. 33).

The Dionysian tendency contains several elements, both positive and negative. Most evident is the self-surrender or self-abnegation of the individual, his loss of self into a feeling of one-ness with nature.

Under the charm of the Dionysian not only is the union between man and man reaffirmed, but nature which has become alienated, hostile, or subjugated, celebrates once more her reconciliation with her lost son, man. (BT, p. 37)

This is the movement of comedy, especially saturnalian or festive comedy.

The clarification achieved by the festive comedies is concomitant to the release they dramatize: a heightened awareness of the relation between man and 'nature' - the nature celebrated on holiday.²

Tragedy reveals the negative aspects of the process. Underlying all appearances there is "the truly existent primal unity, eternally suffering and contradictory..."³ (BT, p. 45). The Apollonian is the principle of individuation, that which makes a thing

² C.L. Barber, Shakespeare's Festive Comedy (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1959), p. 8.

³ At this period in his life, Nietzsche was greatly influenced by Schopenhauer, and would identify this Unity with the Will to Live. See Appendix.

one thing, that which grants particularity; it is shattered in the Dionysian process.

The boundaries between individuals are shattered, but individuation must itself be shattered to make this possible. Man is united to man, but only insofar as both merge into Oneness, the universal ground of being. ⁴

Paradoxically, in both comedy and tragedy it is individuation that is seen as "the primal cause of evil" (BT, p.74).

Comedy exhibits a movement toward placing man in a group; comedy is social. It is the misfit who is cast out from comic society. The good is seen to be union. For the comic man

...the symbolic extension of all the fears he faces is isolation.... And symbolizing all the securities that comic man opposes to his fears is that security in which isolation is formally translated into togetherness, that is, marriage. ⁵

The movement of comedy is an easing of the pain of death, for man will survive generically, if not physically.

To look to the individual is to face death; to look to the group is both to deny the individual and to assuage the fear of death. ⁶

Comedy thus accepts the positive aspects of the Dionysian union. Tragedy emphasizes individuation, and the hero suffers for that alienated state. In tragedy,

⁴ N. Joseph Calarco, Tragic Being (Minneapolis, Minnesota: The University of Minnesota Press, 1969), p.8.

⁵ McFarland, p. 5.

⁶ McFarland, p. 5.

the Apollonian creates

....a radical alienation of individual man from the world, together with the despair which proceeds from such alienation.⁷

Tragedy places stress on individual identity. Lear's "Who is it that can tell me who I am?" (I, iv, 250); the loss of self through real or feigned madness (Hamlet, Edgar, Lear); the basal question, what is man?; all are in the province of tragedy. The tragic hero is great by virtue of his individuality, his difference from other men; isolation is the punishment for greatness.

The isolated characters [in tragedy] are isolated through consciousness.... For a philosopher, isolation is the first act of consciousness. I am myself alone, he says, and the rest of the world then becomes objective to him. But for the hero of a tragic action, isolating one's mind in this way is deeply terrifying. In the tragic society one's life is in one's function or relation to others, and when the group preserves one's real life, isolation becomes a confronting of nothingness.⁸

It is knowledge, consciousness, that brings about isolation, for the tragic hero is a man with a different consciousness of life. Ironically, it is Dionysian insight that yields tragic knowledge - which in turn leads to this negative Apollonian state.

...the Dionysian man resembles Hamlet; both have once truly looked into the essence of things, they have gained knowledge, and nausea inhibits action; for their action could not change anything in the eternal nature of things... Knowledge kills action; action requires the veils of illusion... Conscious of the truth, he has once seen, man now sees everywhere only the horror or absurdity of existence... (BT, p. 60)

This Dionysian knowledge is not rational knowledge, for it is an insight into the nature of the world, and the world is itself irrational. Rational knowledge, says Nietzsche, is the death of tragedy, for it seeks to explain the unexplainable. The real is rational and the rational is real - for the theoretical man. Dionysian wisdom is quite another thing.

This is the plight, then, of the tragic hero. He becomes alienated from his society through the insight he has gained into the nature of reality; at the same time, that insight which leads to the

...shattering of the principle of individuation may become a loss of identity far removed from Dionysiac ecstasy.⁹

He is alone - and yet has lost himself.

The Dionysian and Apollonian are thus inextricably bound together. In comedy, Dionysian unity mediates individual idiosyncrasies, binding men in a group; comic man is educated, and that education fits him for life.

The lightness of the Apollonian is always present. In tragedy, on the other hand, the individual becomes progressively more isolated because of his insight into the Dionysian unity. "Ay, madam, 'tis common," Hamlet says in regard to death, but that equality of all men in the grave only alienates him further, as his mind torments him. There is a process of education in tragedy as the tragic hero, an individual, learns to accept his Dionysian fate. He does this through the healing power of illusion.

CHAPTER THREE

When Nietzsche speaks of Apollonian "illusion," he is not speaking of a delusion. This most basic fact, indispensable to an understanding of Nietzsche's aesthetic thought, is yet rather difficult to grasp. It will perhaps become clear in a discussion of Nietzsche's epistemology, his theory of knowledge.

In Nietzsche's view, there is no such thing as objective truth, at least not from a human perspective. As men, we are imprisoned within our subjectivity. We cannot know das Ding an sich, the thing in itself; we can only know an object as it is presented to us, as we perceive it.¹ We perceive an object in its existence, not in its essence. We cannot know the true reality of anything, only the appearance that is presented to our senses. Moreover, appearance changes, while the thing in itself, the essence of an object, remains constant throughout all temporal changes.

All knowledge is an interpretation of being provided by a living and cognizing subject; there is no truth that is not entertained in thought and believed, that is, that is not found within that encompassing being that we are.... Thus conceived, truth is not something independent, unconditioned and absolutely universal. Rather, it is inextricably involved with the being of a living subject and the world that he has constructed. But this

¹ Nietzsche's thought is very much indebted to Kant at this point.

world as it appears to us is, like ourselves, in a constant process of temporal change.²

Man cannot know truth in itself. Not only is it, impossible, but it is unhealthy. Even if man could attain knowledge of the truth, it would be dangerous to him, for "Truth...is not beautiful but ugly, dreadful, hard to endure...."³ Faced with that reality, we recognize as truth those "facts" we can live with. Men strive "to impose an order and structure upon an unordered and senseless universe so as to preserve their sense of dignity and importance."⁴ Reality, the Unity of all things as revealed by Dionysian insight, reduces man's stature, and robs the individual of significance. The ego is denied. "I" do not matter if all that is is one - Reality is not even a unity composed of many "I's", but indivisible, non-individual, impersonal. Men are so constituted psychologically as to be unable to accept this "truth".⁵ In order to live, men unconsciously make what amounts to a leap of faith; they place their trust in illusions, the illusion of art, religion or science. Nietzsche is most emphatic in noting

2 Karl Jaspers, Friedrich Nietzsche.... (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1965), pp. 184-5.

3 R.J. Hollingdale, Nietzsche (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 154.

4 Arthur C. Danto, Nietzsche as Philosopher (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1965), p. 35.

5 To be totally consistent, Nietzsche would have to find this "truth" no more certain than any other. The fact that the insight comes through an intuition rather than thought might lend it credence for Nietzsche.

that science, which condemns art as dreaming, delusion, is itself an illusion, since we cannot penetrate to the ground of Being, but can only deal with the surfaces of Reality.

...art has no less a claim than sense or science to objective truth. But this is because neither sense nor science can make any stronger claim to truth than art. Neither art itself nor the avenues ordinarily credited with conducting us to truth regarding the objective world lead us, in fact, to the truths they promise.... Each consists in illusions, the illusions of science and sense making life possible, the illusions of art making it bearable.⁶

What, then, are those things we term "truths"? Why are some bits of "knowledge" accepted as truth, while others are rejected as illusion? Says Nietzsche,

Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions, worn-out metaphors now impotent to stir the senses, coins which have lost their faces and are considered now as metal rather than currency.

The difference between truth and illusion "is virtually quantitative, that being taken as fact which has been repeated a sufficient number of times."⁸

What man does in this drive toward illusion is give form to his existence. This form-giving is totally necessary. Man cannot live with chaos, meaninglessness.

⁶ Danto, p. 38.

⁷ Quoted in Danto, pp. 38-9.

⁸ Danto, p. 38.

Life is real and life is earnest only as long as we do not try to disentangle reality from illusion.... Once withdrawn from the course of action that holds us within our society [i.e., our collective illusions], chaos is come again.⁹

Illusion is life - affirming. Its objective truth does not enter the question.

What a recognizing living being calls truth is the way in which he conceives of his world. But the truth that is bound up with life Nietzsche calls 'error'; 'Truth is the kind of error without which a definite species of living being cannot live.' Still...this error is not to be rejected: 'We do not regard the falsity of a judgment as an objection to it;' for repudiating false judgments would amount to repudiating life itself. One must allow untruth as a condition of life, 'the error that is a promoter of life is, as such, 'truth'.¹⁰

One can go too far in the way of illusion, however, and reach the point at which life-affirming illusion becomes life-denying delusion, "optimism," "cheerfulness."

