A STUDY OF THE MANNER IN WHICH SHAKESPEARE CLOSES HIS PLAYS

by

Goldie Lenora Hoffmann

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Approved by:

[Signature]
Instructor in charge.

[Signature]
Head of Chairman of Dept.

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PREFACE

It is a commonplace of criticism that Shakespeare is

careless in the unravelling of his plots, but so far as I
know, no one person has made a comprehensive study of the

manner in which Shakespeare closes his plays. Different
critics have, of course, commented upon the endings of

individual plays; and, in the course of over three hundred

years, the material available on this subject alone has

assumed immense proportions. It will be the purpose of

this thesis, therefore, to state the main observations

briefly and clearly and, in the light of my examination of

the dramas, to give my reaction to both the catastrophe it-

self and the criticism directed at it.

The catastrophe will be considered to include every-
thing which takes place after the climax of the drama, but

particular attention will be given to the closing scenes.
The thesis will include a study of sixteen comedies and

eight tragedies, the chronicle plays and the plays of

doubtful authorship being omitted.

I wish to acknowledge my indebtedness to Professor L.

E. Sisson, under whose able guidance I was first introduced
to the study of Shakespeare, for his early assistance with

this work, and particularly to Professor Lulu Gardner,

under whom it was continued, for her help and the careful

reading of the manuscript.

August, 1931

G.L.H.
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A STUDY OF THE MANNER IN WHICH SHAKESPEARE CLOSES HIS PLAYS

CHAPTER I
CATASTROPHE IN DRAMA

Before making any attempt to analyze Shakespeare's method of closing a play, we must strive for a clear conception of the term "catastrophe" and of the theory of catastrophe in drama. The word 'catastrophe', when used in dramatic criticism, does not necessarily mean disaster. It may mean that, it may mean the reverse. It means to turn up and down, to overturn.1 Catastrophe is the word which describes the final events in a drama—such as a death in a tragedy or a marriage in a comedy—events which have been produced by an overturning, a change in the direction of the main action.2

The concensus of opinion among critics is that the catastrophe should not be forced or artificial, but the logical result of all that has preceded it, the inevitable consequence of the main action.3 "It must be in living, vital union with all the previous parts of the play, and

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1Fleming, W.H., Shakespeare's Plots, p. 50.
2Ibid.
must be the outgrowth of them."\(^4\) What the catastrophe must bring about primarily is finality or "an equilibrium of forces which shall convince us of its permanence".\(^5\) Miss Woodbridge suggests that the catastrophe may be "compared to the crash of the landslide by which the too precipitous cliff regains a natural slope".\(^6\) "It is an end of the action, or it is nothing. Every question suggested by the play is answered rightly in it as to the past and the possible future of the persons in it .... To deviate from the logical result is to destroy at one blow all unity, to extinguish at one breath the vital spark of all. To map out a new life or to suggest a new story on new lines is woful waste."\(^7\)

There should be more concentration of thought and expression in the catastrophe than anywhere else in the drama. In the earlier parts of the play, much elaboration and working-up of character and incident are possible. The outcome may point in many directions. But as we near the close, only one end is possible.\(^8\) Although the spectators cannot foresee what the conclusion will be, they have been

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\(^5\) Woodbridge, Elisabeth, *The Drama*, p. 90.
\(^6\) *Ibid*.
\(^8\) Woodbridge, Elisabeth, *The Drama*, p. 91.
thoroughly prepared for the end, and all impediments to its progress have been removed. "The intense mental and emotional strain, a pleased expectancy if it be a comedy, pity and fear if it be a tragedy, can be continued to the close only by great rapidity of movement. Mental excitement, profound, concentrated feeling, find expression in language which is concise, in action which is immediate."\(^9\) Speeches and soliloquies in the catastrophe, therefore, should be brief so that the action may be continuous as well as swift.\(^10\) Any attempt at explanation and commentary here implies either carelessness on the part of the author, or a lack of faith in his preparation for the end.\(^11\)

Although the author should use words sparingly in the catastrophe, he must not make it too abrupt or offensively sudden.\(^12\) The catastrophe is subject to the general law of gradation of effect, and must be in proportion with cause and effect. "It must come to a full stop. All doubts must disappear. An earthquake in itself and by itself could not rightly end a play. The end must be organic."\(^13\) The catastrophe should not be a surprise. Every movement

\(^11\) Woodbridge, Elisabeth, *The Drama*, p. 91.
of the drama is prepared for, and the more powerful the impression of a tragic fate, for example, the more distinctly should its shadow fall backward in the action. No new characters should be introduced at this point in the drama. "The thoughts and emotions of the spectators, which have been stimulated to the intensest degree, must not be diverted into other channels." If the strain is, by reaction, to be alleviated, the relief must be neither unforeseen nor unexpected.

"Accident is no part of thoroughly dramatic material." It is merely a refuge of a bungling craftsman and a device. Sometimes it has a slight but sufficient connection with the action of the play as when the accidental discharge of a pistol slays the villain, or when the rich uncle comes home from India in the nick of time. But the dramatic value of accident is determined by its probability, and accident is always suspicious and generally faulty. Any "sudden introduction of unexpected, arbitrary agencies to bring about a solution of the plot ..., such as the discovery of a missing will, or the finding of a lost

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15 Fleming, W.H., Shakespeare's Plots, p. 50.
16 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
treasure, is contrary to all rational principles of dramatic construction". 19

The moment the auditors can put on their wraps and go home, with a sense of losing nothing, the play is really ended. The author is no longer able to keep his mastery, and he is unfortunate if he finds long speeches necessary for telling persons of the play about happenings of which the spectators already know. "The actors should be in a position not to inconvenience the audience." 20 Finally, the catastrophe of a play always means a change of conditions for the principal personages. The change may be, for example, from trouble to tranquility, from unhappiness to happiness, but change there must be. 21

Turning now from a discussion of catastrophe in general to a consideration of catastrophe in comedy, we find that on the whole the same rules obtain for the one as for the other. Comedy must, of course, have a happy conclusion. "In a broad sense then, 'all that ends well' is comedy." 22 More strictly speaking, however, it is the agreeable disentanglement of a peaceful, orderly, diverting complication of purposes which constitutes the

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21Ibid.
22Ibid., p. 194.
catastrophe of comedy. 23

The ordinary close in comedy comes with the announce-
ment of a prospective wedding, or with the reconciliation
of lovers. Representing as it does the completed results
of the intriguer's plans and the total overthrow of the
victim, the catastrophe should come at once upon the re-
moval of the last obstacle. 24 It need not be causally
determined by what has preceded, however, because causality
is nowhere emphasized in the action of comedy. Chance may
reasonably determine the issue in comedy. 25

"Whereas tragedy must be final, comedy need not be
more than provisional; it offers a solution only of the
specific problem presented. Not that its conclusion is
bound to be provisional; this will depend partly upon what
has been the underlying purpose of the intrigue." 26 An air
of conclusiveness is often given by a sweeping moral
regeneration of all knaves, taking place in the last act,
but this is usually specious and unsatisfying. But in any
case, the catastrophe in comedy is always quite different
from the fundamental and absolute readjustment in the true

23 Ibid.
25 Ibid.
26 Ibid.
tragic solution. Just as comedy requires a happy dénouement, so a tragedy must have an inevitable but just and tragic ending. The death of one or more of the characters is the fitting close for the tragedy, because it really concludes. It is final; it precludes any possibility of amendment or reprieve. The tragic character of death depends not upon death itself, however, but upon the nature of the action which it terminates. It is tragic only when it comes as the natural and inevitable outcome of a tragic struggle. It must be the result of some action or trait intimately connected with the character which renders a happy ending out of the question. The character may consciously violate a social or divine law. He may commit a fault unwittingly, or he may even believe that he is only doing his duty. In many cases, the tragic result is due to some defect of character, as, for example, irresolution. Under any of these circumstances, the death itself will often actually seem a relief. Not only has it been felt to be inevitable, but it also ends the struggle and so relaxes the strain of expectation.

27 Ibid.
29 Woodbridge, Elisabeth, The Drama, p. 88.
30 Hennequin, Alfred, The Art of Playwriting, p. 156.
31 Woodbridge, Elisabeth, The Drama, pp. 88-89.
Another aspect of the catastrophe of tragedy is involved in the so-called theory of poetic justice. A clear conception of this subject is indispensable in the consideration of Shakespeare's tragic conclusions. The doctrine of poetic justice, in which the men of the eighteenth century particularly delighted, practically demands that the drama shall be overtly didactic, that virtue shall be rewarded and vice punished. Such a solution in drama, however, is more in accord with what we should like to have true than with what we know to be true in life. We all know that vice does not always come to a bad end in this world, and that the innocent as well as the guilty pay the full penalty of death. What consideration of justice, for example, is there to bear on the death of a little child? Justice, then, is only one of the determinants of fate in the drama. And "in art, where there is no mist of individual feeling to blind, the sense of beauty (in death) comes out stronger than the sense of loss".

52 Matthews, Brander; Shakspere as a Playwright. P. 228; Lounsbury, T.R.; Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist. P. 401.
53 Moulton, R.G.; Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist. P. 257.
CHAPTER II
SHAKESPEARE'S COMEDIES

Perhaps the most noticeable thing about the catastrophe in Shakespeare's comedies is the variety of ways in which it is accomplished. Sometimes Shakespeare brings about the solution in the conventional manner; sometimes he disregards entirely the laws of dramatic technique when he comes to the close of a play. While there are resemblances in details between the endings of the different comedies, Shakespeare seems to have no one method of closing a play that may be called his own. Although any classification of the comedies according to type of ending will be more or less arbitrary, such a method will be used here for the sake of convenience and — I hope — clearness.

The Comedy of Errors and The Taming of the Shrew

A discussion of catastrophe in Shakespeare's comedies may well begin, I think, with the two farcical comedies, The Comedy of Errors and The Taming of the Shrew; because no one, so far as I know, objects to their endings on the score of conventionality. ¹

The close of The Comedy of Errors is really admirably managed. ² Granted that there could be two such pairs of twins in the situations in which the Antipholus and

²Ibid.
Dromio of Syracuse and the Antipholus and Dromio of Ephesus find themselves, the simplest, most natural and most fundamental relations of life become a chaos of complexity and dispute.\(^3\) From the time that Antipholus of Syracuse very naturally mistakes Dromio of Ephesus for his own servant, Dromio of Syracuse, and vice-versa, Shakespeare piles one amusing complication upon another until the conclusion seems to be upon us any moment.\(^4\) "The wife mistakes her husband, the master his servant, and the servant his master, the sister-in-law her brother-in-law, the friend his friend, and finally even the father his son."\(^5\) And it is only when the two pairs of twins come face to face that the confusion is finally cleared away and the twins and their father and mother are all reunited after years of separation. But even here, in the final scene, Shakespeare, in a few brief lines happily causes Dromio of Syracuse again to mistake Antipholus of Ephesus for his master.\(^6\) The mistake is corrected instantly, however, and the curtain falls as the two Antipholuses

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\(^4\) Baker, G.P., *The Development of Shakespeare as a Dramatist*, p. 139.


\(^6\) Massiefield, John, *William Shakespeare*, p. 46.
leave the stage together.

Shakespeare does not allow the interest to flag one second while he draws the threads of his story together. The Comedy of Errors ends only when the "error" is removed by the coming together of the two pairs of twins. And as soon as this is accomplished, the play is over. Everyone is accounted for, and there is no reason for keeping the audience longer.

Turning from The Comedy of Errors to The Taming of the Shrew, we encounter the first difficulty involved in our classification of the endings of the comedies. In some respects the catastrophe of The Taming of the Shrew is more a catastrophe of the sub-plot, which centers about the wooing of Bianca by Gremio, Hortensio, and Incentio, than it is the catastrophe of the whole play. When, for instance, in the fifth scene of act five, Katherina says the sun is the moon if Petruchio says it is, we feel sure that the "taming" of the lady is complete. After that our attention shifts back to the characters of the sub-plot for a while.

From still another point of view, the dénouement of The Taming of the Shrew is a bit anti-climactic. Of course, the play does not close with the marriage of Katherina and Petruchio,—marriage is only the starting point for their little drama,—but neither does it close with the marriage of Bianca. And yet this is what we
should expect, because the rival lovers were only biding the outcome of Petruchio's wooing before trying their schemes for securing the hand of Bianca. As it is, however, one whole scene is yet to come after the marriage of Bianca and Lucentio has been consummated.

The entire last scene of act five is taken up with the wager between Petruchio, Hortensio, and Lucentio to see which one of them has the most obedient wife. It happens that it is Katherina who comes in at Petruchio's request, throws down her cap because it does not please him, and finally tells the other wives their duties to their husbands. And it is this final expression of Kate's love for and submission to Petruchio, "dexterously blended" as it is with the sub-plot, which makes the ending of The Taming of the Shrew both dramatically effective and satisfying. Katherina's speech is lengthy, coming as it does at the very close of the play, when everything should be hastening to an end; but Petruchio has commanded her to speak, and far be it from us to interfere with his instructions or to keep Katherina from doing her task well!

Paradoxical as it may seem, The Taming of the Shrew is both complete and incomplete. It is complete if we concern ourselves only with the play within the play, which gives the drama its name. But the induction, which introduces the character of Sly, a drunkard who is supposed to be watching the play, is neither developed nor finished.
Breander Matthews speaks of someone's ingenious suggestion that Shakespeare omitted the later scenes of the induction and withdrew Sly from the gallery above so that it might be free, when the time came, for the Pedant to look out of the window. But I think it is just as likely that Shakespeare became so interested in Kate and Petruchio that he forgot all about Sly. Certain it is that we never think of him until some time after the play is over and we are recalling its earlier scenes. And at least one modern presentation of the play omits the induction entirely.

