

MARLOWE AND SHAKESPEARE: A COMPARATIVE
STUDY OF MACHIAVELLIANISM IN THEIR
MAJOR TRAGEDIES

A Thesis

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In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts in Literature

by

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APPROVAL SHEET

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS IN LITERATURE, this thesis entitled: MARLOWE AND SHAKESPEARE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MACHIAVELLIANISM IN THEIR MAJOR TRAGEDIES, has been prepared and submitted by Milagros Castillo - Espina who is hereby recommended for oral examination.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The tragic world is the world of conflict which finds man battling against himself or the cogent forces of his natural environment. The contention deepens when man fights man, and the two standards of good and evil figure in a struggle for survival. The conflict discloses the prevalence of the good and the suppression of evil. Imaginative literature, through dramatic tragedy, embodies the prevailing thought which underlines the pattern of any human conflict, the impotence of the created and the Omnipotence of the Creator.

The gradual development of the dramatic role of evil took place as a significant part of the exploitation of human conflict as the nucleus of any tragic plot. Lily Campbell, in an inquiry into the nature of tragic drama, states:

"The problem of tragedy has always been the problem of evil in this world. The presentation of the evil that befalls man is but one of the concerns of tragedy; the other and the more important is the explanation of why the evil is so presented."¹

¹Lily Campbell, Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes: Slaves of Passion (New York: Barnes and Noble Inc., 1963), p. 1.

In Europe, particularly in England, the drama had a specifically religious origin with characters drawn from the Bible acting out a single theme: the reward of the good and the punishment of the evildoers.² The Devil in the early miracle plays became the first stereotyped allegorical symbol of anything opposed to goodness, and with it the fear of hell and a profound indignation against sin was strongly aroused. As the imaginative power of the dramatists developed, and their desire to project the good-versus-evil theme increased, the morality plays, equipped with a new approach, emerged, and the miracle Devil donned the new garb of Vice, the improvised symbol of mischief. As hell gaped to receive the leaping Devil, carrying Vice on his back, the medieval audience saw the birth of the stage as the seat of a delightful method of instructing the people in religion and correcting their abuses.

While the roles of evil were limited to dramatic metaphor, a new trend in artistic drama was conceived. This time, the playwrights wanted to do away with bare

²William J. Long, English Literature (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1945), p. 116.

abstractions and symbols; they wanted living characters to vivify plot structures. Hence, a concentrated effort was made to amplify plot and characterization and thereby render a more vibrant replica of life and people.

By the end of the sixteenth century, the English tragedy was focused upon man himself as the shaper of his unhappy destiny, upon "the inner man as a theatre of suffering."³ The human figure became the core of the drama, and every aspect of human endeavor, the good and the bad, appealed strongly.

The impact of tragedies lingered, and the attention hovered around the most interesting character, the dramatic villain. It was the villain, strongly loathed and detested, who was dramatically instrumental in revealing the unworthiness of worldly glory and the damnation deserved by those who defied the course of order and universal brotherhood. The role of evil was represented from different angles and through variations of the basic elements in Senecan tragedy or of Boccaccio's De Casibus theme of the capricious wheel of fortune as the determi-

³Willard Farnham, The Medieval Heritage of Elizabethan Tragedy (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1956), p. 419.