But we must also include in our image of Apollo that delicate boundary which the dream image must not overstep lest it have a pathological effect (in which case mere appearance would deceive us as if it were crude reality). (BT, p. 35)

⁹ Frye, p. 101.

¹⁰ Jaspers, p. 186.

We must always acknowledge the dread reality lying behind the dream image or illusion. We must recognize "the character of life, ^[a] non-teleological [i.e., having no goal] and godless..." ¹¹ and accept it as it is.

...this 'Yes' to life is arrived at through the most uncompromising nihilistic position in full realization of the negative elements of life. An affirmation of life that would fail to recognize its inescapable conflicts and contradictions would, for Nietzsche, be hollow and false, lacking that very spirit which he admired above all, the spirit of the heroic individual who has the strength and courage to accept life as meaningful and joyful in spite of its inevitable tensions, pain and evil. ¹²

Insight and illusion are inextricably bound up together, as I have said before. Illusion makes the insight bearable; insight makes the illusion meaningful. Neither is of value to life without the other. It is a truth's value for life with which Nietzsche is concerned. We cannot know Reality in itself. What grants one view of Reality more validity than others is its instrumental value - is it useful for man to believe this? Some beliefs, as men change, lose their instrumental value. An example of this, which also illustrates my point concerning illusion, is the Greek pantheon of gods. The Greeks' creation of gods was life-affirming, a response to terror. "It was in order to be able to live that the Greeks had to create these gods from a most profound

¹¹ Frederick Copleston, Friedrich Nietzsche: Philosopher of Culture (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne Ltd., 1942), p. 61.

¹² Rose Pfeffer, Nietzsche: Disciple of Dionysus (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1972), p. 36.

need." (BT, p. 42). Modern man can no longer put his faith in a dead myth.

Was also bei den alten noch ein Zeichen ihrer Größe war, wird den Poeten nicht mehr zugestanden. Die Ursache liegt darin, daß die Bedingtheit des Mythos erkannt ist: Der moderne Dichter sieht in ihm eine Reaktion auf bestimmte Lebensbedürfnisse und kann nicht mehr naiv bleiben. Diese Einsicht verheimlicht der Dichter, indem er Beziehungen und Ordnungen vortauscht; er verleugnet seine eigene Bewußtheit - und das ist seine schlimmste Lüge.

What therefore with the ancients was yet another sign of their greatness no longer belongs to the poet. The difference lies in the fact that the condition of the myth is recognized: the modern poet sees in it a reaction to specific needs of life and can no longer remain naive. The poet conceals this insight while pretending to relations and order; he denies his own knowledge - and this is his worst lie. 13

To lie is inadmissible. Illusion is an interpretation of reality; it is a possibility, even if at times an improbability. The world appears at times to have no meaning: "as flies to wanton boys are we to the gods"; yet to posit a meaning, "ripeness is all," is not delusion, but illusion, a possible interpretation of Reality. There might be a meaning we cannot grasp. This is the essence of tragic faith. We are not Tertullians, believing because it is absurd; rather, we accept apparent absurdity, and draw a

13 Peter Pütz, Friedrich Nietzsche (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1967), p.32. The translation is my own.

meaning from it. In a tragic system, we do not bring in meaning from outside. This is the method of religion, which finds comfort in something beyond the facts. This is why there is no Christian tragedy. The comfort is too total, too certain. Dionysian tragedy possesses a depth and tension lost to the fidelis, the man of faith; the man of faith, of course, is also spared the terror inherent in a Dionysian outlook. There are no absolutes in Dionysian tragedy. Illusion is offered, a life-affirming interpretation of the universe saves the spectator from despair, yet no guarantees are given. The illusion may be false. We might be flies to wanton boys. We say yes in the face of the absurd, the meaningless - and give it meaning. ¹⁴

The aim of tragedy is neither defeat nor pity and fear, but the victory of the human spirit. Its ultimate reality is not opposition but synthesis and reconciliation, which may be present even where the end of the drama seems to be a catastrophe. Yet, a sense of ambiguity, conflict, and mystery remains the essence of tragic action and of the final reconciliation. ¹⁵

This is the difference between the optimistic and the Dionysian artist. The optimist denies the Dionysian vision

¹⁴ The Dionysian attitude seems Stoic, but it is not. The Dionysian man feels deeply; that is why he needs illusion. It is also not the absurd attitude posited by Camus in Myth of Sisyphus, in which there is meaning only in the struggle; in Camus, all illusion is rejected. In the Dionysian, meaning is found within the tragic (or comic) action, within an illusion. The Dionysian can, after all, move toward comedy; the absurd cannot.

underlying all illusion. His work is cheerful, but superficial. Even Dionysian comedy possesses a depth, a darkness, a significance denied to the optimist. The optimist deludes himself, thinking that he can know. The Dionysian man knows that he can know nothing. He can only believe. For him, both comedy and tragedy are an exercise in belief and affirmation.

CHAPTER FOUR

If now we have found the tendency and ultimate intention of tragedy to be a turning to resignation, to the denial of the will to live, we shall easily recognize in its opposite, comedy, the incitement to the continued assertion of the will.... It declares...that life as a whole is thoroughly good, and especially is always amusing... yet if once we contemplate this burlesque side of life somewhat seriously...the reflective spectator may become convinced that the existence and action of such beings cannot itself be an end; that, on the contrary, they can only have attained to existence by an error, and that what so exhibits itself is something which had better not be. ¹

The nihilist has no room in his system for comedy. If the world is something to be repudiated, if the will is something "zu verneinen" ² (literally, "to say no to"), comedy, with its gay affirmation, must be rejected.

The essence of comedy is affirmation. Tragedy, too, affirms, but it finds strength for that affirmation in the face of dread insight. It struggles toward a yes-saying (Ja-sagen). Comedy, on the other hand, exults, joys, revels in life. There is no way one can not say yes in comedy; it takes a certain strength, which is not

¹ Arthur Schopenhauer, selection from The World as Will And Idea, trans. R.B. Haldane and J. Kempen in Theories of Comedy, ed. Paul Lauter (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1964), p. 371.

² Raoul Richter, Friedrich Nietzsche: Sein Leben und Sein Werk (Leipzig: Dürr'schen Buchhandlung, 1909), p. 115. He is referring to Schopenhauer. See Appendix A.

to be commended, to stand aside, as Malvolio does, and remove oneself from festivity.

The butts in the festive plays consistently exhibit their unnaturalness by being kill-joys. On an occasion 'full of warm blood, of mirth,' they are too preoccupied with perverse satisfactions like pride or greed to 'let the world slip' and join the dance. ³

The character who removes himself from comic society is derided. While in tragedy the isolato, the alienated hero, is granted stature through his isolation, in comedy the grump who stands back from the festival is seen as a malcontent, an object of ridicule, for "Behind the laughter at the butts there is always a sense of solidarity about pleasure...." ⁴

William J. Marts defines comedy as "the health of being human." ⁵ The definition is an excellent one. Comedy is a revelling in all that it means to be human. Its characteristic features as stage presentation are music and the dance. As such, comedy is Dionysian, embodying the best features of that form. It is saturnalian; the "whole experience of the play [is] like that of a revel." ⁶ There

³ C.L. Barber, Shakespeare's Festive Comedy (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1959), p. 8.

⁴ Barber, p. 9.

⁵ William J. Marts, Shakespeare's Universe of Comedy (New York: David Lewis, 1971), xi.

⁶ Barber, p. 6.

is a drive toward unity; the bonds of individuation are broken, as the characters move toward community. The ultimate expression of this is the inevitable end of a comedy: marriage.

The affections of the sexes... are probably the single deepest theme of comic drama. For not only is sex the glue that binds society together, the attraction that makes it impossible for man to live alone, but it is the means by which society maintains its immortality.

Comedy's view of sex and the sexual drive is decidedly Dionysian in a positive sense.⁸ The urge towards procreation, toward life, ever more life, has its roots in the joyous overflowing at the base of the comically perceived Dionysian. Seen from the tragic perspective, there is a terror in becoming, in the varied existences surrounding man, all growing, all changing, flowering and decaying. Comedy delights in becoming, in nature's ceaseless growth and rejuvenation.

The positive Dionysian aspects of comedy are closely allied with the Apollonian. One characteristic of the Apollonian is a delight in appearance. Comedy too "not only accepts artificiality, but revels in it."⁹ Comedy exists in a dream world; the forest of Arden, the land of

⁷ Thomas McFarland, Shakespeare's Pastoral Comedy (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 1972), p. 13.

⁸ Tragedy's view is negatively Dionysian.

⁹ McFarland, p. 5.