Disregarding the induction, then, the catastrophe of _The Taming of the Shrew_ is quite satisfactory. The ending is not unduly drawn out and the two plots are merged effectively enough in the final scene so that the sub-plot does not seem overemphasized nor does the catastrophe seem anti-climactic.

### The Merry Wives of Windsor and Twelfth Night

The catastrophe of Shakespeare's third farce, _The Merry Wives of Windsor_, does not differ much from the ending of the other farces except for the slight emphasis on the sub-plot at the very close of the play. The main plot of _The Merry Wives of Windsor_ is skillfully linked with the sub-plot, just as the two are joined in _The Taming of_

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7Matthews, Breander, _Shakespeare as a Playwright_, p. 141.
the Shrew. The last trick which Mrs. Ford and Mrs. Page play on Falstaff, the trick in which Anne Page and Mr. Ford also participate, results not only in the complete outwitting of Sir John but also offers a splendid opportunity for the abduction of Anne. When, therefore, the Fat Knight's folly is at last exposed to the public, the trick turns on those who have scorned and ridiculed Falstaff. Slender, whom Mr. Page wants Anne to marry, returns to say that he almost married a postmaster's boy, who was dressed like a fairy and whom he mistook for Anne. Dr. Caius, Mrs. Page's choice for a son-in-law, has likewise run off with a boy who he thought was Anne. And when Anne finally returns as the bride of Fenton, whom neither Mr. or Mrs. Page wanted Anne to marry, we are inclined to agree with Sir John:

"I am glad, though you have taken a special stand to strike at me, that your arrow hath glanced."

Brander Matthews strenuously objects to the indignities which are heaped upon Falstaff's "huge bulk". He does not think that being beaten and being carried to the river in a bucket-basket full of dirty linen are fit punishments for one whom we cannot help liking despite all his foibles. Even if he deserves such gross defilements, Mr. Matthews continues, they seem out of keeping with his generous humor. The Falstaff whose prime function in Henry IV is

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8 The Merry Wives of Windsor V. v. 241-2.
to fool others is himself unceasingly befouled in The Merry Wives of Windsor. But while Shakespeare may appear to be unfair to Falstaff in the light of our earlier conception of him, he does not treat him in a manner which is incongruous with the kind of a life led by Falstaff in The Merry Wives of Windsor. Moreover, his wits are not now what they have been, and we are more inclined to laugh at him than to laugh with him.

And notwithstanding the fact that Shakespeare unquestionably wrote for the Elizabethan playgoer, who does not seem to have possessed the sympathy for man or beast that the modern playgoer does, it seems to me that Shakespeare has softened Falstaff's fate a shade or two by throwing the final emphasis upon the marriage of Anne Page.

The catastrophe of The Merry Wives of Windsor leaves several loose ends. Mrs. Quickly, who acts as a go-between for at least five persons, simply drops out of the play after she arranges the last meeting between the Merry Wives and Falstaff. And the retaliation which Parson Evans and Dr. Caius promise mine host of the Garter upon his interference with their quarrel is never effected. Evidently, in all the excitement of exposing Sir John to public

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9 Matthews, Brander, Shakespeare as a Playwright, p. 136.
10 Ibid.
ridicule, the person and the doctor forget to execute their own plan for revenge.

Before passing on to Twelfth Night, we should pay some attention to the droll fairy dance which comes near the close of The Merry Wives of Windsor. Although it is to be compared with the masque in Love’s Labour’s Lost and the performance of “Pyramus and Thisbe” in A Midsummer Night’s Dream, it differs from those final entertainments in that it has a much closer connection with the plot of the play. It is not inserted merely because the author has run out of material and wants to fill up time; it affords the opportunity for the solution of both the main plot and the sub-plot.

Twelfth Night is the best example of a comedy in which Shakespeare centers the final interest about members of the sub-plot. Indeed it is this very characteristic which subjects the conclusion of Twelfth Night to Mr. Oechelhäuser’s unfavorable criticism. The German critic feels that the resolution of the comic episode of Malvolio thrusts itself rather painfully upon the two loving couples, who “have just reached the threshold of their joyous freedom which must remain, through this new incident, through this new incident, through this new incident.

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11 Ibid., pp. 80-81.
unsettled in the balance.\textsuperscript{12} But does the catastrophe, as Shakespeare handles it at this point, really check their joy? Olivia and Sebastian are already contracted in marriage, and the Duke intends to marry Viola as soon as she puts on "woman's weeds". But the captain has Viola's clothes and Malvolio seems to be the one who is acquainted with the captain's whereabouts. For that reason, the lovers must await the outcome of the comic complication regardless of whether or not they are interested in it. And the conversation of Olivia and the Duke, which ensues while Malvolio is being summoned, must necessarily be interrupted while Malvolio's case is being finished off.

Whether or not one feels that the Malvolio episode is in its proper place in the final scene depends, I think, upon his conception of the character of Malvolio. Considered as a broad comic character, he is no more than a conceited Puritan, who prides himself upon his virtue and severity, and who is made the laughing stock of the intrigues of the Clown, Maria, and Fabian. In this case, he receives little more than his just due. But looked upon with more sentiment, Malvolio seems to be "left high

and dry in the end"; and his fate is hardly the fitting note upon which to close an otherwise light comedy. Personally, I think Malvolio is a broad comic figure.

Shakespeare could not well have deferred the dénouement of the main plot until after the Malvolio plot was settled. He has prolonged the suspense as long as possible. The Duke is angry with Viola because he thinks she is a hypocrite, Olivia believes her husband has left her, and Viola is deserted by the man whom she loves. Any further prolongation of uncertainty about the solution would have been mistaken technique. Shakespeare, therefore, begins the final resolution quickly by reuniting Viola and Sebastian. Then he is ready to turn to the Malvolio plot.

Critics in general take exception only to the speed with which the conclusion of Twelfth Night is effected. Dr. Johnson, however, thought the play was lacking in "credibility" and in "proper instruction" at the last.


14 Fleming, William H., Shakespeare's Plots, p. 375.


But "all that is improbable in \textit{Twelfth Night} is the clarity of the mating", and it is almost justified by the pressure of the action to its close.\textsuperscript{17} As for the lack of a moral in the play, no one today feels that the function of comedy is to teach a lesson.

Mr. Kenny thinks the marriage contract between Olivia and Sebastian is both hurried and strange.\textsuperscript{18} Is it so strange, though? Olivia is a beautiful woman and "why should not Sebastian welcome the prize which falls plump into his arms?"\textsuperscript{19} Besides, no one questions the fact that Sebastian has charm and brains enough to make Olivia reasonably happy.

The marriage contract between Olivia and Sebastian does not seem so sudden as it would were it to come at the end of act five. By coming at the end of act four, however, it not only seems less forced but it also makes the audience feel that there is now a chance for Viola to have Orsino. Viola is a lovely girl and the Duke can recall numerous expressions of her love for him. Why, then, should

\textsuperscript{17}Matthews, Brander, \textit{Shakespeare as a Playwright}, p. 164.

\textsuperscript{18}Kenny, T., \textit{Life and Genius of Shakespeare} (1864), p. 199, as quoted by Furness, H.H., \textit{A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare}, XIII, p. 582.

\textsuperscript{19}Matthews, Brander, \textit{Shakespeare as a Playwright}, p. 164.

he not fall in love with her as soon as he knows her to be a woman? Indeed, the spectators have "dimly descried" and "vaguely desired" these two weddings all the while. 21

In spite of one almost imperceptible flaw in technique, the dénouement of Twelfth Night is handled with a good deal of skill. Shakespeare errs in that he does not inform us, until the catastrophe is reached, of Antonio’s capture of the Duke’s vessels. In the fore part of the play, he gives us the information that Antonio has rescued Sebastian from death. Now he tells us some of the facts of the Captain’s life previous to his meeting with Sebastian. This information is valuable to the spectator of the drama, but it is a canon of dramatic art that knowledge of what has taken place previous to the beginning of the drama, and which it is necessary the spectator should possess in order to understand and appreciate the play, should be given in the introduction or at least in the early part of the play. 22

But the catastrophe is really brought about directly and rapidly. While every word and deed in the drama leads toward the conclusion, the appearance of Antonio and Sebastian in the early part of the catastrophe apparently tends toward greater complication. The result is that when the solution is finally reached, the dramatic effect of the whole is heightened.

Just as Twelfth Night opens with a request for music, so it closes with a song. The song is an epitome of human life; its refrain signifies that while there is a certain amount of storm in every human life, there is also a certain measure of sunshine. And so the play closes, but the action continues. The Duke’s messenger is still entreat ing Malvolio to peace, and Malvolio is yet to tell of the captain who holds Viola’s clothes.

A Midsummer Night’s Dream and The Merchant of Venice

The plays in which the catastrophe is centered about the sub-plot are so closely related to those in which the ending is anti-climactic that it is a question whether certain dramas belong to one group or to the other. This is particularly true in the case of A Midsummer Night’s Dream. Attention in the fifth act is focused upon the performance of “Pyramus and Thisbe” by the rustics, who are certainly characters of the sub-plot. But this amateurish entertainment is really not an integral part of the play.

By the end of act four, Oberon has succeeded in obtaining the changeling boy from Titania, the Queen of the fairies is reconciled to her lord, and Bottom is relieved of his ass’s head. Lysander is once more in love with Hermia and Demetrius at last returns the love of Helena.

23 Ibid., pp. 381-2.
Nothing remains undone except the rustics' performance and the consummation of the three marriages. And the weddings are of the least interest.

The presentation of "Pyramus and Thisbe" suffers somewhat from the fact that the audience already knows how the wall will be presented and that the lion will put the ladies at ease by disclosing his real identity. But it is all very amusing and becomes increasingly so as we see it through the eyes of the Duke and his party. And even if the youthful author inserts this extraneous interlude because he has run out of material and the play must go on, he is to be admired for the final scene. What could be a more fitting close for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* than the picture of the fairies as they come in after everyone has retired to "sweep the dust behind the door" and to bless the occupants of each palace chamber?

The catastrophe of *The Merchant of Venice* is decidedly anti-climactic. The knot is untied at the conclusion of the trial scene, and according to the common ideas of theatrical satisfaction, the curtain might drop. But Shakespeare felt that something was still wanting. He

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was not willing to dismiss his audience with the gloomy impressions which the unexpected delivery of Antonio and the punishment of Shylock make inevitable. 27 If he had closed the play while we are still agitated by the perils of the trial and the blow which Shylock receives, it would be impossible to determine whether Shakespeare meant to exhibit the tragic or the comic aspect of life as the prominent one. 28 Most people, in fact, still believe that the main action of The Merchant of Venice is the loan made by Shylock to Antonio, and the consequences thereof. 29 And they believe this in spite of the nature of the fifth act, because they are most interested in the Shylock scenes.

One reason for this apparent overshadowing of the love story of Bassanio and Portia by the Shylock story lies in the conventional method of staging the play. 30 In modern times, the star actor of the cast almost always assumes the character of Shylock, and therefore gives that character an exaggerated importance in the presentation. 31 But Shylock appears in only five scenes of the entire play, and only

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29 Fleming, W. H., Shakespeare's Plots, p. 137.
30 Ibid.
31 Ibid.
two of those are long. When we take these facts into consideration, then, it is evident that Shakespeare means to emphasize the Bassanio-Fortunio plot, even though his characterization of Shylock is stressed. 32

The foregoing discussion brings us, of course, to the question of whether the Shylock plot is comic or tragic. Mr. Baker feels that Shylock is a tragic character and that we cannot believe in his accepting his defeat and the conditions imposed upon him. For this reason, he finds the end of The Merchant of Venice unsatisfying. 33 Mr. Bradley also feels that Shylock is a figure with which the pleasant ending does not harmonize. 34 Opposed to these views, however, are "the seasoned balance of critical opinion" and "the instinctive reaction of children". Moreover, we must keep in mind the fact that Shakespeare was writing not for a twentieth-century audience but for an audience which probably laughed where we do not, an audience which delighted in sharp contrasts between the

32 Ibid.
33 Ibid., p. 268.
35 Ibid.
serious or tragic and the comic or grotesque. It is quite possible, then, that Shakespeare meant Shylock to be comic, but unconsciously treated him in a sympathetic manner simply because he could not help doing this with any character in whom he became interested.

But even if Shakespeare considered Shylock to be the familiar comic victim whose downfall — affected by injustice if not by justice — brings with it the happiness of the lovers, he also knew that the feeling which genuine comedy should leave on the mind is assuredly not that which rests on the mind as we leave the piazza of St. Mark. "We have to be won back to a saner, happier acceptance of life." It is only natural for the human mind to pass from strain to reaction and for relieved suspense to find vent in exhilaration. In The Merchant of Venice, the reaction is found in the ring episode, by which the disguised wives involve their husbands in a perplexity which affords the audience the necessary

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39 Ibid.
41 Quiller-Couch, Sir Arthur, Notes on Shakespeare's Workmanship, p. 97.
merriment for relieving the tension of the trial scene. If we resolutely hold the trial scene back in focus, the last act ceases to be a superfluous appendage hobbling in, in a spiritless manner, after all the interest is evaporated. It becomes instead the most delightful act in the play, an act which relieves the heart from its oppression and which closes in music by moonlight, amidst the placid gladness of rescued innocence and united love.