Illyria, Theseus' Greece. Comedy delights in disguise, transformation and charades; girls dressed as boys (played by boys pretending to be girls pretending to be boys); Bottom as an ass, the play within a play in Taming of the Shrew and Midsummer Night's Dream. Disguise works differently in comedy than in tragedy, where, for instance, Edgar is forced to act as Tom o' Bedlam and Kent as the unnamed follower, when they are banished from tragic society. In comedy, the heroine often must disguise herself, as a protective measure; she is alone in the world (Viola in Illyria, Rosalind in Arden), and must meet what society there is as a young man. The heroine maintains control, however, through her disguise: Rosalind educates Orlando; if control slips, the issue is comic: Olivia pursues a frantic Viola. The heroine never loses her individuality; in tragedy, the disguised male character tends to be submerged in the role he takes on.

Note that tragedy is a male world, while comedy is female. The lesson of comedy is "feminine," calling for intuition, joy, an affirmation that is easier for the female, linked as she is to the source of life. Tragedy sets forth a sterner message, as I have noted; life must be bravely affirmed in the face of terror and dread. The spirit of tragedy is heroic; that of comedy, human.

Yet both comedy and tragedy revolve around the same tensions, center on the same irreducible fact, man's mortality. Faced with that imponderable inevitability, comedy,

manages not only to affirm, but to sing. Comedy looks at life, not in the sense of its ending, but in its infinite variety, its richness, the joy contained within its brief space.

'How that a life was but a flower'
(A.Y.L. V. iii. 29) was a two-sided theme: it was usually a gesture preceding 'And therefore take the present time'; but it could also lead to the recognition that

so, from hour to hour, we
ripe and ripe
And then, from hour to hour,
we rot and rot.

(A.Y.L. II. vii. 26-27)

The second emphasis was implicit in the first; which attitude toward nature predominated depended, not on alternative 'philosophies,' but on where you were within a rhythm. And because the rhythm is recognized in the comedies, sentimental falsification is not necessary in expressing the ripening moment. It is indeed the present mirth and laughter of the festive plays - the immediate experience they give of nature's beneficence - which reconciles feeling, without resort to sentimentality or cynicism, to the clarification conveyed about nature's limitations. 10

Death can be accepted. And yet, the threat of death does not seem real; its pain is defused.

...comedy is...a strategy of obtaining security from the threats of life. It does not stand up to death or catastrophic event as tragedy does, but rather eliminates them as a possibility. 11

10 Barber, p. 10.

11 McFarland, p. 16.

This is perhaps because the framework of illusion defuses the reality of a character's possible fate. A too-real character, such as Shylock, disturbs us as we are forced to contend with his suffering as a real, not illusory, event.

The movement of comedy is from negative illusion to positive insight; the typical comedy is a process of education, whether of a lovesick young boy (As You Like It), a shrew, or two older lovers (Twelfth Night). The action begins with a character who lives in superficial illusion; while the plot may be sheer artificiality, delight in appearances, in short, illusion, the movement of comedy is to bring this character to insight. Orlando writes bad and rather naively risqué verses to his lady, decorating the forest; Orsino and Olivia pine away, surfeited on sterile emotion; Kate, clear-headed even in the beginning, needs yet to be educated to a more congenial role than shrew. Each character has potentialities which he or she is not fulfilling; each needs to be taught to live. Comedy exhibits a "drive toward identity"¹²; the character must be educated to his real self. Paradoxically, though comedy moves toward the group (Dionysian), it does so in the framework of individual fulfillment (Apollonian).

There is a delicate balance, as I have implied, between illusion and reality in comedy; in Nietzschean terms, between insight and illusion. When this balance

¹² Northrop Frye, Fools of Time (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1967), p. 15.

is upset, as in the case of Shylock, we are pulled out of the comic world into a limbo. We do not know how to relate to such a drama.

So it is with the "problem comedies." They exhibit the full movement neither of comedy nor of tragedy. Illusion, superficial emotion, such as that of Troilus, is not redeemed through education; insight into a disgusting and chaotic world, such as that expressed by Thersites, is not mediated by illusion. It is the full movement, either from insight to illusion (tragedy), or illusion to insight (comedy), which brings satisfaction in a drama. Without this movement, the play does not reconcile the spectator to life, it does not affirm. In a problem comedy, he does not share the joy in life that is inherent in comedy; at the same time, the heroic avowal of truth and subsequent affirmation in spite of that truth is missing. There is no true insight; there is no true illusion. For a satisfying drama of either mode, both must be present.

CHAPTER FIVE

Comedy is an affirmation of life through joy; tragedy, an affirmation through suffering. Both exhibit a process of reconciliation. The agents of action are insight and illusion.

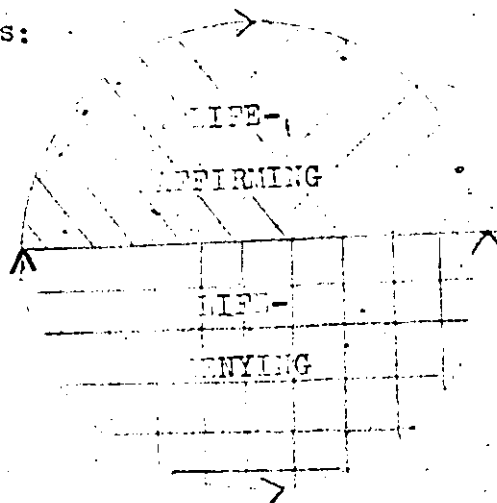
There are four aspects of insight and illusion; they move in a cyclical pattern.¹ The realm of tragedy can begin in superficial illusion; the tragic action is from negative insight to a healing illusion. Comedy generally moves from superficial illusion to a saving insight, an education. Some comedies begin with, or immediately follow, a period of chaos (usurpation [As You Like It], shipwreck [Twelfth Night], and the like), which in a tragedy might lead to a negative insight. The Tempest, for instance, defuses decidedly Dionysian elements: "full fathom five thy father lies." Thus, there are no hard and fast boundaries between these aspects; tone and direction of action determine to some extent the generic type of drama. There must be movement, however, for the drama to be truly satisfying. Again, this is the problem with certain of Shakespeare's comedies (Troilus and Cressida). They remain within one aspect, and do not move on to a healthier, more reconciled or more insightful aspect. The circle of aspects might be

¹ I am going beyond Nietzsche at this point. He does not clarify different aspects of insight and illusion in his discussion in Birth of Tragedy.

diagrammed thus:

Healing
Illusion

Dread
Insight



Positive
Insight

Superficial
Illusion

There are four possible movements:

1. Dread insight to healing illusion.
2. Dread insight to healing illusion to positive insight.

[These are the movements of tragedy.]

3. Dread insight to superficial illusion to positive insight.

4. Superficial illusion to positive insight.

[These are the movements of comedy.]

All exhibit a move between insight and illusion. Both are necessary for a full view of the world.

The movement of comedy is toward a qualified optimism; not a "cheerfulness," but an affirmation made while recognizing man's limitations, his need for education, his mortality. Comedy is suffused with the joy found in realizing that, despite these handicaps, man can yet be happy.

The movement of tragedy is to a "pessimism of strength" (BT, p. 17). This is not an absolute pessimism, a denial of life, but an affirmation, an underlying understanding of pain and death.

The tragic attitude is not optimism, for it does not represent the little that is evil in the world as rapidly diminishing, and it is not pessimism, for it does not represent that inevitable obliteration of good which leads one away from the unyielding persistence of the tragic hero and toward the resignation and acceptance of forgetfulness. ²

Tragedy reaches a middle position, at which life is seen as painful in its beauty, yet beautiful in its pain.

Central to tragedy is a problem of knowledge similar to that facing the rational man. Que sais-je? Montaigne's famous question is basic to the tragic dilemma. What do I know? What can I know? The tragic hero is barred from complete knowledge; he must act nonetheless. Ever alive in the tragic world is the possibility of deception. Macbeth thinks he has attained knowledge from the witches, but that knowledge is imperfect. Othello acts thinking he knows things as they are; he is cruelly deceived. Lear thinks he knows his daughters; he knows nothing. Finally, even Hamlet may be deceived by the Ghost, if those critics who label the apparition demonic are correct. ³

Tragedy is a movement toward isolation (Apollonian) through insight (Dionysian).

Man is a creator as an individual;
as a member of society or species,
he is a creature. The end of a.

² Henry Alonzo Myers, Tragedy: A View of Life (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1956), p. 5.

³ Eleanor Prosser, John Vyvan, et al.

comedy leaves him creaturely, invited to join a party to celebrate the creation of a new society...The end of a tragedy leaves him alone in a waste and void chaos of experience with a world to remake out of it.⁴

The hero is isolated through insight, but due to the problem of knowledge, this "insight" may be false, as it is the case of Othello and Macbeth. The plight of the deluded hero is most pathetic, but least tragic, for the reconciliation that is a prime factor of tragedy is lessened when the hero's sufferings result not from his insight into a dreadful world which possesses a real existence, but from a world which is of his own making. That is, for a hero's sufferings to be truly tragic, he must relate to the world as it is, not as he has created it through his false perceptions. In fact, it is of the essence of the tragic predicament that the hero runs up against the real world, finds that it is intractable, that it will not bend to his wishes and be as he wills it; he must learn to accept his limitations, affirm the world through illusion. Illusion must be preceded by a true insight.⁵ At the end of the non-deluded tragedies, the hero is most alone, but

⁴ Frye, p. 120.