There seems to be some indication that Shakespeare tried to close The Merchant of Venice in some other manner than the one he finally employed. Stephano tells Lorenzo and Jessica that Portia is returning to Belmont accompanied by a hermit and her maid. But as Dr. Johnson says, "I do not perceive the use of this hermit, of whom nothing is seen or heard afterwards." No doubt, however, Shakespeare first planned the story in some other way and inadvertently retained this trace of the original design when he changed

42 Moulton, R. G., Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist, p. 72.
43 Ulrici, Dr. Hermann, Shakespeare's Dramatic Art, p. 126.
44 Quiller-Couch, Sir Arthur, Notes on Shakespeare's Workmanship, p. 96.
46 Quiller-Couch, Sir Arthur, Notes on Shakespeare's Workmanship, p. 96.
47 Ibid.
his scheme.

Shakespeare seems to pull the strings a bit at the end, when he has three of Antonio's argosies "richly come to harbor suddenly". 49 Mr. Thaler advises us, at this point, to remember that "the account of Antonio's losses at first was kept by that careless female bookkeeper, 'gossip report', who is not always 'an honest woman of her word'". 50 But even this clever suggestion does not explain "by what strange accident" Portia chanced upon the letter containing the unbelievable news. 51 Absurd as the conclusion is, we must accept it, just as we accept the casket story and the story of the pound of flesh.

The action of The Merchant of Venice, like that of Twelfth Night, does not end with the conclusion of the play. 52 As the curtain comes down, Portia and her friends pass through the open door of the mansion at Belmont, looking forward to hearing Portia "answer all things faithfully".

48 Ibid.


50 Ibid.

51 Quiller-Couch, Sir Arthur, Notes on Shakespeare's Workmanship, p. 97.

52 Fleming, William H., Shakespeare's Plots, p. 251.
Love's Labour's Lost, As You Like It.

Much Ado About Nothing, and The

Two Gentlemen of Verona

From the standpoint of catastrophe alone, almost all of Shakespeare's other comedies can be grouped under one head. In general, they are the comedies in which the catastrophe does not seem to grow out of or to be the direct result of what has preceded. In some of these plays, the inconsistency of character or other incongruity is not so conspicuous because of the light tone of the whole piece. In the remaining comedies, on the other hand, the so-called "happy ending" is not in accord with the rather tragic nature of the characters or with the sincerity and seriousness of the action. To the first division of this large group belong the catastrophes of Love's Labour's Lost, As You Like It, Much Ado About Nothing, and The Two Gentlemen of Verona, which we shall examine one by one here.

The final act of Love's Labour's Lost is a patchwork rather than a presentation of situations which develop naturally and inevitably from the earlier parts of the play. By the end of act four, the King of Navarre and the three lords attending him have decided definitely

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to woo the Princess of France and her three ladies. The
man, disguised as Russians, then visit the ladies, who
trick them and laugh at them until they are forced to leave.
Undaunted, Ferdinand and his friends return in their own
costumes and, after acknowledging that they have been out-
witted, they allow the minor characters to enter and present
"The Nine Worthies". Led by Biron and Boyet, the characters
of the main plot attempt to disconcert the actors and to
effect a challenge between Costard and Armado. The uproar
just reaches its height when the news comes to the Princess
that her father is dead.

The action of the play then suddenly stops, and the
complete settlement of the love story is deferred for a
year. What the King and his companions had agreed to do
"in whimsical arrogant caprice" is now forced upon them —
though in a somewhat modified form — by the ladies. And
not only must Ferdinand and his lords serve a year's
probation before the Princess and her friends will marry
them, but Armado must be a plowman three years for
Jaquenetta!

As yet, no wholly satisfactory reason has been suggest-
ed for this curious ending, which is thrust in, so to
speak, from the outside rather than developed from elements
contained in the earlier acts of Love's Labour's Lost.

54 Ibid., p. 101.
55 Ulrici, Dr. Hermann, Shakespeare's Dramatic Art, p. 87.
56 Baker, G. P., The Development of Shakespeare as a
Dramatist, pp. 111-112.
As Mr. H. C. Hart says, the play has broken down by the time the last scenes get under way. The youthful author seems at a loss to know how to close his comedy. He spins out the bantering of the ladies rather too long, inserts the performance of "The Nine Worthies" in order to fill up space or time, and finally ends the play by dropping the comic tone and introducing an external force.

On the other hand, however, after such extravagant raillery as prevails throughout Love's Labour's Lost, it is almost impossible for the characters to return to sobriety without coming under the presence of some foreign influence. If, moreover, it is Shakespeare's purpose to show the trifling of the earlier acts at its moral value against a background of tragic happenings, the ending could hardly be otherwise. Coleridge no doubt has this view in mind when he speaks of "the sweet and tempered gravity, with which Shakespeare in the end draws the only fitting moral which such a drama afforded".

After the announcement of the ultimatum by the ladies,


58 Schlegel, A. W., Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature, p. 384.

59 Mansfield, John, William Shakespeare, p. 25.

60 Coleridge, S. T., Lectures and Notes on Shakspere and Other English Poets, p. 288.
the members of the sub-plot enter to sing the song between Spring and Winter, which are represented by the cuckoo and the owl. Like the song at the close of *Twelfth Night*, this lyric alludes to the general significance of the whole play. Just as spring and winter are not separate and are not intended to be so, so wit and all talents are useless in themselves. Study and philosophy are pure folly when kept quite apart from real life. 61

Thus *Love's Labour's Lost* closes, leaving us with much the same feeling that Biron experiences:

"Biron. Our wooing doth not end
    like an old play;
    Jack hath not Jill:...

King. Come, sir, it wants a twelvemonth
    and a day,
    And then 'twill end.

Biron. That's too long for a play." 62

The close of the comedy, to a certain extent, returns to where it began. 63 It is not so much a termination as a

61 Ulrici, Dr. Hermann, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Art*, pp. 87-88.
62 *Love's Labour's Lost* V. 11, 7-11.
63 Ulrici, Dr. Hermann, *Shakespeare's Dramatic Art*, p. 68.
clearing of the road of life. And although we know how it will all come out at the end of the year, perhaps much of the lack of enthusiasm for this first play by Shakespeare may be attributed to his defiance of the conventional happy ending.

On the whole, the catastrophe of *As You Like It* is quite satisfactory, but it is put with this group of plays because the denouement is brought about in a pretty arbitrary manner.

Mr. Hudson feels that the many issues of the play are just as we would have them to be. He says our wish is that Frederick and Oliver should repent and repair the wrong they have done. And as soon as they become good, they naturally love those who were good before. It is true that we are glad to have these two men reform, but would a character like the unrighteous Duke be readily converted by a recluse hermit? Would a man like Oliver de Bois be completely transformed by a single act of magnanimity on

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the part of his persecuted brother? Gervinus seems to think this would be the case. He finds both acts quite natural and in accordance with the characters. But in order to reason in this fashion, Gervinus must be reading into As You Like It motives and inducements for such changes. As Shakespeare presents the play, however, Frederick and Oliver appear both inconsistent and changeable, and their repentance is as absurd as it is sudden.

So far as the Duke and Orlando's brother are concerned, we really do not care what they may do after they fulfill their purpose in the play. Once their ill-founded jealousies bring about the union of Rosalind and Orlando in the Forest of Arden, we are ready to dismiss them from our thoughts. But wait—Oliver and Celia fall in love with one another. This is "that one unlucky slip of the brush which", as Swinburne aptly says, "has left so ugly a little smear in one corner of the canvas". No one of the audience could ever have doubted that As You Like It would end happily, but the union of Celia and Oliver

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68 Ulrici, Dr. Hermann, Shakespeare's Dramatic Art, p. 15.
69 Ibid.
70 Matthews, Brander, Shakespeare as a Playwright, p. 203.
71 Ibid.
72 Swinburne, A. C., A Study of Shakespeare, p. 151.
73 Matthews, Brander, Shakespeare as a Playwright, p. 161.
takes even the audience by surprise. The playwright does not prepare us for this betrothal as he does for the two marriages in *Twelfth Night*.

Dr. Johnson, who comments on the facility with which both Rosalind and Celia give up their hearts, thinks that Celia is to be forgiven for much because of the heroism of her friendship. Doubtless this is true, but it is also one reason why we think she deserves a better mate than we imagine Oliver to be. On the other hand, the difficulty in characterization may lie not so much in the happy end as in the unhappy beginning. Perhaps Coleridge is right in suggesting that "Oliver is made too bad in the first scenes".

Again, the mating of Celia and Oliver is not of much more consequence to the play than that of Phebe and Silvius. "The couples who have a more essential being — Touchstone and Audrey, Orlando and Rosalind — are delightfully provided for from first to last." And however we feel about the peremptory fashion in which the

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75 *Ibid*.
plot is wound up, we hardly think that matters are mended
much in George Sand's adaptation of the play, in which
Celia's hand is transferred to Jacques. After all, As
You Like It is not to be taken too seriously. It is a
"fantastic story of fortune's vicissitudes and love's de-
lays such as never could literally have happened in the
actual world". In spite of the seriousness and unhappiness
in it, none of it cuts deep. And so the radical conver-
sion of the wicked Duke and the instantaneous regeneration
of the malignant Oliver are only typical of the "poetic
pleasantry" of the whole.

Dr. Johnson, as usual, objects on moral grounds to the
haste with which Shakespeare closes As You Like It. By
suppressing the dialogue between the usurping Duke and the
hermit, he feels that the dramatist loses an opportunity to
exhibit a moral lesson worthy of his highest powers. Such
a criticism is not only impertinent to comedy, but it also
fails to consider the fact that such a dialogue would be
entirely out of place near the end of the play, when

79 Swinburne, A. C., A Study of Shakespeare, p. 151.
81 Bate, Remarks on the Differences in Shakespeare's
Poetry, etc., p. 78, as quoted by Furness, H. H., A
83 Lounsbury, T. R., Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist, p. 411.
everything should be rapidly coming to a focus. It is bad enough that the learned disquisition of Touchstone upon a lie seven times removed should come in the final scene, when things ought to be hastening to a conclusion. But this speech has its origin in technical necessity. Something has to fill the gap while Rosalind is changing back into the clothing of her own sex. The set speech for its own sake was common enough in Elizabethan drama.

Almost impossible to explain away is the introduction of Hymen in the last act of As You Like It. If it were not that Shakespeare is capable of similar ineptitudes elsewhere, we might consider this flaw an imposition upon Shakespeare by another hand or even a hasty alternative to satisfy the public censor, who objected to church rites of marriage on the stage. But as it is, the insertion of Hymen is simply a piece of "sheer botchwork", the kind of artistic improbability which runs almost in harmonical progression in Shakespeare. The epilogue to As You Like It is likewise a superfluous appendage.

84 Matthews, Brander, Shakespeare as a Playwright, p. 160.
85 Ibid.
86 Quiller-Couch, Sir Arthur, Notes on Shakespeare's Workmanship, p. 112.
87 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
The problem which confronts critics in the catastrophe of *Much Ado About Nothing* is that presented by the Hero-Claudio story. The outcome of the Beatrice-Benedick plot seems to satisfy all the commentators except the poet Campbell, who thinks Benedick's life will be made unhappy by Beatrice's supposed bad temper. But, as I have said, it is the main plot which has aroused the wrath of scholars. Roderick Benedix most emphatically says that "a girl slandered and ill-treated to an unutterable extent is not an object to awaken merriment". The principal event is grave and agitating, if not tragic, Mr. Benedix continues, and there should be serious atonement for the malicious and wanton insult offered to Hero by Don Pedro and Claudio. Instead of this, however, Hero finally, without hesitation, marries her slanderer. Andrew Lang also regrets that Benedick lets Claudio off so easily, with contempt and a challenge. But in order that the play may be a comedy, there is universal reconciliation in the twinkling of


91 Ibid.

Mr. Swinburne, on the other hand, feels that the ultimate marriage of Hero and Claudio, though in itself a doubtfully desirable consummation, does not mar the perfection of the play. This is the inevitable conclusion if the action is not to come to a tragic end, and a tragic end would be painfully and grossly out of place here. As Brander Matthews suggests, the union of the delicate Hero with the shallow Claudio has abundant tragic possibilities if we take it seriously, but this is just what Shakespeare does not intend. Hero and Claudio are only "auxiliary to Beatrice and Benedick". Claudio's denunciation of Hero at the altar gives the impetus for Beatrice's command to "kill Claudio", which in turn, is a direct appeal to Benedick's deeper affection for Beatrice.

There is not much doubt that the whole of Much Ado About Nothing lies within the sphere of comedy. We have listened to the conversation of Don John with Borachio, we know that Hero is innocent and that her death is to be but

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a pretence, and at the wedding we have looked behind the veil which covers the face of Antonio's supposed daughter. The discovery of Don John's plot almost immediately after it has begun is fair warning to the audience not to take this part of the play too seriously. "But, lest the audience should feel too assured of the happy ending, this is delayed by a series of improbabilities." What Mr. Benedix calls "the scandalous interruption" of the marriage in the fourth act results, then, only in its postponement to the fifth act. In this way, the catastrophe comes to us only after a gradual preparation. The marriage of Hero and Claudio does not surprise us as the union of Celia and Oliver does. Nor is any softening close necessary in Much Ado About Nothing like that which carries us from Shylock's judgment-hall to Portia's villa at Belmont.

As we bring to a close this consideration of the catastrophe in Much Ado About Nothing, we must again remind ourselves that Shakespeare is an Elizabethan writing for Elizabethans. And the average Elizabethan attitude

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99 Thorndike, A. H., English Comedy, p. 110.


toward marriage is not the twentieth-century view. Sixteenth-century society believed that a woman's only business in life was to get married as soon as possible. It was better that the suitor should bring money, but good enough if he brought simply himself. "The important thing was to purchase the husband."¹⁰² The husband himself or the means by which he was obtained were of little moment.

Moreover, marriages of convenience for men were also in accordance with the custom of the time. For that reason, we cannot let Claudio's readiness to marry "another Hero" or Bertram's easy consent to the match with Lafeu's daughter — in All's Well that Ends Well — count too heavily against them.¹⁰³ When, then, Shakespeare marries Celia to Oliver and Hero to Claudio, or, as we shall see later, a Helena to a Bertram and an Imogen to a Posthumus, it may not be because he is careless or has a false idea of romanticism, but because he perceives and understands his audience's attitude toward matrimony.¹⁰⁴

And before condemning the "marital sacrifice" in Much Ado About Nothing and other Shakespearean comedies,


from a modern point of view, we should remember that the women of these plays know their men better than we do, and perhaps know them to be more likeable than the most obvious passages of the action suggest. Moreover, as Mr. Thaler reminds us, women still marry men to reform them. And in this event, Celia, Hero, and the others have the advantage of dealing with sinners whose past is known and whose future will be under strict observation.

The catastrophe of The Two Gentlemen of Verona forms a connecting link between the two groups of Shakespeare's comedies in which the dénouement does not seem to be the logical result of what has preceded. There is a certain seriousness about the circumstances attending the dénouement which is hardly appropriate to the light tone of the whole. On the other hand, however, the final disposition of the characters in The Two Gentlemen of Verona is in keeping with the comic episode and the slightness of characterization throughout the play.

The hand of criticism has long shaken its accusing forefinger at the final scene of this play, and in particular at Valentine's offer to surrender the woman he loves and who loves him to the faithless Proteus, who not

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106 Ibid., p. 753.
only deserts his own mistress but also attempts to ravish Valentine's mistress. When Valentine says to Proteus,

"All that was mine in Silvia I give thee", he is, as Quiller-Couch suggests, emptying the baby with the bath.\textsuperscript{107} He surrenders his true love with a "mawkish generosity that deserves nothing so much as kicking".\textsuperscript{108} His speech may bring down the curtain on the play, but it certainly "blows all character to the wind".\textsuperscript{109} We think we know Valentine's character, and therefore we feel this line like a slap in the face.\textsuperscript{110} "There are now no Gentlemen in Verona!"\textsuperscript{111}

If less picturesque in diction than Quiller-Couch, other critics are hardly less emphatic about the inadequacy of this ending. The all but unanimous verdict of outstanding critics and commentators all the way from Hamner, Johnson and Coleridge to Lounsbury, Baker and Brander Matthews is that the dénouement of The Two Gentlemen of Verona constitutes a "violation of the truth of life", "a

\textsuperscript{107} Cambridge ed. of The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Introduction, p. 13.

\textsuperscript{108} Quiller-Couch, Sir Arthur, Notes on Shakespeare's Workmanship, p. 67.

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{110} Cambridge ed. of The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Introduction, p. 13.

\textsuperscript{111} Quiller-Couch, Sir Arthur, Notes on Shakespeare's Workmanship, p. 67.
complete confession of dramatic ineptitude”, that it is
simply “quite out of nature”, “wholly unconvincing” and
“absurd”. 112

At least three of these critics, Hamner, Coleridge
and Quiller-Couch, feel that Valentine’s preposterous offer
to Proteus is too unnatural a fault to be charged to
Shakespeare, and that the objectional speech of Valentine
and all that follows it are corrupt. Other commentators do
not go so far as to say Shakespeare did not write the fifth
act as it now stands, but they do say that if the last
scene is Shakespeare’s, it does not stand in its final
form. It is evident that the dénouement is badly hurried, 113
and if the final scene has not come down to us in an
abridged or corrupt version, it may be a rough sketch which
the dramatist, for some reason, neglected to revise. 114
Dowden thinks Shakespeare handed the play to the actors
while a portion of it was still a hasty sketch and that he
left the dénouement for future working out. 115

Mr. Rolfe goes a step further and says that if The

112 Thaler, Alvin, “Shakespeare and the Unhappy Happy Ending”,
Publications of the Modern Language Association of
America, XIII (Sept., 1927), p. 743.
113 Thorndike, A. H., English Comedy, p. 99.
114 Rolfe ed. of The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Appendix,
p. 191.
115 Dowden, Edward, Shakespeare, p. 50.
Two Gentlemen of Verona had been carefully finished or revised. Valentine's perplexing proffer of Silvia would have been struck out. After Proteus and Valentine meet in the forest, something must be said or done to lead Julia to betray her sex. Perhaps in the preliminary sketching of the scene, Shakespeare could think of nothing better for bringing about this revelation than the most unnatural offer of Valentine, at which Julia cries out "O me unhappy!" and faints. As soon as Julia recovers from the swoon, she puts an end to the whole predicament by means of the ring which she was to deliver to Silvia.

Directly opposed to Mr. Rolfe's idea, however, is the view expressed by Charles Knight. Mr. Knight feels that the dramatist would have retained the renunciation of Valentine even if he had revised the final scene, but that he would have worked the idea out and exhibited a struggle of self-denial and a sacrifice to friendship, "which very young people are inclined to consider possible".

The clause just quoted quite naturally leads to a discussion of the theory of W. W. Lawrence and others who urge a study of comparative literature as a basis for understanding certain of Shakespeare's plays. Mr. Lawrence

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116 Rolfe ed. of The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Appendix, p. 191.
117 Ibid.
118 Knight, Charles, Studies of Shakespeare, p. 101.
believes that The Two Gentlemen of Verona is built in medieval fashion about the virtue of friendship. The focus of the play, Professor Lawrence continues, is not on love at all, but on friendship. In accord, then, with the code of honor for sworn friends, the perfect friend must sacrifice everything, including his lady-love, to the demands of this virtue. 119

This exaggerated affection of one man for another, however, absurd it may seem to us today 120 and however foolish and meaningless it may appear in the play, 121 was still a potent force in Shakespeare's time. 122 There is no reason to think that the situation seemed novel to the well-read Elizabethan. 123 The story of a man giving up his betrothed to a friend had been repeatedly told since the twelfth century (Petrus Alphonsus). 124 And Shakespeare's own sonnets express a submissive renunciation of the

120 Ibid.
121 Brandes, George, William Shakespeare, p. 65.
123 Tudor ed. of The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Introduction, p. 16.
124 Ibid.
beloved for the sake of friend and of friendship. 125

Notwithstanding these arguments, Mr. Lounsbury feels that Valentine's offer is a tribute which love could never have paid to friendship in any period. 126 More than that, it would have been morally wrong to have paid it in The Two Gentlemen of Verona, because it affects the lives of others as well as that of the man who makes the offer. Even if it could be accepted as a true picture of the feelings and ideas of some particular century, Mr. Lounsbury concludes, its appearance in this place gives it a character of universality and makes it therefore inexcusable. 127

And so the critics continue in their desire to condemn or to explain away the unnaturalness of Valentine's action. Time and space now prevent us from doing more than to mention the most ingenious solution offered for the problem. According to this suggestion, made by Dr. Batteson and altered by Mr. Bond, Valentine's "All that was mine in Silvia I give thee" is to be regarded as meaning that Valentine gives Proteus his affection, which is all that is

125 Ibid.

Brendes, George, William Shakespeare, p. 65.

126 Lounsbury, T. F., Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist, p. 388.

127 Ibid.
This figure of speech is then understood by everyone except Julia, who takes it literally as Valentine's renunciation and thereupon faints with grief. In other words, Valentine means to offer Proteus his love again, while Julia thinks he is offering Proteus his lady, Silvia. Needless to say, this supersubtle meaning, which has escaped students for three centuries, would hardly be apparent to an audience on first hearing or reading. 129

I agree with Mr. Sampson that Shakespeare's intention is wholly clear even if wholly unconvincing. 130 "Valentine is the faithful man who was the friend of Proteus before he was the lover of Sylvia. Unlike Proteus, who was disloyal even to a constant friend, Valentine will be loyal even to an inconstant friend, and the more inconstant the friend the greater Valentine's loyalty. When the clash of obligations comes, the prior loyalty, friendship, takes precedence over the second loyalty, love.... For his friend he [Valentine] will give up his dearest possession, all of Sylvia that he could call his own." 131

The artificiality of the issue in The Two Gentlemen of Verona was doubtless acceptable enough to an age

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128 Tudor ed. of The Two Gentlemen of Verona, Introduction, p. 15.
129 Ibid.
130 Ibid.
131 Ibid.
accustomed to a highly antithetic literary interpretation of love and friendship, and to an audience which probably thrilled more easily in unison with the emotion of surprise than with the emotion of recognition. Robert Bridges, who has written an illuminating article, "On the Influence of the Audience", says if Shakespeare's audience could forgive Proteus and accept without question the inconceivable magnanimity of Valentine, it would be because of their own indifference to the unsuccessful criminal attempt of Proteus and because of a moral bluntness which failed to discriminate between the two men. If this was the case, Mr. Bridges feels that Shakespeare passed away from more concession to the audience and came to take advantage of their stupidity by admitting, where he knew they would be tolerated, inconsistencies or impossible situations for the sake of dramatic effect or convenience. The validity of such an explanation of the denouement in The Two Gentlemen of Verona cannot, of course, be proved; but, as I have suggested before, the influence of Shakespeare's audience is always to be considered when judging his plays.

132 Ibid., p. 16.
133 Matthews, Brandon, Shakespeare as a Playwright, p. 74.
135 Ibid.
In comparison with Valentine’s ready acceptance of the unconvincing repentance of Proteus and his inexcusable offer to surrender Silvia, the disentanglement of the remaining threads of the story seems of little significance. The rival lover, Thurio, relinquishes Silvia to Valentine with possibly the wisest words he ever spoke:

"I hold him but a fool that will endanger
His body for a girl that loves him not.
I claim her not, and therefore she is thine."\(^{136}\)

The Duke, Silvia’s father, quickly experiences a change in heart, forgives Valentine, and gives him his daughter. And upon Valentine’s request, he also pardons the outlaws with whom his future son-in-law has been living. Only Sir Eglamour is left unaccounted for—we never learn why he ran away. He is of no further use after he aids Silvia in her escape to the forest, and so Shakespeare simply lets him run off.

The catastrophe of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* resembles that of *As You Like It* and, to a certain extent, that of *Much Ado About Nothing* in the general reconciliation at the close. But it is easier to accept the fifth-act

\(^{136}\)The *Two Gentlemen of Verona* V. iv. 133-135.
conversions of *As You Like It* then it is to accept those of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*. In the first place, the whole tone of the former play is lighter and in a more idyllic vein. Then, too, we learn of the cruelty of Oliver and the usurping Duke in the first act of *As You Like It* and, learning of it, almost forget it as we watch the progress of Rosalind’s and Orlando’s love. We do not witness the deterioration of character in Oliver and the Duke as we do in the case of Proteus. Furthermore, Proteus is always in the limelight. He has no Beatrice and Benedick or Dogberry and Verges to soften his infidelity. Proteus’ speedy return to his first love and Julia’s ready acceptance of Proteus as her lover again, however, are comparable to Claudio’s consent to take as his wife “a second Hero” and Hero’s acquiescence in a marriage with Claudio.

*All’s Well that Ends Well*, Measure for Measure, and Cymbeline.

Of the Shakespearean comedies in which the conventional happy ending seems out of place with the serious nature of the whole, we shall discuss first *All’s Well that Ends Well*. Here the dénouement is unsatisfying because of the repellent device by which it is brought about. 137 It is highly distasteful to see a delicate

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137 Tudor ed. of *All’s Well that Ends Well*, Introduction, p.12.
woman like Helena taking advantage of the king's favor in order to win an unwilling husband. And that she should force herself under cover of night upon the man who has left his home and country for the express purpose of escaping from her is still worse. But the pity of it is that "this pearl among women" should finally enforce her rights, "after the man she adores has not only treated her with contemptuous brutality, but has, moreover, shown himself a liar and hound in his attempt to blacken the character of the Italian girl whose lover he believes himself to have been".

The degree of dissatisfaction which one feels with the close of this play depends somewhat, of course, upon his concept of Helena and Bertram. To Lounsbury, no excellence in Helena's character can counter-balance the fact that she is untrue to her sex in pursuing Bertram. All explanations of her conduct and all the tributes paid to her character, Mr. Lounsbury continues, cannot veil the fact that she takes advantage of the king's favor to do an

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138 Brandes, George, William Shakespeare, p. 58; Lounsbury, T. R., Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist, p. 590.