⁵ The hero may be partially deluded (Lear at the beginning of the action, Hamlet, possibly, by the Ghost), but there must be a true insight, as defined by the dramatic context, into the nature of reality.

most reconciled; at the end of a tragedy of delusion, the hero is simply alone.

Hamlet

Hamlet begins the play with the wisdom of Silenus, "O, that this ~~too~~ too sullied flesh would melt,"⁶ and yet moves to an affirmation, a calm acceptance of life: "There's a divinity that shapes our ends, / Rough-hew them how we will" (V,ii,10-1). It is the fact of death that he cannot accept: "all that lives must die"; Hamlet cannot reconcile himself to this fact, although to "persever/ In obstinate condolment is a course/ of impious stubbornness.../ It shows a will most incorrect to heaven..." (I, ii, 72, 92-5). Claudius sounds the reasonable Apollonian note, as he reproves Hamlet:

... 'tis a fault to heaven,
A fault against the dead, a fault to nature,
To reason most absurd; whose common theme
Is death of fathers, and who still hath cried,
From the first corse till he that died today,
'This must be so'. (I,ii,104-6)

Hamlet does not listen to the voices of reason, but loses his will to live as a result of his insight.

...that the Everlasting had not fix'd
His canon 'gainst self-slaughter!
O God! God!
How weary, stale, flat and unprofitable,
Seem to me all the uses of this world!
Tie on 't! ah fie! 'tis an unweeded
garden,
That grows to seed; things rank and
gross in nature
Possess it merely. (I,ii,131-7)

⁶ William Shakespeare, Hamlet, in The Complete Works of Shakespeare, ed. Hardin Craig (Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1961), I,ii,129. All further Shakespeare quotations will be from this text.

It is not merely the physical death of man that distresses him, but the inevitable fall into oblivion; man does not even live on in the affections of his loved ones.

...That it should come to this!
 But two months dead: nay, not
 so much, not two...
 Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous
 tears
 Had left the flushing in her galled
 eyes,
 She married. (I, ii, 137-8, 154-6)

The double horror facing Hamlet, his father's death and his mother's marriage, yield an unbearable insight. The Ghost is merely an instrument, his message a focus for the disease already planted in Hamlet's soul. Its ontological status, demon or purgatorial spirit, does not ultimately matter, for Hamlet's mind is already poisoned: "O my prophetic soul" (I, v, 40). Because of the marriage he is already prepared to believe anything of evil concerning his uncle. The underlying action of the play is not the revenge plot, the testing of the ghost and so on, but Hamlet's regeneration, his movement from debilitating insight to saving illusion. The Ghost's command is a spur to Hamlet's progress, whatever effect, in a Christian interpretation, this would have on his soul.

To share in the tragic world is to engage ourselves to a design drawing us toward death; the command of the ghost is that Hamlet participate in the natural arrangement of death, the demand that the dead generation makes upon the living,

that they too share in the
common mortality....⁷

Hamlet instigates his sufferings by following the ghost's command; those sufferings draw him toward illusion, a providential view of reality. During the course of the play, Hamlet moves from pessimism to an acceptance of the special providence that is in the fall of a sparrow. The sparrow falls, it will die, yet it is right that it should: " 'tis common." Hamlet was "opposed to life," "a figure of death haunting the smugly mundane, corrupt court."⁸ He moves through cynicism, scorning and distrusting everyone, making cruel jests at Polonius, casting Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, "two men there are not living/ To whom he more adheres" (II,ii, 20-1), as Judases,⁹ castigating Ophelia and abusing his mother - all of which actions may through a bit of casuistry be justified, but are actually indefensible in a man of Hamlet's noble station and character.

He moves beyond the negation of his melancholy to a healthier state. Because of the good turning of chance in the sea fight, Hamlet escapes with the pirates to return to Denmark, having altered the commission carried by

⁷ Geoffrey Bush, Shakespeare and the Natural Condition (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1956), p. 86.

⁸ Paul N. Siegel, Shakespearean Tragedy and the Elizabethan Compromise (New York: New York University Press, 1957), p. 100.

⁹ A role, it must be noted, which they neither manage nor intend to fulfill.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. There is a problem here. He has his friends killed, "not shriving time allow'd" (V,ii,47). On his return, Hamlet cannot understand why Laertes should hate him: "What is the reason that you use me thus? / I loved you ever" (V,i,312-3). Hamlet's moral salvation is in some question even at the end of the play. But that consideration does not strike us, for we join in his illusion. He feels that there is a special Providence guarding him. It is no longer a cursed spite that he was born to set matters right.

Hamlet has not only to accept the mystery of man's condition between the angels and the brutes, and not only to act in a perplexing and soiling world. He has also to act within the human limits....¹⁰

He accepts his role, realizes that he cannot sweep to his revenge, and will wait until time brings that to fulfillment.

If it be now, 'tis not to come;
if it be not to come, it will be
now; if it be not now, yet it
will come; the readiness is all.... (V,ii,231-3)

His revenge will involve his own death, yet he is not afraid. He no longer fears death; he no longer defies the natural order of things.

Horatio's valediction, "Good night, sweet prince;
/ And flights of angel sing thee to thy rest" (V,ii, 370-1),

¹⁰ Maynard Mack, "The World of Hamlet," in Twentieth Century Interpretations of Hamlet, ed. David Bevington (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), p. 61.

is often cited as proof of Hamlet's salvation, and just as often refuted. His speech is evidence of one thing: Hamlet's triumph over pessimism. Horatio is the Apollonian character in the play. He is not fortune's fool; he reacts reasonably to all occurrences. He is the voice of reason and moderation. "That is most certain," he replies to Hamlet's "divinity" speech (V,ii,11). He did not need a long process of suffering to achieve this knowledge. Admittedly, Horatio is rather colorless, a good man to have around, but no hero. He does not possess Hamlet's depth. In his Apollonian role, however, he does act as the touchstone of the play's action on the insight to illusion level. He speaks the last bit of healing illusion, blinding us to the evil Hamlet has done: he has killed three innocent people, driven another, a woman he loved, mad, and does not really repent; yet we do not realize this at the end. We believe the illusion. "Now cracks a noble heart." We are left, not with the half-crazed, Dionysian Hamlet, who expressed death and negation, but with the noble, Apollonian prince, made wise by Dionysian insight mediated by illusion, who expresses a calm in the face of inevitability, who accepts his final fate. 11

11 Some mention should be made of Hamlet's madness. Like the young women in the comedies, he puts on a disguise as a protection. Unlike them, he cannot fully control the role. Disguise in the comedies is an Apollonian activity, the deliberate putting on of an illusion. Here, the disguise of madness is Dionysian, for madness is a loss of self. A thoroughly Apollonian character, such as Edgar, can handle the Dionysian elements of the role; Hamlet,

Othello

Othello moves from a superficial illusion through a false insight to a healing illusion. He has placed Desdemona on a pedestal, set her at the center of his universe. "Perdition catch my soul, / But I do love thee! and when I love thee not, / Chaos is come again" (III,iii,90-2).

Innocently, she holds absolute power over him.

...And then for her
To win the Moor - were 't to renounce his
baptism,
All seals and symbols of redeemed sin,
His soul is so enfeather'd to her love,
That she may make, unmake, do what she
list.... (II,iii,348-52)

He values her as more than a woman, as an angel, almost as his god.

Having such a superficial understanding of Desdemona, he is easily duped by Iago.

O beware, my lord, of jealousy;
It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock
The meat it feeds on: that cuckold lives in
bliss
Who, certain of his fate, loves not his
wronger;
But, O, what damned minutes tells he o'er
Who dotes; yet doubts, suspects, yet
strongly loves! (III,iii,165-70)

already plagued and over-burdened by the Dionysian, cannot.

...What I have done,
That might your nature, honour and exception
Roughly awake, I here proclaim was madness.
Was 't Hamlet wrong'd Laertes? Never Hamlet!
If Hamlet from himself be ta'en away,
And when he's not himself does wrong Laertes,
Then Hamlet does it not, Hamlet denies it.
(V,ii,241-7)

Othello's criterion for truth is far from adequate: "to be once in doubt/ Is once to be resolved." The mere suspicion of adultery is enough to damn Desdemona. From seeing her as a saint, Othello descends to seeing her as a whore.

...I am abused; and my relief
Must be to loathe her. O curse of marriage,
That we can call these delicate creatures ours,
And not their appetites! I had rather be a
toad,
And live upon the vapour of a dungeon,
Than keep a corner in the thing I love
For other's uses. (III,iii,165-70)

His perception, manipulated by Iago, inverts the true order of reality: Desdemona is a fair devil, Iago the one who loves him. He even descends to actual treatment of Desdemona in keeping with his "insight"; he makes his bedroom a brothel. He thinks of the murder of Desdemona as justice, a sacrifice. And so, within the context of his "insight," and the historical situation, it is. Had Desdemona committed adultery with Cassio, Othello would have been justified in killing her, according to Italian law. I venture a guess that most males even today would not find the killing of an adulterous wife to be murder. The cuckold's right to wreak revenge is an unwritten law. Othello was working within an accepted framework of social conventions.