139 Brandes, George, William Shakespeare, p. 58.

140 Ibid.

141 Lounsbury, T. R., Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist, p. 590.
unwomanly act.\textsuperscript{142} Brander Matthews feels that the low contrivance by which Helena finally makes Bertram hers robs her at once of any claim to sympathy.\textsuperscript{143} And she degrades herself almost as much by the mere fact she pursues a man who is not worth following. When, furthermore, the sacrifice is made and the end secured, the victory of love is purely external; there is no inward and deathless unity of passion between Bertram and Helena like that which unites Posthumus and Imogen or Romeo and Juliet.\textsuperscript{144} If Helena is, as Andrew Lang says, the thief of lust rather than of love, then chances for a really happy ending are small, and Bertram certainly is not "dismissed to happiness".\textsuperscript{146}

To other critics, however, Helena is a patient Griselda, a woman who suffers everything in inexhaustible tenderness and humility and never falters in her love until in the end she wins the rebellious heart.\textsuperscript{147} W. W. Lawrence, who has made an admirable study of the medieval

\textsuperscript{142}\textsuperscript{Ibid.}
\textsuperscript{143} Brander, Brander, \textit{Shakespeare as a Playwright}, p. 225.
\textsuperscript{144} Lounsbury, T. R., \textit{Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist}, p. 390.
\textsuperscript{145} Hobie, H. W., \textit{William Shakespeare}, p. 250.
\textsuperscript{147} Brandes, George, \textit{William Shakespeare}, p. 58.
background of All's Well that Ends Well, finds Helene wholly noble and heroic, and fully justified in her conduct, both in the winning of Bertram and in the manner of fulfilling his conditions for their union after marriage. According to the conventions of the virtue-stories, which Professor Lawrence finds in the sources of All's Well that Ends Well, Helene is not guilty of indecent persistence in pursuing the man who has rebuffed her. Just such single-minded devotion to a good object, irrespective of all other considerations, was regarded by the people of the Middle Ages as meritorious. "That a virtue might be carried too far, or that it might transgress the most elementary demands of common sense and decency in making for its goal, seems to have been little regarded in medieval story." 149

Furthermore, Professor Lawrence says, there is never the least intimation in the early analogs that the bed-trick is immodest and unworthy of a refined woman. 150 The answer would have been that the heroine is lying with her husband as any chaste wife has a right to do. The objection that delicacy would prevent her from doing so under false pretenses would have been met by the Elizabethan, partly by the obvious point that she has to

149 Ibid., pp. 437-8.
150 Ibid., p. 438.
do so in order to fulfill her husband's conditions, and partly by the conviction that virtue should allow nothing to interfere with the pursuit of its goal. The difficulty remains, however, in the "single-eyed devotion to a good object". Bertram is hardly a "good" object. Dr. Johnson's hostile estimate of Bertram has set the style for most of the comment on the hero: "a man noble without generosity, and young without truth; who marries Helen as a coward, and leaves her as a profligate; when she is dead by his unkindness, sneaks home to a second marriage, is accused by a woman he has wronged, defends himself by falsehood, and is dismissed to happiness." A good deal is to be said on Bertram's side, however, in so far as his relations with Helen are concerned. He has forced upon him a wife whom he does not want. In spite of Helen's intellectual and moral excellence, she has nothing desirable to offer him. But, all in all, it must be admitted that Bertram is not a highly estimable personage. Dramatically, Bertram's bad character is justified. It accounts for his rejection of Helen and his

151 Ibid.
152 Lounsbury, T. R., Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist, p. 389.
153 Ibid.
154 Lawrence, W. W., Shakespeare's Problem Comedies, p. 62.
incapability of understanding her finer nature, it explains his willingness to commit adultery, which the plot absolutely requires, and, finally, it throws the noble character of Helena into relief and creates added sympathy for her. But it is this very nobility of Helena's nature which renders her final union with such a cad and villain less plausible. Are we to forget that Bertram treats his wife with the greatest harshness, sets what he believes impassable barriers to their union, engages in an intrigue with another woman, and attempts to lie himself out of a tight place? Are we to believe that all ends well simply because Bertram is apparently transformed in the twinkling of an eye into a model husband?

This is evidently just what Professor Lawrence would have us regard as true. The sudden transformation of Bertram from a villain into a model husband, Mr. Lawrence explains, is a convention of medieval and Elizabethan story-telling, which must be expected to follow Helena's triumph. And, Professor Lawrence continues, to argue that a union so brought about will never be happy is to miss the whole point of the faithful wife

155 Ibid.
156 Ibid., p. 63;
157 Lawrence, W. W., Shakespeare's Problem Comedies, p. 58.
No matter how harsh the treatment of the woman by the man, no matter how unsuited they may seem to each other, it is a convention of the Virtue-Story that they 'live happily ever after'.

The statement that "a happy ending was imposed upon Shakespeare for the relations of Helena and Bertram by the traditions of the story" fails to take into account, however, the dramatist's artistic responsibility for the management of his story and characterization. As Mr. Lawrence himself suggests, it is disturbing, at least to modern feelings, that Shakespeare should make the characters in this play as natural and as real as living human beings and yet retain a plot which makes their actions seem psychologically impossible.

Furthermore, it is difficult to understand why Shakespeare was not as free to make changes "in situations made familiar to people by centuries of oral narrative".

159 Ibid.
160 Ibid., p. 468.
162 Lawrence, W. W., Shakespeare's Problem Comedies, p. 72.
163 Ibid., p. 69.
as he was to ignore the traditional outcome of the Lear story as reported by the chroniclers and the distinctly happy ending of the practically contemporary chronicle play of King Lear. And if Shakespeare did not hesitate to blacken the character of Bertram, why should he hesitate to change the solution of his story? Was it because he did not want to trouble himself about changing an outcome which would bother his contemporaries very little anyway? I am inclined to think that this was so.

The closing scene, in particular, of All’s Well that Ends Well indicates that Shakespeare was striving for theatrical effect rather than psychological consistency. The natural way in which to bring about the reconciliation of Helena and Bertram would be for Helena to claim justice of the king, tell her story, and call upon Diana to substantiate it. Instead of doing this, however, the dramatist introduces a complicated series of tricks and misunderstandings which postpone the full explanation as long as possible. Diana, the obscure Florentine maid, suddenly becomes an expert stage-manager, who keeps everyone in the dark as to her real purpose, boldly bandies words with the king, drives Bertram into a tight corner.

and, finally, after being ordered to prison by the king, produces Helena, as a grand coup de théâtre. 166

The reconciliation of Helena and Bertram, which follows immediately, is even more brief and bald than the reunion of Posthumus and Imogen in Cymbeline. 167 After Helena tells Bertram she has fulfilled the conditions for their union after marriage, Bertram simply says:

"If she, my liege, can make me know this clearly,

I'll love her dearly, ever, ever dearly". 168

Lafon then begs Parolles to lend him a handkerchief so he may weep, the King tells Diana to choose a husband and he will give her a dowry, and, after a short epilogue by the King, the play is over.

Professor Lawrence accounts for the "singular abruptness" with which Shakespeare unravels the tangled fortunes of his characters on the grounds that he recognizes the audience's impatience to go home as soon as the end is in sight. 169

And to Mr. Thaler's reminder that the Elizabethan audience was not in the habit of rushing off the moment the play was

166 Ibid., p. 75.
168 All's Well that Ends Well V. iii. 13-14.
169 Lawrence, W. W., Shakespeare's Problem Plays, p. 76.
over, but remained for the jig. Mr. Lawrence replies that an audience which is looking forward to a fresh diversion would be likely to be more restless rather than less so, while listening to dramatic material which no longer occupies their entire interest. But is not this audience the same one which likes Friar Laurence's long recapitulation at the close of *Romeo and Juliet*? Is it not reasonable to suppose, then, that Shakespeare hurries the close in *All's Well That Ends Well* because he has already taken up his time with introducing and explaining a complicated series of mistakes, or that he habitually rounds off his comedies with rather less care than he devotes to his tragedies?

The catastrophe of *Measure for Measure*, like that of *All's Well That Ends Well* necessarily leaves an unsatisfactory impression upon the mind. In its "very inmost essence", Mr. Swinburne says, *Measure for Measure* is a tragedy, and no sleight of hand or force of hand can give it even a tolerable show of coherence or consistency when it is clipped and docked of its proper and rightful end. The emphasis which is placed upon Isabella's virtues,

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Claudio's cowardice and Angelo's self-deception makes these themes more suitable for tragedy—or melodrama at least—than for a comedy which ends in four marriages and general amnesty. This play of the deepest intrigue, lawlessness in high places, and civic debauchery ends, we repeat, in four weddings and an unsolicited pardon for a capital crime.

The same repellent device employed in effecting the dénouement of All's Well that Ends Well is used to bring about the happy solution of Measure for Measure. But the substitution of Angelo's former sweetheart, Mariana, for Isabella, in order to save the latter's honor and to do the former a right, does not seem quite so offensive as the substitution of Helena for Diana. The reason for this feeling, no doubt, lies partly in our keeping in mind that the ruse employed by the women of these two plays is a common one in medieval story and does not seem to be considered humiliating. Moreover, in Elizabethan days, a betrothal such as Mariana's was held to have much the binding force of the complete marriage ceremony, and to confer marital rights. The most potent reason for considering the trick in Measure for Measure less offensive,

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174 Thorndike, A. H., English Comedy, p. 129.
175 Tudor ed. of Measure for Measure, Introduction, p. 16.
176 Lawrence, W. W., Shakespeare's Problem Comedies, p. 95.
however, lies in the fact that Isabella, the one redeeming character in the play, is herself unsullied by participating in the act. Against a background of corrupt Vienna, with its bawdy-houses, penders, and libertines, the purity and nobility of Isabella’s character is thrown into even higher relief than the character of Helena is by the blackness of Bertram. 177

The avoidance of the tragic end by the intromission of Mariana brings us immediately to a discussion of the Duke, at whose advice the bed-trick is carried out. The disguised Duke might have ended the agonies and fooleries of Measure for Measure at any moment, if he had so desired. 179 He alone was in possession of the facts. He could have revealed himself, brought Angelo, Isabella, Mariana, Claudio, and the rest before the bar of his authority, freed the innocent and punished the guilty, and so would have saved Isabella and Claudio much suffering. 160 But the Duke does not do this. Such an arrangement would have been much less effective dramatically than his continued disguise, his suggested ruses, the prolongation of the suspense of the accused, and the false security of the villain. So in spite of his

177 Ibid., p. 66.
178 Swinburne, A. C., A Study of Shakespeare, p. 204.
179 Thorndike, A. H., English Comedy, p. 129.
180 Lawrence, W. W., Shakespeare’s Problem Comedies, p. 104.
181 Ibid.
self-styled retiring nature and desire to delegate his power to another, he suddenly resorts to the most dramatic methods to bring the guilty to justice, and then lets them all off without punishment of importance. 182

"The Duke's part in the plot, excepting for his abdication, is little in accord with his disposition as sketched in the beginning, and little in accord with probability." 183 He is serviceable to the purposes of the drama, but he is not psychologically consistent. 184 To the Elizabethan audience, however, the character of the Duke probably offered few difficulties. If he had been the proper sort of official in the first place, his people probably would not have been the debauchees they are. Having failed, however, to enforce the neglected laws thus far, he is not likely to exercise his rightful authority just because he learns of Angelo's terms to Isabella. On the other hand, of course, it is just as improbable that such a Duke would suddenly become the expert stage director that he is. But what the audience cared about was the intricacies of the plot—its surprises and suspense. 185

183 Lawrence, W. W., Shakespeare's Problem Comedies, p. 112.
184 Ibid.
185 Ibid., p. 104.
They did not care a straw about the triumph of the Duke's theories as a reformer or about the moral welfare of Vienna. They did want the play to end, as a comedy should, in a general atmosphere of happiness.\footnote{Ibid.}

This is ostensibly the end for which Shakespeare strives. The old law is not enforced against Claudio after all the effort, and no excuse is offered.\footnote{Tadór ed., of Measure for Measure, Introduction, p. 16.} Angelo has become guilty of the same offense while acting as deputy of the city to enforce that very law, but is pardoned also. Isacco, a notoriously dissolute fellow, who has most basely slandered the Duke in public and private, is let off with a scolding on the condition that he is to marry the girl he has wronged. Pompey is put in prison, but is promoted from a common pandar to a hangman's assistant, a position which is at least in a lawful profession. Bernardino, a notorious criminal, of the lowest type, is pardoned even before he repents. And the Duke himself is to marry Isabella.\footnote{Ibid.}

Isabella's marriage to the Duke has been called a "scandalous proceeding".\footnote{Bradley, A. C., Shakespearean Tragedy, p. 78.} That Isabella, resolved as she was to enter a nunnery, should pair off with the Duke at
the end of the play so that the so-called comedy may end in still another wedding, leaves her in our memory as a figure sadly diminished from the heroic, Brander Matthews thinks.\textsuperscript{190} The Duke has not wooed her, the critic continues, and apparently he has never given her a thought as a possible consort. "She has shown no liking for him; and yet she accepts him offhand, practically selling herself for rank, although she had refused to sell herself to save her brother's life."\textsuperscript{191}

Of course, as Mr. Thaler says, the Duke does not tell Isabella that he has found her "lovely" until the end of Measure for Measure.\textsuperscript{192} But he has watched her under fire and has found her true and strong of heart. She can give him the things he lacks — faith in man, resolute strength, and joy.\textsuperscript{193} Moreover, as we have noted before, long engagements were not the fashion in Elizabethan times, and so a Duke's wooing would certainly not be un fashionably long.\textsuperscript{194} Nor was an Elizabethan audience likely to be scandalized to see the heroine rewarded for her trials and

\textsuperscript{190} Matthews, Brander, Shakspeare as a Playwright, p. 228.
\textsuperscript{191} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{193} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{194} Ibid.
virtues by marrying the most distinguished man in the play, in the good old story-book fashion. 195

Much criticism is directed at the marriage of Isabella and the Duke solely because Isabella is a novice from a nunery, who marries the Duke without securing the permission of the Lady Superior. 196 The answer to this objection is that Shakespeare makes it perfectly clear in the beginning that Isabella has not yet taken vows. And a Roman Catholic novice who has not yet taken vows in the order may forsake the religious life, and marry. 197

It has been pointed out that Isabella does not formally assent to the Duke's proposal. And while I am not sure that Isabella turns to the Duke "with a heavenly and yielding smile", I have no doubt that she consents to marry him. 198 It is not strange that she should remain speechless 199 when, in the midst of all his other closing revelations, the Duke suddenly says:

"Give me your hand, and say you will be mine". 200

195 Lawrence, W. W., Shakespeare's Problem Comedies, p. 106.
196 Tudor ed. of Measure for Measure, Introduction, p. 16.
197 Lawrence, W. W., Shakespeare's Problem Comedies, p. 106.
198 Ibid.
200 Measure for Measure V. 1. 492.
She has hardly recovered from the startling discovery that the friar is really the Duke, when her brother, who she thinks is dead, is restored to her. She must still be trying to believe her own eyes and ears when the Duke winds up the whole play by proposing to her.