The problem is a lack of knowledge on Othello's part: Desdemona is not unfaithful. Othello has mistaken appearance for reality, acted upon an incorrect interpretation,

and thrown a pearl away. At the end, he attains a certain stature, as he moves to an illusion of his honor, and regains the dignity he held before Iago's manipulation. His death is consonant with his life, and possesses a nobility lost sight of in the course of the play.

...I pray you, in your letters,
When you shall these unlucky deeds relate,
Speak of me as I am; nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in malice: then
must you speak
Of one who loved not wisely but too well....
(V,ii,340-4)

There is still a problem, however, a certain discomfort with the drama. A basic question demands an answer: Is Othello a tragedy?

Underlying the play for the spectator is the healing sense of Desdemona's innocence. We do not share Othello's obtuseness; we know things as they are. We watch Othello destroy the greatest thing in his life, and are powerless to stop him. Othello is pathetic, in agony over a thing not even real, a figment of his imagination. The tragic movement is incomplete, for Othello gains no real insight: he realizes what he has done, but does not grow as a result of the tragic action. We possess full knowledge throughout. We stand outside, watching Othello destroy everything; we are detached from the action, and thus from the hero. We know too much to see Othello's actions as tragic.

Another problem with the play is the fact that the evil within it is comprehensible. Othello does not deal with a

disordered, chaotic universe which defeats our hopes. Rather, it deals with a human agent, Iago, the instrument of evil. While repulsive, Iago is yet understandable. We are not awed by his evil. Disgusted, surprised, even a little admiring, perhaps; but Iago is graspable, an evil objectified and made easier to bear than general chaos.

These two aspects, then, create a problem in our experience of the play. Iago is an objectification of our fears.¹² Once objectified, those fears can be dealt with intellectually. In a Dionysian play, such as King Lear, although the fears are expressed, they are not objectified. There is still an aura of mystery, of awe, of terror. The intellect is powerless before them. There is no way in which we can understand the action of King Lear. We can feel it, respond to it, accept it, but we cannot understand, comprehend, grasp it, for it is not something that can be touched. It is amorphous. The mystery at the heart of Lear might be seen as water held within a glass. For a time, it holds the shape of the glass, or dramatic form, in which it is contained; it can then be dealt with. Take the container away, however, and one cannot hold the water; the mystery remains, formless. The drama is a form in which to experience the mystery. It is not a solution. It is impermanent. The mystery remains essentially unintelligible.

¹² The objective correlative, if you like, which Eliot thought Hamlet lacked, and for which lack, in this interpretation, it is the better.

Othello, however, can be understood. We know the truth all along. We are horrified by Iago, but we understand him. The plot is one of intrigue, rather like a novel of the perfect crime. Will he get away with it? Hamlet and King Lear are dramas of incomprehensible Mystery. Othello is a whodunit.

Macbeth

Macbeth begins in delusion, which, like Othello, he accepts as insight, and progressively falls into further delusion. All that is left him at the end is a bestial courage.

The action of the play is toward a progressive self-inflicted isolation. Macbeth begins as a national hero, dear to his king; he ends alone.

I have lived long enough: my way of life
Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf;
And that which should accompany old age,
As honour, love, obedience, troops of friends,
I must not look to have; but, in their stead,
Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honour, breath,
Which the poor heart would fain deny, and
dare not. (V,iii,22-8)

Even his wife has grown away from him, retreating into madness, driven to suicide. Macbeth dies from the inside; he cannot even mourn for her: "She should have died hereafter; / There would have been time for such a word" (V,v,17-8). He is drained of all energy, all emotion. He loses himself in illusion conjured up by Dionysian forces.

The witches are the representatives of the Dionysian on the supernatural level. They are incomprehensible, evil, dark, mysterious. They use illusion to destroy Macbeth,

illusion that is really insight. That is, their prophecies are true; they utter them in such a way, however, as to make it possible for Macbeth to delude himself into thinking he is safe. Macbeth thinks he is acting in an Apollonian manner, that he is making himself a greater, more powerful individual. In actuality, he is destroying himself, by destroying his social context. He reaches a negative Apollonian state, alienated, isolated, alone.

Lady Macbeth is a human embodiment of the Dionysian. She calls upon Dionysian forces to strip her of her identity, that which is reasonable, Apollonian in her, and allow her to share in chaos and disorder.

...Come, you spirits
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full
Of direst cruelty!
Come to my woman's breasts,
And take my milk for gall; you murdering
ministers.... (I,v,41-4,48-9)

She finds that the Apollonian cannot be cast out or exorcised. She is the one who has actively called for the obliteration of the Apollonian, but it is Macbeth who loses himself, feeling no remorse. Lady Macbeth's fall into madness is evidence of the hold the Apollonian still has on her; the force of conscience, supreme evidence of the Apollonian, divides her from herself, in illusion makes her relive her crime. Macbeth is troubled by illusions in the first half of the play (the dagger, Banquo's Ghost), while a Dionysian Lady Macbeth acts efficiently in the interests of their ambition. Their roles are now reversed.

Both Macbeth and his lady are destroyed by the Apollonian, Macbeth by taking illusion for insight, Lady Macbeth by the insight into her evil which the Apollonian will not let her deny. The play centers on the problem of evil, as do all tragedies of the Dionysian mode. Macbeth does not ask the question of human mortality, "Why does the good man suffer?" but a more personal one, "Why does a man choose evil?" There was no real need for Macbeth's action; his position as thane should have been sufficient. He admits this.

...I have no spur
To prick the sides of my intent, but only
Vaulting ambition, which o'erleaps itself
And falls on the other. (I,vii,25-8)

The problem is one of limit, an Apollonian one. Macbeth cannot accept the limits of his life. He must will beyond - and be destroyed. The Apollonian will not allow itself to be overthrown.

There are a few difficulties with Macbeth as a tragedy, although for the most part it works quite well. Macbeth, like Othello, is deluded, but the witches are so incomprehensible a force, that this delusion does not destroy the tragic effect. We still cannot totally grasp the action intellectually; there is a mystery still present. More distressing is the fact that Macbeth closes his life in unredeemed Dionysian despair.

Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools

The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing. (V,v,19-28)

This is the wisdom of Silenus, with which Hamlet begins. Macbeth cannot move beyond it. This despair is mitigated somewhat by his bear-like courage, but not totally. The action is saved by the restoration of order at the close. We experience a healing illusion, although Macbeth does not. The universe, incomprehensible, yet exhibits a structure, an equilibrium, an illusion of order.

CHAPTER SIX

King Lear is perhaps the most fruitful of Shakespeare's plays for an application of Nietzsche's Dionysian/ Apollonian construct. Nietzsche's theory helps to make clear the essential direction of the play; it moves neither toward nihilism nor absurdity, but to a "pessimism of strength."

The language of the play

The play's language is decidedly Dionysian.¹ Animal imagery is employed to show how close man is to the bestial. To be simplistic, in Lear there are bad animals, stupid animals and good animals, while Edgar (as Tom) is an actual embodiment of man as animal. In his disguise, he has lost the human in the beastly.²

The sisters, Regan and Goneril, are stinking dogs, pelicans, foxes, tigers, adders--but most especially dogs. Goneril is a kite, a wolf, a fox, a serpent (twice); and a boar. Oswald, their servant, picks up his ladies' traits. He is a dog, a rat, a bird, and a goose. Edmund, their lover, is a toad.

Lear is an ass, and a stupid dog. Kent, the good servant, is twice spoken of as a dog. Lear and Cordelia

1 Robert Heilman has written the definitive study of imagery in King Lear. I am indebted to his work, This Great Stage (Washington: University of Washington Press, 1967), for my discussion.

2 This has repercussions in clothing imagery--see below.

will be birds in a cage, happy in their imprisonment. The most famous of the animal images offers one resolution to the theme, what is man: "...as flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods, / They kill us for their sport" (IV,i, 38-9). This is not the resolution, since animal imagery is not as significant as the other imagery. Animal imagery is illustrative; it points up a problem, while the other imagery is developmental, moving toward resolution of that problem.

Smell imagery is introduced in the first scene. "Do you smell a fault?" Gloucester asks Kent, speaking of his bastard son? (I,i,16). The significance of this is seen in retrospect from Edgar's "the gods are just." Gloucester, not smelling a fault here, must "smell/ His way to Dover" (III,vii,93-4).

All that follow their noses are led by their eyes but blind men; and there's not a nose among twenty but can smell him that's stinking. (II,iv,68-71)

Both Lear and Gloucester have failed to smell what should be smelled, and must suffer for it. Lear has not smelled "Lady the Brach" stinking by the fire (I,iv,124-6).³ He comes finally to say, "I smelt 'em out" (IV,vi,104).

Lear's statement when Gloucester wishes to kiss his hand, "It smells of mortality" (IV, vi, 136), thus has deep connotations. Reality "stinks," but one must learn to

³ The two sisters, archetypal bitches.

recognize the smell. "The first time we smell the air/
We wawl and cry" (IV, vi, 183-4). The smell is bad, but it
cannot be ignored. Smell is the agent of Dionysian insight;
it must be utilized.

Smell imagery runs over into sight imagery. If we
cannot see, we must smell; and if we have not smelled, we
cannot see. Lear and Gloucester are both blind, and both
blinded. Gloucester is blinded literally, Lear symbolically
through the loss of his mind. Sight is then an Apollonian
gift, lost when one succumbs to the Dionysian, but granted
again when one passes through to illusion.

At the outset, Lear is admonished by Kent to "see
better" (I, i, 160). Gloucester tells Edmund, demanding the
forged letter, "if it be nothing I shall not need spectacles"
(I, ii, 34). The letter is, of course, nothing, but Gloucester
does not see this. The storm buffets Lear in its "eyeless
rage" (III, i, 8), literally in its impartiality, symbolically
as a counterpart for man. Edgar asks one of the
"sisters," at the mock trial of Regan and Goneril, "Wantest
thou eyes at trial, madam?" (IV, vi, 26); they will cause
his father to want eyes. Gloucester himself tells the sis-
ters, at his "trial," "I would not see thy cruel nails/
Pluck out his poor old eyes" (III, vii, 56-7). He says that
he shall "see" vengeance. "See 't shalt thou never,"
Cornwall says, and plucks out his eyes. This is true not
only literally, but symbolically; he dies before the sisters.

Gloucester speaks the clue to sight imagery: "I

stumbled when I saw" (IV,i,21). The physical eye must be replaced by "the eye of anguish" (IV,iv,15) before Lear and Gloucester can see again. Both regain their sight through a child's love. Lear regains his sanity, and thus his sight, in the arms of Cordelia. Gloucester has said of Edgar, "Might I but live to see thee in my touch/ I'd say I had eyes again!" (IV,i,25-6). He regains his sight in Edgar's arms.

Clothing imagery takes on the status of a symbol in King Lear. The action begins with a dis robing: "He will divest us" (I,i,50). "Fathers that wear rags/ Do make their children blind," sings the fool (II,iv,48-9). Lear, while not actually wearing rags, has yet made his daughters blind to him by giving them his land. In a near converse, Edgar, Gloucester's son, wears rags, while another of his children has made him blind, for his own advancement.

Lear speaks of "poor naked wretches," while Edgar counsels, "set not thy sweet heart on proud array" (III,iv,84). Clothing, "proud array," hides "all," yet clothing separates man from the beasts. In one sense, clothes are "lendings," hiding man from himself and others. Yet clothing is more than that. "Reason not the need," says Lear. Clothes symbolize inward man. Lear disrobes on the heath, reaching the nadir of existence. He joins Edgar in being an animal. Edgar is given clothing as he guides Gloucester. Lear, re-united with Cordelia, has "fresh garments" put on him, and regains his Apollonian self.

Clothing is a sign of the self; naked man is Dionysian.

Another significant element in Lear's style is the "all/nothing" language. This mirrors the Dionysian/Apollo-nian elements in the play. "Nothing," replies Cordelia to Lear's question in the first act, setting loose the Dionysian action.

At the beginning of King Lear, we see the hero preparing to take the fatal step of depriving himself of his own social context. He will exchange the reality for the 'name' of king, and instead of being loved by his subjects for his qualities, he will be loved by his daughters for himself alone. All seems to go well until, with Cordelia's 'nothing,' he finds himself staring into the blankness of an empty world. Those who love Lear love him according to their bond, the tie of loyalty which is their own real life. Who is Lear to be loved apart from that? That is, what is the identity of a king who is no longer a king?⁴

"I gave you all," Lear cries to his daughters. He gave himself, his individuality, his essence. "I am a fool, thou art nothing," the fool tells Lear, pointing to this loss of self.

In Shakespeare the word nothing, when it means something called nothing, usually refers to the loss of essence, not to the end of existence.⁵

⁴ Frye, p. 103.

⁵ Frye, p. 108.

Edgar, too, has lost himself. "Edgar I nothing am." The all/nothing pattern runs through the play, pointing to the problem of identity. The characters lose the Apollonian in the Dionysian: Lear goes mad, Edgar and Kent must disguise themselves. The play contains an element from comic drama, what Northrop Frye terms "a drive toward identity." Dionysian loss of self must yield to the individual made wise through insight.

"Who is it that can tell me who I am?"

One basic problem dealt with in King Lear is that of identity. Lear is a king. He holds his identity in outward material things, not from within. Withdrawn from his regal role, he is no one. "...By abdicating as king, Lear has destroyed his own social context, and has therefore essentially murdered himself."⁶ He is no more than the role. He has defined himself in terms of his goods, his kingly prerogatives, and so on, not in terms of his being a man, not in terms of his unique personality.

If Lear's individuality is tied to his kingship, which distinguishes him from other men, [by giving up the kingdom] he has severed his principium individuationis from reality, and it is destined to be shattered by events.

⁶ Frye, p. 35.

⁷ N. Joseph Calarco, Tragic Being (Minneapolis, Minnesota: The University of Minnesota Press, 1969), p. 89.

Lear thinks to retain the outer form of kingship.

...Only we still retain
The name, and all the additions to a king;
The sway, revenue, execution of the rest,
Beloved sons, be yours.... (I,i,137-40)

He wishes to take illusion for reality, but having cast off the reality of kingship, he must inevitably lose the illusion. His daughters plan to reduce his train of followers, since he does not need them.

O, reason not the need: our basest beggars
Are in the poorest thing superfluous:
Allow not nature more than nature needs,
Man's life's as cheap as beast's.... (II,iv,267-70)

That superfluity, his role as king, is his principle of individuation, that which makes him Lear. Since he is defined by material things, Lear needs to retain those outward trappings to keep a hold on himself.

Goneril and Regan, however brusque and insensitive, show a certain hard common sense in their attitude to Lear, and are not revealed as evil until they separate him from what is left of his society. The outcry made about their cruelty in cutting off his 'train' seems excessive at first, but is deeply rooted in the convention of the play. That act shows that they do not merely 'seek his death'; they seek rather his annihilation. To murder Lear, and thereby get the noisy old nuisance out of the way, would show less real malice than wiping out the society he commands and letting him go on living. The latter obliterates the idea or real form of Lear, so to speak: it strikes at a deeper life than his physical one.

It is through the loss of self that Lear attains a positive Dionysian insight.

...Lear's individuality is absorbed in a Dionysiac insight which transcends his particular situation. The Dionysiac moves the individual beyond himself; it involves the shattering of the principium individuationis. In the storm, Lear's suffering begins to embrace the suffering of all 'naked wretches,' and his pity begins to transcend self-pity.... Lear merges with his fellowman at the zero point of being, in his nothingness.⁹

Lear loses the negative illusion of the self defined by what is external to man. He must move to an understanding of man in himself, in man's intrinsic value as man.

The sisters deprive Lear of all the trappings of kingship, and he leaves Gloucester's castle in a rage. He must spend the night on the heath, his spirit as violent as the storm. In the midst of his Dionysian frenzy, he thinks of those subjects he has forgotten.

Poor naked wretches, wheresoe'er you are,
That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides,
Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you
From seasons such as these? O, I have ta'en
Too little care of this! Take physic, pomp,
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou mayst shake the superflux to them,
And show the heavens more just. (III, iv, 28-36)

Seeing Edgar disguised as Tom o' Bedlam, he goes further in Dionysian insight.

⁹ Calarco, pp. 96-7.

Why, thou wert better in thy grave
 than to answer with thy uncovered body
 this extremity of the skies. Is man
 no more than this? Consider him well.
 Thou owest the worm no silk, the beast
 no hide, the sheep no wool, the cat no
 perfume....Thou art the thing itself:
 unaccommodated man is no more but such
 a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art.
 Off, off, you lendings! (III;iv,105-14)

He disrobes, joining Tom in a common plunge to insight, unmediated by illusion.¹⁰ He insists that Tom be offered shelter when Gloucester comes to bring Lear indoors. In Dionysian communion, Lear sees the lowest of creatures, a madman, as his brother. This Dionysian insight, negative though it is in part, brings Lear closer to his true self.

Lear's redemption comes as he gradually realizes the commonness to all men of nature's compulsions, both inner and outer, and begins to measure his own humanity with more feeling for others than during his kingly days.¹¹

As a result of his Dionysian experience, when Lear is reunited with Cordelia, he is ready to live a new life. By seeing himself in union with other men, not set apart because of his kingly station, he has reached a definition of self that is intrinsic, essential, not based on accidental qualities. He is ready to live in a common, not kingly, way.