The third character about whom the critics properly center attention when they are considering the catastrophe of Measure for Measure is Angelo. Coleridge would do much in cold blood for Angelo. In his words, "the pardon and marriage of Angelo not merely baffles the strong and indignant claim of justice—(for cruelty, with lust and damnable baseness, cannot be forgiven, because we cannot conceive them as being morally repented of;) but it is likewise degrading to the character of women." 201 Charles Knight agrees with Coleridge that Angelo's fortune "baffles the strong and indignant claim of justice", but he cannot see how it could be otherwise. 202 If Angelo had been adequately punished, Mr. Knight continues, the catastrophe would have been even more unsatisfactory. When the Duke takes the management of the affair into his own hands, and averts the consequences of Angelo's evil intentions by a series of deceptions, he throws away the power of punishing

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201 Coleridge, S. T., Lectures and Notes on Shakespeare and Other English Poets, p. 299.

202 Knight, Charles, Studies of Shakespeare, p. 520.
those evil intentions. At any rate, the complicated strategies of the Duke, which we know would cease instantly at his will, are what suggest even the most remote possibility of a happy solution to the play.

Mr. Thaler suggests that the public shame of Angelo’s exposure is to him a punishment scarcely less severe than the death for which he himself asks shortly before the end. Such a viewpoint, however, must presuppose a good, though narrow, man, suddenly gone wrong through an over-mastering sexual temptation. But Angelo is not such a man. In the light of his conduct to Mariana and his flat refusal to temper justice with mercy in the case of Claudio, he appears to be a smooth rascal, who has been more or less successful in concealing his own baseness. And so, as Robert Bridges says, how could the disgrace of exposure remodel such a villain in fifteen minutes?

Our modern feeling, then, is that Angelo gets off altogether too lightly. Our twentieth-century philosophy

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203 Ibid.
205 Lawrence, W.W., Shakespeare's Problem Comedies, p. 113.
does not know the two extremes of the Middle Ages — the falseness of cruel punishment, and mercy. When the medieval man was pardoned, the question whether he deserved it for any special reason was hardly asked. Mercy had to be gratuitous, like the mercy of God.\(^{208}\) The pardon of the repentant villain and his union to a heroine, then, which the modern audience finds difficult to accept, was commonplace in Elizabethan drama.\(^ {209}\) "The same miraculous processes which lead to the forgiveness of erring male characters, and their conversion to the path of rectitude also automatically make them perfect husbands", and so prevent them from being "degrading to the character of women".\(^{210}\) We have already noted this in the case of Oliver, Proteus, Claudio, and Bertram, and will see it again when we consider Posthumus in Cymbeline. The abrupt transition from the heights of tragic experience to the cheerfulness of a happy ending, which keeps Measure for Measure from being psychologically consistent, probably did not worry the audience in the Globe Theatre.\(^{211}\)

The dénouement of Cymbeline is evidently neither the natural outcome of a tragedy nor of a comedy.\(^{212}\) Not only

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\(^{208}\) \textit{Ibid.}, 17.  
\(^{209}\) \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 116-117.  
\(^{210}\) \textit{Ibid.}, p. 118.  
\(^{211}\) \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 117-118.  
\(^{212}\) Thorndike, as quoted by Furness, H. H., \textit{A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare}, XVIII, p. 515.
do reconciliation and reunion follow the most grievous
ers of the heart and wrongs which are as great as those
of the true tragedies, but the catastrophe is the outcome
of situations invented and arranged for the express purpose
of exciting the audience up to the moment of the final un-
reavelling. Moreover, as Thorndike and Matthews point
out, the very postponing and heightening of the happy ending
by a multiplicity of intricate situations make the dis-
coveries and recognitions of the final scenes ineffective
on the stage. The revelations are astonishing only to the
characters in the play, because they reveal nothing which
the spectators do not know already.

On the whole, we must admire the clearness and skill
with which all the characters, without any violation of
probability, are brought together in the last scene and the
' drmatic knots united. Barrett Wendell, one of the critics
who speak highly of the dénouement in Cymbeline, finds some

213 Dowden, Edward, Shakespeare, p. 361.
214 Thorndike, as quoted by Furness, H. H., A New Variorum
215 Thorndike, as quoted by Furness, H. H., A New Variorum
Edition of Shakespeare, XVIII, p. 513; Matthews, Brander, Shakespeare as a Playwright,
p. 334.
216 Matthews, Brander, Shakespeare as a Playwright, pp.
334-5.
217 Ulrici, Dr. Hermann, Shakespeare's Dramatic Art, p. 171;
Furness, H. H., A New Variorum Edition of
twenty-four distinct situations in the dénouement. And each of these is clearly and effectively developed to an interesting close in which everyone has been accounted for. Charles Knight also finds little in the catastrophe which fails to satisfy the spectator, but he reproves those who land the conclusion merely because it is consistent with poetical justice. Mr. Knight reminds us that the perishing of Desdemona in Othello is as true as the safety of Imogen in Cymbeline, and that poetical truth involves as high a moral in the one case as it does in the other.

Not all critics, however, agree with Mr. Knight concerning the poetic justice in Cymbeline. Mr. Thorndike says that the happy ending is secured by a violation of the most liberal notions of poetic justice. He does not specify wherein the catastrophe fails to administer justice, but no doubt he, as well as G. C. Macaulay and Hartley Coleridge, has in mind Posthumus and possibly Iachimo.


219 Knight, Charles, Studies of Shakespeare, p. 376.

220 Ibid.

221 Thorndike, as quoted by Furness, H. H., A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare, XVIII, p. 514.

Goldríge says that Posthumus, "in plain terms, acts a villain's part. A man who could lay wagers upon his wife's virtue, and wilfully expose her to the insults of such a ribald scoundrel as Thachmo, is not only unworthy of Imogen, but richly deserving of the worst possible consequences of his folly".223

But the wager in Cymbeline is at once thoroughly medieval and thoroughly Elizabethan, Mr. Lawrence reminds us.224 In the light of medieval knightly observances, Posthumus Leonatus emerges fully vindicated in the making of the wager; "his was the only conduct possible for the perfect knight and lover".225 The perfect Elizabethan lover was not only morbidly sensitive about the spotless purity and honor of his wife, but he was fully justified in putting her to death if she proved unfaithful. The old idea that the unchaste woman must pay for her frailty with her life, which is at the disposal of the husband whom she has wronged or kinfolk whom she has disgraced, survived as a convention of the romantic drama down to the beginning of the seventeenth century.226

Posthumus, then, is evidently meant to be a blameless

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223 Lawrence, W. W., Shakespeare's Problem Comedies, p. 195.
224 Ibid.
225 Ibid.
226 Ibid., p. 197.
character.  But it is only natural that we should dislike the husband who makes the radiant and spirited Imogen suffer. To quote Mr. Lawrence, "we wish that Posthumus had thought more of Imogen and less of social correctness". In other words, we wish that he were a man with modern notions, instead of an Elizabethan with medieval ideas still dogging him.

Strangely enough, at least one critic objects to the fate of the wicked Queen in Cymbeline. Mr. Snider does not think that she should die, because she has instigated Britain's rebellion against Rome, an act in itself noble and of national consequence. On the other hand, he does not think that she should live, on account of her hostility toward the institution of the family. As Mr. Snider sees it, the Queen is a contradiction which runs through the entire play and blasts its effect. And violence is done to the feelings of an audience - especially of a British audience - when the end of the drama brings the undoing of the Queen's work.

Needless to say, such a view fails to take into consideration that the interest of the play centers about Imogen and Posthumus and not about the rebellion against Rome. The war is of interest only because it brings all the characters into one focus. Moreover, the deaths of the Queen and of her stupid son, Cloten, excite little pity, because selfishness and greed are the only conceivable grounds for their cruelty.

The Queen's sudden illness and remorse are hardly adequately motivated. Her last dying speech and confession, which is "absurdly out of nature", is reported to us only to clear the way for the quick sequence of marvelous discoveries and recognitions which tumble over each other in the final scene. It is of a piece with Iachimo's change of sentiments and with Posthumus' being summoned before the King, in spite of the fact that he is supposed to be a common Roman soldier. All of these are rather insignificant incidents introduced merely to assist in bringing the long drama to a termination. I say that even Iachimo's change of heart is rather insignificant, because if Imogen can again accept Posthumus and he in turn can pardon the instigator of his jealousy, then we

232 Ulrici, Dr. Hermann, Shakespeare's Dramatic Art, p. 171.
233 Matthews, Brander, Shakespeare as a Playwright, p. 234.
234 Ulrici, Dr. Hermann, Shakespeare's Dramatic Art, p. 171.
can surely take Iachimo's repentance as it is.

There is, however, at least one serious blemish in the
denouement of Cymbeline. I have in mind that piece of
vapid impertinence in the fifth act, including the vision
of Posthumus while asleep in the prison, the absurd "label"
found on his bosom when he awakes, and the Soothsayer's
still more absurd interpretation of the label at the
close. 235 The whole thing fails to throw a particle of
light upon the character cxmotive of any person in the
drama, and only retards the action, which has been rather
swift up to this point. It is simply irrelevant. 236

Mr. Furness, in the preface to the new variorum edition
of Cymbeline, expresses the conviction that the insertion
of the vision and all that pertains to it is not the work
of Shakespeare but of an interpolator. 237 But this is not
necessarily true. Mere inferiority does not keep the part
in question from being Shakespeare's. If, as it is quite
likely, the dramatist was under the influence of, or was
even rivalling, Beaumont and Fletcher in constructing an

235 Furness, H. H., A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare,


237 Furness, H. H., A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare,
elaborate dénouement, then he may have included the vision in order to hold off the final unravelling longer and to have one more puzzle to solve at the end.

Oxon and wainropes, to use Mr. Furness' own words, cannot take him to the conviction that one other faulty passage in Cymbeline is the work of Shakespeare, either. He objects to the curious management of the business in Cymbeline's tent during act five. After the confession of Iachimo, Posthumus, with a fresh outbreak of repentance, strikes the disguised Imogen, who has attempted to interrupt him, and she swoons. Upon reviving, Imogen does not act as Mr. Furness thinks she should. She does not spring into Posthumus' arms, 'now stretched out in staggering welcome, with the glad cry that here again was love as firm as earth's rocky base'. Instead of this, she 'begins an unseemly squabble with Pisanio! About a drug! It made her ill! Then poor old doddering Cornelius must needs be brought forward, and must tell again in prosy words what he had told us all once before, even to the very same reference to 'cats and dogs'! All this while Posthumus has nothing to do but shift first on one foot and then on the other, and listen open-eyed to Imogen's quarrel about

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some mysterious poison. When at last Pisanio's and Cornelius's explanation has satisfied Imogen, and the curiosity of Belarius and Guidrini and Arviragus is allayed about the Boy Piedle, then Imogen ... turns at last to Posthumus'.

As I have already said, Mr. Furness does not think Shakespeare is responsible for this flaw. But, again, I think Shakespeare purposely unravels the other tangles of the plot first, in order to heighten the dramatic effect of the reconciliation between Imogen and Posthumus. This does not mean, of course, that Shakespeare is entirely successful in his effort. Mr. Lawrence, who takes exception to the last speeches of Imogen and Posthumus and feels that their reunion should have been staged and phrased "with appropriate dignity", thinks that Shakespeare had less enthusiasm for their reunion than he had for the wager in the earlier part of the play. But it may be that the dramatist simply had less time for it in his already overcrowded dénouement. Incidentally, the reconciliation of Imogen and Posthumus is no more bald or brief than that of Helena and Bertram. But, in spite of Quiller-Couch's statement that the last lines spoken by the two are "exquisitely poignant", I do think they are lacking a


bit in dignity.

**Trollus and Cressida, The Winter's Tale,**

and **The Tempest**

The dénouement of *Trollus and Cressida* is most strange. The action stops abruptly, and nothing is concluded.243 All the plottings and schemings, all the rhetoric and philosophy, all the amorous intrigues, and all the big words and blaring of trumpets are left at loose ends rather than brought to a conclusion.244 "There are neither the reconciliations of comedy nor the purifying calamities of tragedy to round out the action."245 In its relentless analysis of the darker sides of human passion, this play suggests the great tragedies, but there is not the intensity of emotion and violence of action which lead inevitably to the tragic close.246 On the other hand, the ending is anything but the conventional happy one.

Neither of the plots of *Trollus and Cressida* terminates conclusively. Cressida does not receive what had become, by Shakespeare's day, her traditional punishment. Instead

244 *Ibid.*, p. 122;
of experiencing the ostracization of a leper, she is left, despite her faithlessness, in the full tide of her love-affair with Diomedes. The Troilus of Shakespeare does not end his pain and disillusion in death as does the Troilus of Chaucer’s poem or of Heywood’s play. As far as we can see, Troilus, broken-hearted, is left to a futile continuance in the great struggle between the Trojans and Greeks.

The ending of the sub-plot, like that of the main plot, is inconclusive. The elaborate plan of the Greek chiefs to shame Achilles into action fails completely. It is true that he resents the slights he has received and the reproaches of Ulysses and Patroclus. But he does not send a challenge to Hector. He merely dispatches Thersites to ask Ajax to invite the Trojans to his tent after the combat. When they arrive, Hector urges Achilles to come into the field and fight, and he promises to do so. In the next scene, however, Achilles tells Patroclus that he is deterred from his great purpose by a message from Polyxena, his lady-love, begging him not to do battle with her brother, Hector. And it is not until Patroclus is killed that Hector is roused to action and contrives the death of Hector by a mean trick. But he is not punished for his arrogance or for his inaction, and he is left in

triumph after having compassed the death of the most brilliant and sympathetic hero in the play. Nor does the swollen vanity of Ajax meet any rebuff. The upshot of the whole episode is, to quote Thersites, that: "the our Ajax [is now] prouder than the our Achilles", and that the shrewd policy of Ulysses and Nestor is "not prov'd worth a blackberry". 248

It is almost useless to criticize details in a dénouement which, in its entirety, is so unsatisfactory dramatically. The speech of Pandarus, for example, is a rather long one for the very close of the drama, but it does not matter much. The audience certainly does not realize that the end of the play is at hand, and this speech surely does not delay anything unless it is the epilogue. And the epilogue prevents — or anticipates — disapproval by implying that there will be no hissing except from bawds or panders or their unfortunate customers!

The theatrically ineffective ending of Troilus and Cressida has, of course, been blamed on some unknown writer. He is always a convenient, but not always a reliable, scapegoat. Sometimes he fails to carry into the wilderness all the sins heaped upon him! Shakespeare may have retained the final scenes because they were in an old piece he was revising. In this event, we do not know how

248 Ibid., pp. 158-159.
he planned to make the final scenes harmonize with the earlier part of the play. 249 On the other hand, the planning of the whole action may be Shakespeare's. The closing scenes, then, may be in harmony with his design, and in accord with his intentions, though actually written by another hand. Division of authorship does not necessarily mean looseness of construction. 250

As far as the love story is concerned, only an unhappy ending is possible. "The theme was so firmly established for an Elizabethan audience by tradition, as involving the separation of the lovers, the heartbreak of the one and the bad faith of the other, that no conventional happy ending could follow." 251 But critics feel that the Shakespearean ending is not unhappy enough; they feel that Cressida should be punished. The dramatist, however, does no violence to tradition because he does not carry the action to a later time; and, what is probably of more significance, he has already filled a five-act play. 252

The catastrophe of Troilus and Cressida affords a striking contrast to that of All's Well that Ends Well and

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249 Ibid., p. 161.
250 Ibid.
251 Ibid., p. 162.
252 Ibid.
253 Ibid., p. 163.
Measure for Measure. Whereas the conclusions of the latter plays are dramatically effective but psychologically weak, the dénouement of Troilus and Cressida is dramatically weak but psychologically strong.\textsuperscript{254} It is realistic and logical. It makes no concession to theatrical effect of the obvious sort, but it creates a very definite impression of the futility and misery which come of loving a worthless woman. These closing scenes are not exactly like anything else in Shakespearean comedy.\textsuperscript{255}

The Winter's Tale brings us to the consideration of another play in which the tragic entanglements come to a happy end. To Victor Hugo, this play is even more tragic in nature than Cymbeline.\textsuperscript{256} He feels that the impassioned tone of the whole and the "ascending scale of its chief scenes" are tragic, but that the deaths of Mamililus and Antigonus are more deeply moving than the death of Cloten in Cymbeline.\textsuperscript{257} Bulthaup, speaking of The Winter's Tale, says, "A plot which should have been treated only as a tragedy, is, without intrinsic justification, conducted to

\textsuperscript{254}Ibid., p. 165.

\textsuperscript{255}Ibid., pp. 167-168.


\textsuperscript{257}Ibid.
a superficial end of reconciliation." And Hartley Coleridge urges that "the exhibition of such madness of heart" as that of Leontes "should be confined to the sternest tragedy", because such a sinner can "surely never again be worthy of a restoration to happiness".

Indeed, the first three acts of *The Winter's Tale* seem to be a complete and independent tragedy. By the time we come to the end of them, the boy Hamlllius is dead, Antigonus has been devoured by a bear, Hermione and Perdita are both supposed to be dead. Leontes, childless as well as wifeless, is very righteously left to a lifelong remorse. The remaining two acts of the drama, taking place sixteen years later in time, are really another play. This second play picks up the thread of the story at its most tragic point and then "conduces us out into a garden of pleasant romantic devices where old wrongs meet to be reconciled as in this world they never do and never are".


261 Ibid.

Some critics, however, think that a distinct break is apparent between act three and the following acts only when the play is examined superficially and when individual features alone are considered. Mr. Ulrici feels that "the colours used to describe the jealousy of Leontes, the unhappiness of his wife, and the king's repentance and sorrow, are nowhere laid on with glaring thickness, but [are] tempered and given in light touches". And although the last two acts are crowded with elements which, in the narrower sense of the word, are certainly comic, the first three acts are also based upon the comic view of life. Mr. Quiller-Couch, who approaches the problem from a slightly different angle, says that "in a world where Nature mixes comedy with tragedy and often shades one into the other indistinguishably, Art, if she be Nature's mirror ..., must always be impatient of hard definitions".

I am not so sure that either of these explanations makes the final dénouement seem more consistent with the temper and handling of the play. On the other hand, we

263 Ulrici, Dr. Hermann, Shakespeare's Dramatic Art, p. 34; Quiller-Couch, Sir Arthur, Notes on Shakespeare's Workmanship, p. 258.
264 Ulrici, Dr. Hermann, Shakespeare's Dramatic Art, p. 34.
265 Ibid.
266 Quiller-Couch, Sir Arthur, Notes on Shakespeare's Workmanship, p. 257.
cannot overlook the suggestion made by both of these critics that some threads of the story are deliberately left hanging at the end of act three. The introduction of the oracle in this act does point to a happy issue. The doom of the oracle has been exacted, but there is unfulfilled promise of hope in its statement that "the King shall live without an heir if that which is lost be not found". "That which is lost" is, of course, Perdita, as her name tells us.

The final scenes of The Winter's Tale, like those of Cymbeline, consist of a series of discoveries and recognitions. The old shepherd and his son prove to Polixenes that Perdita is of royal birth and, therefore, a fit mate for Polixene's son, Florizel. Leontes finds that Perdita is his lost daughter, while Paulina learns how her husband, Antigonus, met his death. And, finally, Perdita is restored to her mother, Hermione, who is restored to her husband, Leontes. It is the return to life of Hermione that gives the final episode of The Winter's Tale a vitality and effectiveness which are wholly lacking.

267 Ibid., p. 258.
268 Ulrici, Dr. Hermann, Shakespeare's Dramatic Art, p. 34.
269 The Winter's Tale III. ii. 32.
270 Quiller-Couch, Sir Arthur, Notes on Shakespeare's Workmanship, p. 258.
271 Matthews, Brander, Shakespeare as a Playwright, p. 337.
in the closing scene of Cymbeline.\textsuperscript{272} Not for a single instant does Shakespeare admit us to the councils of fate.\textsuperscript{273} Like Leontes, we believe in the death of Hermione and, to the very last, we are left the dupes of Paulina's device.\textsuperscript{274} We experience a genuine shock of surprise, therefore, when the seeming statue starts to life and steps down from the pedestal.

The statue scene is not entirely free from criticism, however. Mrs. Lennox feels that Shakespeare has preserved the queen for the mere sake of having her represent her own statue in the last scene and that it is a mean and absurd contrivance.\textsuperscript{275} "How can it be imagined", she asks, "that Hermione, a virtuous and affectionate wife, would conceal herself during sixteen years in a solitary house, though she was sensible that her repentant husband was all that time consuming away with grief and remorse for her death; and what reason could she have for choosing to live in such a miserable confinement when she might have been happy in the possession of her husband's affection and have shared

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{272}Ibid.
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\textsuperscript{274}Ibid.
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his throne? But, as Mr. Campbell says, Hermione's refusal to be reconciled with her husband "may be explained by the conscious wrongness of a mother being unwilling to re-embrace a husband who had ordered the murder of her child [that is, daughter], and had caused the death of her only son], until that husband had repented, and the lost Perdita had been restored." Having been assured of Leontes' repentance, however, I do not think Hermione is, as Mr. Matthews says, "frankly un feminized" because she forgives her husband without a word of reproach.

This last point brings us to the greatest difficulty in The Winter's Tale, the scoring of the recognition scene. The meeting of Leontes and Hermione is a situation worthy of Labiche, says Robert Bridges, and yet we are

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276 Ibid.
277 Ibid.
279 Matthews, Brander, Shakespeare as a Playwright, p. 333.
280 Quiller-Couch, Sir Arthur, Notes on Shakespeare's Workmanship, p. 265.
expected both to take it seriously and to overlook it.\(^{281}\) When Hermione descends from the pedestal into her husband's arms, the "impossibility of reconciliation" is passed by in silence.\(^{282}\) Hermione turns to Perdita, anxious to know where she has been living and how she happened to come to Leontes' court. And Leontes busies himself in finding a husband for the aged and unattractive Paulina.

Here, as in All's Well that Ends Well and Cymbeline, Shakespeare is beset with the difficulty of presenting in a very short time the reconciliation, forgiveness, adjustment and restoration of good will between injured and injurer, a process in itself naturally slow.\(^{283}\) The dramatist's time is already up when Hermione and Leontes are reunited, and so he marries off Paulina and Camillo in summary fashion. They are the only ones not provided for except Autolycus, who drops out early in the last act. But if Shakespeare married a catastrophe which he knew his audience would accept anyway, he at least made his statue scene more effective by bringing the curtain down immediately.

The conclusion of Shakespeare's last comedy differs from that of all his other comedies; all five acts of

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\(^{282}\) Ibid.

\(^{283}\) Quiller-Couch, Sir Arthur, Notes on Shakespeare's Workmanship, p. 302.
The Tempest may be said to be an expanded dénouement. In contrast to Cymbeline and The Winter's Tale, the tragic complications of this play have preceded the opening of the drama. Twelve years have passed since Prospero was deposed of his dukedom of Milan by his brother, Antonio, and since Prospero and his infant daughter, Miranda, cast upon the mercy of the sea, found refuge in a desert island. Prospero has spent those twelve years in the study of magic and the education of Miranda. Now comes the day, to which he has looked forward, when he can bring within his power his own brother and his allies, the King of Naples and his brother. By the aid of his magic, Prospero is able to raise a tempest which wrecks his enemies upon his island as they are sailing homeward from the wedding of the Princess in Tunis.

What follows, then, is really the skillful working out of Prospero's plan. Miranda and Ferdinand fall in love, just as Prospero intended they should. The magician's good sprite, Ariel, frustrates the counter-plot against the King's life, formed by Prospero's brother, Antonio, and the King's brother, Sebastian. And the malevolent servant, Caliban, and his new rulers, the King's drunken butler and a jester, are pursued by Prospero's spirits for plotting against his life.

284 Thomæike, A. H., English Comedy, p. 151.
Finally, Prospero conjures his enemies and all the rest of the ship's crew into one magic circle, forgives the contrite King and his companions, reveals his identity, and restores to the King his son and his ship and crew. The King then willingly consents to the marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda, who are to rule over Naples and Milan. When Ariel brings in Stephano, Trinculo and Caliban, they, too, are pardoned, but with the provision that they put Prospero's cell in perfect condition. At last, having attained all that he desires and having commissioned Ariel to arrange a favorable journey back to Naples, Prospero gives his obedient servant his promised freedom and then "casts his magic books and staff into the depths of the sea". 285

CHAPTER III

SHAKESPEARE'S TRAGEDIES

As we turn from Shakespeare's comedies to his tragedies, we notice at once the difference in the treatment of the catastrophe in the two types of drama. On the whole, the dramatist seems to take more care to round out the catastrophe of tragedy than he does to close a comedy. Instead of leaving loose ends, as he often does in the latter, he is usually reluctant to let the audience go until he has carried it a little beyond the tragic end. Moreover, the catastrophe in Shakespearean tragedy follows almost inevitably from the deeds of men, and the main source of these deeds lies in character. For these reasons, it is almost impossible to group the tragedies according to kind of ending. There are resemblances and differences in the details of the final resolutions, it is true; but, in general, the catastrophe is the direct result of all that has preceded and usually finds its source in a flaw or weakness of the main character.

In *Julius Caesar*, the first tragedy we shall discuss, there may be said to be two points of catastrophe: the first for Caesar, the second for the conspirators. In the first half of the play, the action turns upon the fall of

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2 Woodbridge, Elisabeth, *The Drama*, p. 90.
Caesar and in the second upon the fate of Brutus and Cassius. Both parts of the action are connected externally, however, in so far as the subject of the action in the first part is not so much Caesar's death as, in reality, the conspiracy against his supreme power and the attempt to restore the republic. In the second part, then, we see the course and the unhappy termination of this undertaking. Moreover, even if Caesar is killed in the middle of the play, his ghost returns toward the end, and his spirit dominates the action long after his death.