¹⁰ Lear is deluded in thinking Tom has been betrayed by his own two daughters, but healing illusion is not present.

¹¹ Robert H. West, Shakespeare and the Outer Mystery (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1968), p. 157.

...Come, let's away to prison:
 We two alone will sing like birds i' the cage:
 When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down,
 And ask of thee forgiveness: so we'll live,
 And pray, and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
 At gilded butterflies, and hear poor rogues
 Talk of court news....
 And take upon's the mystery of things,
 As if we were God's spies.... (V,iii,8-14,16-7)

Lear has reached an Apollonian state, enriched by Dionysian insight, in which he possesses a true individuality, one based on inner calm rather than outward vesture.

Pelican daughters and unbearable insight

Lear is an old man, yet he is painfully naive. He has raised his daughters, but knows them not at all. With his love of material things, he has conditioned his older daughters to seek those things, bartering affection for wealth.

Which of you shall we say doth love us most?
 That we our largest bounty may extend
 Where nature doth with merit challenge.
 (I,i,52-4)

Goneril and Regan did not grow vicious by accident. Lear fostered their clear-headed, ambitious properties, offering a calculus of love.

The youngest daughter somehow has escaped infection, but Lear misunderstands her. His instincts are good; he senses that she is his most loving daughter: "I loved her most, and thought to set my rest/ On her kind nursery" (I,i,125-6), but her reply hurts his pride. He finds he

cannot bargain with her.

Nothing will come of nothing....
 How, how, Cordelia! mend your speech a little,
 Lest it may mar your fortunes. (I,i,92,96-7)

She stands firm, possessing an integrity lacking in both her father and her sisters. He banishes her, sending her dowry-less with France, who can prize her at her worth: "She is herself a dowry" (I,i,244). Persons have value in themselves, not as they possess material goods.

The daughters, being reasonable, follow Lear's action to its logical end. They begin to strip away from Lear the trappings of kingship. He responds in high dudgeon, declaring that neither could be his real daughter.

Are you our daughter?

 Degenerate bastard! (I,iv,238,275)

...if thou shouldst not be glad,
 I would divorce me from thy mother's tomb,
 Sepulchring an adulteress. (II,iv,132-4)

It is patently obvious that they are his offspring. Insight begins to press in on him; those around him are ungrateful.¹² The fault must not be in himself, but in his daughters. He cannot see that he has prepared them for this moment all their lives.

The insight into their lack of feeling is devastating. Lear reaches a crisis. The self he thought he was has been destroyed. He is nothing. He is alienated from those around

¹² Lear at this point resembles Timon of Athens, although he goes beyond misanthropy.

him, and is coming to a realization of what he has done:

"I did her wrong" (I,v,34). There is no order to his world:
 "things fall apart, the center cannot hold." This Dionysian
 insight is too much for him. He retreats into madness.

"My wits begin to turn"

Lear realizes the danger he faces, the possible fall
 into madness:

O let me not be mad, not mad, sweet heaven!
 Keep me in temper: I would not be mad! (I,v,50-1)

O, how this mother swells up toward my heart!
 Hysterica passio, down, thou climbing sorrow,
 Thy element's below! (II,iv,56-8)

O me, my heart, my rising heart, but, down!
 (II,iv,122)

I prithee, daughter, do not make me mad....
 (II,iv,221)

O fool, I shall go mad! (II,iv,289)

My wits begin to turn. (III,iii,67)

...O Regan, Goneril!
 Your old kind father, whose frank heart gave all--
 O, that way madness lies; let me shun that;
 No more of that.... (III,iv,19-22)

He retains a control of sorts even while falling
 into madness.

...in Lear's own comments on his mental
 state there is a special significance:
 they show that he knows what is happen-
 ing to him. Not only does he know what
 is happening; he also knows, at least
 in part, why it is happening.¹³

¹³ Heilman, p.196.

Madness is a Dionysian state. Lear is able to achieve a communion with the elements, and other people. At the same time, he has lost himself completely, and becomes the fool he has acted. The Dionysian needs to be saved by the Apollonian, Cordelia restoring his sanity.

Edgar deliberately puts on the Dionysian guise of madness, yet retains Apollonian control. He too sees into the depths.

O gods! Who is 't can say 'I am at the worst'?
I am worse than e'er I was.....
And worse I may be yet: the worst is not
So long as we can say 'This is the worst.'

He can live with that knowledge, however, secure in Apollonian illusion.

Flies to wanton boys

Edgar is the Apollonian center of the play. He has passed through Dionysian insight, in fact, lives a Dionysian existence as poor Tom, and yet does not despair. He brings his father from despair, through optimism, to illusion.

Gloucester, having been blinded, despairs, losing all sense of order in the world. "As flies to wanton boys, are we to the gods,/ They kill us for their sport" (IV, i, 38-9).

He plans to kill himself--the wisdom of Silenus. Even in despair, he feels compassion for poor Tom, a positive aspect of his Dionysian state. He tells the old man to "bring some covering for this naked soul," and gives Tom his purse (IV, i, 46, 67).

Edgar must bring Gloucester from this negative Dionysian state through the use of illusion. He makes Gloucester believe that he has fallen from a cliff, and yet survived. The spirit leading him to suicide was a fiend; Gloucester was saved by divine intercession: "Thy life's a miracle" (IV, vi, 55).

Gloucester moves to optimism, regaining his will to live: "...henceforth I'll bear/ Affliction till it do cry out itself/ 'Enough, enough,' and die" (IV, vi, 75-7). Even after seeing Lear in his deranged state, he retains a hold on life:

You ever-gentle gods, take my breath from me;
Let not my worser spirit tempt me again
To die before you please! (IV, vi, 221-3)

When Lear is captured, however, he lapses into despair, "a man may rot even here" (V, ii, 8). Optimism is not a permanently healthy state for man, since it is doomed to frustration; the gods are not ever-gentle. Edgar speaks the Apollonian illusion which must cloak the Dionysian insight. "Men must endure/ Their going hence, even as their coming hither:/ Ripeness is all..." (V, ii, 9-11). Life must be accepted as it is.

...The ripeness that is all is pious
acceptance of life as it comes and the
living out of one's time to the end....
To die ripe is to realize life's poten-
tial, largely by staying free of ill
thoughts; it comes from piety toward life,
not from defiance of it or despair at it.¹⁴

Ripeness, a coming to fruition, is our task, a growth in individuality, Apollonian, through the depth of Dionysian insight.

"Is this the promised end?"

Cordelia's death is the crux of King Lear, the problem which has plagued readers for centuries. Samuel Johnson was so distressed by it that he refused to read the play. Nahum Tate's adaptation, complete with happy ending, was performed until 1838. There is something agonizing about the original ending. We have suffered with Lear, see him finally brought to triumph over himself, then see him lose everything. The insight released is overwhelming.

Shakespeare wants us to be outraged [at Cordelia's death]. Against whom? Regan and Goneril are dead, and the repentant Edmund is dying. In the last scene of his tragedy, Shakespeare has eliminated all the evil individuals against whom our anger might be directed....

The outraged eye of the spectator turns from the scene of desolation, barren of villains, to 'heaven's vault' arching over it, and from specific evil to what Kitto calls 'Evil itself.' The death of Cordelia compels us to embrace, in its terrible finality, a general vision toward which the entire play has been moving.¹⁵

That vision is one of general chaos, disorder--a Dionysian unintelligibility. We recognize that

...the divine order, if it exists, may

be a horrible thing. The way is doubly prepared... for us to accept that it does not exist--by the unacceptable 'evidences,'¹⁶ and by our no longer wanting its existence.

If there is a force guiding such a world, how evil, how unutterably cruel it must be. We are flies to wanton boys.

So the scene begins. Kent and Edgar wonder if it is the Last Judgment, the tableau is so horrible. Lear carrying the dead Cordelia, an inverse Pieta. Lear sounds the Dionysian note.

...She's gone forever!
I know when one is dead, and when one lives;
She's dead as earth. (V,iii,257-61)

He is torn between hope and despair.

...she lives! if it be so,
It is a chance which does redeem all sorrows,
That ever I have felt. (V,iii,265-7)

And my poor fool is hang'd! No, no, no life!
Why should a dog, a horse, a rat, have life,
And thou no breath at all? Thou 'lt come no more,
Never, never, never, never, never! (V,iii,304-7)

Lear ends by pulling illusion from the depths of negation; his appraisal was correct at the beginning. Cordelia is as dead as earth. He dies believing, however, that she lives: "Do you see this? Look on her, look, her lips,/ Look there, look there!" (V,iii,310-1). That illusion transforms the final scene.

¹⁶ Nicholas Brooke, "The Ending of King Lear," in Shakespeare: 1564-1964, ed. Edward A. Bloom (Providence, Rhode Island: Brown University Press, 1964), p. 84.

The old king has encountered ultimate nothingness, the final zero of Being, and from it plucked something, everything, a breath on Cordelia's dead lips, the entranced vision of the martyr in his torment. His illusion, like the hand of a god, has created the world from original Chaos.¹⁷

The play ends in affirmation.

We know, however, that Lear is deluding himself. Cordelia is dead. Our experience of the play is deeper, more painful, because of Lear's illusion.

6 The darkest possibility of King Lear is that only deception makes natural misfortune tolerable, that the unkindness of natural life is endured only through appearances, and that all human love can offer, to show the heavens more just, is a trick.¹⁸

We are speechless before the final negation, before the final affirmation. We do not understand what has happened. We have seen a process of education, an old man brought to understanding, an integral self, at peace with the world, and seen that education shattered, made meaningless, by the ultimate Dionysian horror. The action is redeemed by an old man's delusion, and we are somehow comforted.

What is mysterious about the concluding moments is that our minds are no longer pained by our knowledge that Lear

17 Calarco, p. 113.

18 Bush, p. 128.

is deceived....There is a necessity to
believe, as there is for Hamlet, to act....¹⁹

The meaning is in our need to affirm, our impulse to the Apollonian. We must believe; we must find an illusion that will not destroy the wisdom we have gained through Dionysian insight. Life at its most horrifying must be accepted, although the acceptance itself kills. Lear does not survive his act of faith.

Edgar, the Apollonian figure, survives the tragic action. He will succeed Lear as king. Our experience is to some degree softened by a restoration of order, and the triumph of bearable knowledge.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Nietzsche's theory is ~~extrinsic~~ to Shakespeare's plays. Therefore, to expect the plays to conform to this external pattern is inadmissible as literary criticism. The use of such a theory to illuminate aspects of the plays, however, is valid and fruitful. I have tried to deal with the plays, not as though I were baking Nietzschean cookies, cutting the dramas into Dionysian and Apollonian shapes, but rather as entities possessing their own integrity, which I have attempted to retain, despite my analysis.

A major objection that might be made to my discussion is a philosophical one. Suppose the world is not Dionysian? What then? If the world is something that can be accepted in itself, without the mediation of illusion, a theory which defines tragedy in those terms is hopelessly out of touch with reality. I cannot reply to this argument, other than to note that men do suffer and die. If that fact is too easily accepted, then we are not dealing with tragedy.

Another objection, again philosophical, might be raised by the existentialist. Yes, the world is Dionysian, but it should be accepted as such. Illusions are a sign of weakness. Man is strong enough to bear the world as it is. I would reply that man is not equipped to deal with reality without illusions. Any statement is an interpretation, and thus an illusion, since as men we cannot know

anything with certainty, except for the fact that we doubt. We begin with Augustine, "Dubito, ergo sum": "I doubt, therefore I am." The only way, then, to live without illusion is to suspend judgment on all questions--a virtual impossibility. We should not live with life-denying illusions, of course, but illusions which serve life cannot be rejected. In Apollonian illusion, Dionysian reality is not denied, but made bearable. It is thus an insightful illusion.

The final objection is most damning. What does a philosophical idea have to do with literature? A great deal. Literature, to be vital, must deal with life. Great literature deals with great questions. In order to understand the literature fully, it is necessary to understand the patterns of thought. One of these patterns is Dionysian/Apollonian, since that is how we perceive the world. This philosophical idea, then, is not extraneous to literature, but intrinsically bound up with its operations for man.

APPENDIX

"The ethical significance of existence lies in its ultimate horror."¹

Schopenhauer's metaphysical thought furnishes valuable insight into Nietzsche's work, and acts incidentally as a negative standard: what a tragedy does not do. Underlying the thought of both Schopenhauer and Nietzsche is Kant's questioning of the basis of knowledge.

If we are to know things, we must know them essentially; that is, we must know them in their essence, that which underlies all changes. Kant terms this das Ding an sich, the thing in itself. Man cannot penetrate to the level of essence; he must remain on the superficial level of appearance, of existence. All knowledge is colored by human perception. The world is to some extent our own creation.

[Kant bezeichnet] die Welt der Objekte, die uns umgibt, als die Welt unseres Bewusstseins, unserer Erfahrung, als Welt der Erscheinungen. Die Welt der Dinge, die ich sehe, höre, rieche, aber auch messe und wäge, ist aus den von Kant angegebenen Gründen nur unsere Vorstellung...daß von dieser Seite aus niemals der Einblick in die Welt der Dinge an sich...erschließt.

[Kant designates] the world of objects that surrounds us as the world of our consciousness, as the world of appearances.

¹ Patrick Gardiner, "Arthur Schopenhauer," in The Encyclopedia of Philosophy, ed. Paul Edwards (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967), p.330.

The world of things that I see, hear, smell, but also measure and weigh, is, on the basis of the above grounds, only our idea...that...from this side never opens up an insight into the world of the thing in itself.²

Schopenhauer reflected upon Kant's criticism, and decided that we can to some extent know das Ding an sich. Everything in nature, he thought, is engaged in an act of willing: man, animals, plants, natural phenomena, all are engaged in a will to live, to endure.³

Therefore, true Reality is Will: "der Wille ist-- das Ding an sich."⁴ The Will is the primal Unity underlying all things.

[der Wille] ist das All-Eine, das ungeteilte Ursein, nie ganz erkennbar und nur aus seiner vornehmsten Erscheinungsform, dem eben uns vertrauten Willen, ablesbar und deutbar.

[The Will] is the "All-One," the undivided primal Being, never entirely perceivable, and then only in its forenamed appearances, in which even we are familiar with the Will, understandable and clear.⁵

The Will is the basis of suffering, eternal and without limit.

² Raoul Richter, Friedrich Nietzsche: Sein Leben und Sein Werk (Leipzig: Durr'schen Buchhandlung, 1909), pp.110-1. My translation.

³ Richter, p. 112.

⁴ Richter, p. 112.

⁵ Richter, p. 112.

Der Wille als Kern der Erscheinungen ist Wille zum Leben. Wille zu sich selbst. Aber dieser Wille ist notwendig ein leidvoller Wille. Das Wollen überhaupt ist unlustvoll. Denn als Wollen entspringt es dem Mangel, der Bedürftigkeit und dem Unbehagen mit dem gegenwärtigen Zustand. Da nun der Wille kein letztes Ziel des Strebens kennt und in alle Ewigkeit wollen muß, so gibt es kein Maß und Ziel des Leidens. Der Wille ist der Kern der Natur, der Welt. So ist die Natur und die Welt also auch nur eine große Leidenstätte.

The Will as core to appearances is will to live. Will to itself. But this will is necessarily a suffering will. The willing is generally negative [it. disinclined]. For from willing comes deficiency, neediness and uneasiness with present conditions. And since the will knows no purpose or goal to its striving, and must will in all eternity, there is no measure or purpose to the suffering. The will is the core of nature, of the world. Therefore nature and the world are also only a great place of suffering.⁶

There is no final satisfaction to be found in the world.

Just because it is a striving without end, Will never attains final satisfaction: a partial and transitory satisfaction, as experienced by an individual man, for instance, soon turns to ennui. Will-in-itself is, therefore, always unsatisfied, always desiring, never at rest, constantly reaching out as if it could be satisfied and yet never finding satisfaction in anything.

⁶ Richter, p. 113.

⁷ Frederick Copleston, Arthur Schopenhauer: Philosopher of Pessimism (London: Burns Oates & Washbourne Ltd., 1947), p. 86.

Man's only salvation, according to Schopenhauer, is to escape the Will, either through altruism, the loss of self in others, or complete negation of the Will. The negation of the Will found in art (pure will-less contemplation) is only temporary; we are doomed to will again, with even more pain, having known the calm of nothingness. A lasting solution is asceticism. The man who wishes to escape the slavery of the Will may

....by deliberate abstention from every physical pleasure, above all from procreation, so mortify the will in himself that he virtually ceases to live even while his body still breathes.⁹

Again,

Total release from the enslavement of the will... occurs only when a person finally ceases to feel any attachment to earthly things and when all desire to participate in the life of the world completely vanishes.⁹

Such, it can easily be seen, is the condition of Hamlet at the beginning of that play.

Nietzsche rejected Schopenhauer's metaphysic as weak. It denied life, through extirpation, rather than sublimation, of the Will. Schopenhauer's wisdom is the wisdom of Silenus: not to be born is best.

⁸ F.A. Lea, The Tragic Philosopher: a Study of Friedrich Nietzsche (London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1957), p. 20.

⁹ Gardiner, p. 331.

Schopenhauer, Nietzsche says, fails to grasp the true meaning of pessimism: suffering and struggle are productive powers that are not to be abolished, but overcome, cancelling out that which is weak, but preserving and developing that which can become the basis for a pessimism of strength.¹⁰

Schopenhauer's thought misses the essence of Dionysian tragedy, and consequently the essence of Shakespearean tragedy: a will to affirm, despite suffering--in short, a will to live.

¹⁰ Rose Pfeffer, Nietzsche: Disciple of Dionysus (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1972), p. 45.

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