Notwithstanding these considerations, however, the last two acts of the play do not equal the preceding acts in outward magnificence and rapidity. "After the overthrow of the external splendour and greatness of the conqueror and ruler of the world, the intrinsic grandeur of character of Brutus and Cassius is all that remains to fill the stage and occupy the minds of the spectators." And it is less exciting to watch Brutus and Cassius supporting the consequences of the conspiracy with heroic firmness than

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2Ulrici, Dr. Hermann, Shakespeare's Dramatic Art, p. 195.
3Ibid.
4Ibid.
5Matthews, Brendor, Shakespeare as a Playwright, p. 260.
6Schlegel, A. W., Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature, p. 415.
7Ibid.
it is to observe the formation and execution of their hazardous determination.8

This does not mean, of course, that our sympathy is not with Brutus. If it were not with him, we would be less concerned about the sudden up-springing of suppressed individuality in Antony's character. The action seems to be retarded, however, because the conspirators are not doing anything. Once Antony is permitted to exercise his spell upon the Roman people, Brutus and Cassius become powerless against the quick action of the triumvirs. And the success of the conspiracy soon crumbles into ruin.

Although the deaths of Brutus and Cassius are the legitimate result of the assassination of Caesar, they do evoke pity.9 Unlike the conduct of Macbeth, which is the result of murderous ambition, Brutus' mode of action grows out of a mistaken sense of duty.10 His patriotism is so intense and genuine that it leads him to sacrifice to the welfare of the republic not only Caesar but also himself. But while Brutus' motive is noble, it is also mistaken.11 His decision to join the conspiracy is the result of most illogical reasoning. And even after he

8 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
sacrifices his best friend for fear that friend, in the future, may destroy the liberties of the Roman people.\footnote{Ibid., p. 314.}
Brutus continues to make the wrong moves. He errs in allowing Antony to make the funeral oration and in deciding to march to Philippi against the shrewder advice of Cassius. In as much as Brutus does wrong through mistaken judgment, however, rather than through evil intent,\footnote{Ibid., p. 317.} we pity him as he turns on his sword.

Mr. Grein laments the fact that \textit{Julius Caesar} is not brought to an end when the people rush from the forum to the houses of the conspirators and mete out their reward to them with overflowing cups of wrath, instead of reaching a noisy conclusion in clamour, steel and blood.\footnote{Grein, J. T., \textit{Dramatic Criticism}, p. 35.} But to end the play before the conspirators meet their fate is to leave it incomplete. If anything spoils the simple greatness of the close of \textit{Julius Caesar}, it is the subject of the concluding conversation between Messala, Strato, and Octavius.\footnote{Woodbridge, Elisabeth, \textit{The Drama}, p. 91.}

The promotion of Brutus' servant to the favor of Octavius is too petty a detail to demand attention at the very close of the drama.\footnote{Ibid.} And yet we should gladly overlook this
small fault if the play would end with Antony's significant words, "This was a man." We should like to stop here and feel that all is finished, instead of being reminded that political rearrangements and the division of spoil are yet to come.

The action of Coriolanus, another of Shakespeare's Roman tragedies, also exhibits two distinct movements. The first one terminates in the banishment of Coriolanus, the second ends in his death. In this play, however, both parts of the action are concerned with one subject only — the fate of a proud man who does much for his city, but who openly manifests his hatred of the populace. Moreover, the banishment of the hero is but the beginning and foreshadowing of the final tragic end.

The play is rather halting in its presentation of the catastrophe, however. Soon after the great scene in which Aufidus receives Coriolanus into his home in Antium, we begin to feel that Aufidus is befriending Coriolanus to

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17 Julius Caesar V, V, 75.
18 Woodbridge, Elizabeth, The Drama, p. 91.
20 Ibid.
21 Freytag, Dr. Gustav, Technique of the Drama, p. 131.
his own advantage, and we are anxious to see what the future will bring. First, though, we must return to Rome, where we learn that Cominius has visited Coriolanus and unsuccessfully urged him to have mercy on Rome. After much persuasion, Menenius is prevailed upon to go to Coriolanus and to beg him not to join forces with Aufidus against Rome. But Menenius also fails in his purpose.

Then comes the meeting between Coriolanus and his mother. It is a very touching scene, but Coriolanus is apparently unmoved by Volumnia's pleas. The long interview is about to close with Coriolanus still persisting in his revengeful design to storm and burn his native city, when the hero finally promises to save Rome. This is the chance for which Aufidus has been waiting. When Coriolanus comes before the Volscian lords to discuss the terms of the treaty with Rome, Aufidus calls him a traitor and his confederates assassinate him.

One reason for the apparent retardation of the catastrophe lies in the long scenes between Aufidus' servants and the muffled Coriolanus and between the sentinels and Menenius. These scenes are amusing25 and Shakespeare refuses to hurry them because he is cognizant of their effect upon the audience. As Mr. Bradley points out, what

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is amusing in Coriolanus is, for the most part, simply amusing, and has no tragic tinge.24 Even the interruption of Volumnia’s speech by young Marcus’.

"A’ shall not tread on me;
I’ll run away till I am bigger, but then I’ll fight",25
makes us laugh almost without reserve.26

Some critics feel that Coriolanus is such a disagreeable figure that we hardly care what becomes of him, and so lose interest in his fate.27 His attitude toward the people does make us less sympathetic toward him, but, on the other hand, the people fail to appreciate what he has done for them. And, however we feel about him, Coriolanus has saved his soul, if not his life, when he gives way to his mother’s pleas. The ending would have been more strictly tragic if he had persisted in setting Rome afire and then had taken vengeance upon himself as soon as he realized the enormity of his deed.28 The play is much

24Ibid.
25 Coriolanus V. iii. 27-3
28Bradley, A. C., Shakespearean Tragedy, p. 84.
nobler, though, as it stands. 29

Those people who believe that rewards and punishments should be distributed according to merit will feel that Coriolanus meets a deserved death for having been disloyal to his country. 30 But they will also feel that Aufidus should not survive or that he should at least not survive unpunished, and that the two tribunes, Sicinius and Brutus, who were instrumental in bringing about the banishment of Coriolanus, do not deserve to live. 31 The only answer to this view is that, in this world, the good and the bad often share alike and sometimes the bad seem to take precedence over the good.

Coriolanus, like Julius Caesar, does not end immediately after the death of its hero. The Volscian lords are shocked as they see Aufidus stand on the dead body of Coriolanus and they exclaim, "Hold, hold". Aufidus, in defence, replies that they will rejoice in Coriolanus' death when they learn how dangerous he was. The lords then order the body to be borne off and promise fitting funeral rites, and Aufidus' rage gives place to sorrow. Thus we are allowed to catch our breath before the final curtain falls.

29 Ibid.
30 Lounsbury, T. R., Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist, p. 403.
31 Ibid.
Macbeth, in its intense rapidity of action, suggests to Brander Matthews "the rushing swiftness of the cataract's rapids hurrying resistless to the final fall". Certain it is that the action strides forward with amazing speed from the time of Duncan's murder to the death of Macbeth. After the banquet scene, though, the action "wavers a little and hesitates before stiffening itself again to set before us the dread approach of retribution". The scene between Macbeth and the weird sisters is rather long, but it is necessary. The witches' prophecies about Birnam wood and about "none of women born" harming Macbeth are what buoy him up for his last stand. The scenes in which Lady Macduff prattles with her children and in which Macduff is told of their murder, however, are hardly dramatically necessary. And there is very little artistic excuse for the conversation about touching the king to cure "the evil". These scenes claim only casual attention, while we are eager to follow the fate of

32 Matthews, Brander, Shakespeare as a Playwright, p. 314.
34 Matthews, Brander, Shakespeare as a Playwright, p. 320.
36 Ibid.
Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. On the other hand, there is again a sharp tightening of the dramatic intensity in the final passages, and the whole play is so short that we scarcely notice the retardation caused by these extraneous episodes.

The catastrophe of Macbeth brings us again to a discussion of poetic justice in Shakespeare. Ulriici sets about to find some justification of the downfall of every person who has no hand in the transgressions and crimes but who is finally punished anyway. The German critic reasons in this fashion:

Duncan falls because he has not properly fulfilled his duties as king. The numerous revolts against his government, in the suppression of which Macbeth proves his heroism, are either the result of arbitrary rule and injustice or of unroyal weakness. Malcolm and Donalbain have to suffer banishment because of their unmanly flight to England after their father’s death [I wonder how Mr. Ulriici would “justify” Malcolm’s accession to the throne of Scotland]. Banquo brings destruction upon his own head because he is curious to know his glorious descendants and so rouses the jealously of Macbeth. And, finally,

\[37\text{Ibid.}\]
\[38\text{Ibid.}\]
\[39\text{Ulriici, Dr. Hermann, Shakespeare’s Dramatic Art, pp. 473-4.}\]
Macduff's wife and children suffer for the thoughtlessness of their natural protector, who leaves them behind to secure his own safety. He is punished by their death and preposterous idea — Lady Macduff is punished for the unloving asperity with which she rails at her husband's conduct, and thus gives us an insight into a marriage which was perhaps also a motive for Macduff's hasty and secret flight.

The "justification" of Lady Macduff's fate shows, I think, the absurdity of Mr. Ulrici's reasoning. Even if Macduff's flight was not wise or judicious in the interest of his family, to represent its consequences as a judgment on him for want of due consideration is monstrous and ludicrous. And to suggest that marital difficulties caused him to leave home is to read into the play a meaning which is not present.

The element of poetic justice is not absent from Shakespeare's representation of life any more than it is from life itself. But in both it sometimes does not appear at all, and in both it acts but imperfectly when it does appear. In Macbeth, punishment falls at last upon

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40 Ibid.


42 Lounsbury, T. R., Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist, p. 415.

43 Ibid.
the guilty husband and the guilty wife, but that does not mean, as Schlegel says, that Shakespeare follows an accurate scale of retaliation as far as the other characters of the play are concerned. After all, however, this is an unimportant matter. What arrests our attention in Macbeth is the gradual transforming power of sin, once it has taken full possession of the soul.

The tragedy ends, in the Shakespearean manner, with a return to the practical affairs at hand and a forward look to a better and happier time. Malcolm, Siward and Ross ask each other about their missing friends and Siward learns that his son has died a noble soldier's death. Macduff then enters carrying Macbeth's head, and salutes Malcolm as the King of Scotland. And after Malcolm promises to make his companions earls and to call home their exiled friends, the play is over.

Although there are two central characters in Macbeth, they are not of equal importance. In each of the next two plays, however, there are two characters whose fates are so wrapped up in each other that we say their names in the same breath. These plays are, of course, Romeo and

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44 Schlegel, A. W., Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature, p. 409.
45 Lounsbury, T. R., Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist, p. 415.
46 Bradley, A. C., Shakespearean Tragedy, p. 366.
Juliet and Antony and Cleopatra. And, incidentally, there are many similarities between their catastrophes.

As Victor Hugo points out, each play ends amid a funereal atmosphere. In Antony and Cleopatra, the final scenes take place at the tomb of the Ptolemies; in Romeo and Juliet, the last scenes are enacted at the tomb of the Capulets. The sepulchre is the ultimate try sting place for both the pagan and the Christian lovers, who have been driven to bay by adversity. In the two dramas, the same error is followed by the same consequences. Antony believes that Cleopatra is dead and kills himself; Romeo believes that Juliet is dead and kills himself. And the devotion of the women is such that they refuse to save themselves. The one withstands the solicitations of Caesar and trusts only her resolution as she applies the aspic. The other resists the prayer of Friar Laurence and joins Romeo in death.

Antony and Cleopatra live in a manner entirely different from that of Romeo and Juliet, but their infinite love suppresses all other differences between the two plays.
couples and affraces all distinction between the innocent and the guilty. The dying Egyptian equals the Veronese in agony. And when Cleopatra kills herself for Antony, she may well be permitted to call him her husband.

Similar as Antony and Cleopatra and Romeo and Juliet are in the main points of the catastrophe, however, they do differ in details. The deaths of the lovers are closer together in the latter play than they are in the former. Romeo does not die until the third scene of act five is well under way, while Antony dies at the end of the fourth act. But Shakespeare keeps up the interest to the very end of Antony and Cleopatra. We not only greet Cleopatra’s death with sympathy and admiration, but we rejoice at the thought of her foiling Octavius. And these feelings are only heightened by the deaths of Charmian and Iras, who are heroically faithful to their mistress.

We do not feel a keen sorrow at the deaths of Antony and Cleopatra as we do at the deaths of the hero and heroine in Romeo and Juliet or even in Hamlet and Othello, because they are already tarnished and half-ruined by

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50 Ibid.
51 Coleridge, S. T., Lectures and Notes on Shakespeare and Other English Poets, p. 316.
52 Bradley, A. C., Shakespearean Tragedy, p. 85.
53 Ibid.
their past. We do not look back and think how noble or beautiful they were or dream of the life they might have lived if fate had treated them differently. We feel that it is better for their own sakes that they die. In death they are noble.

Shakespeare no doubt has the same impressions in mind when he makes no effort to soften Cleopatra's death. In Romeo and Juliet, on the other hand, the dramatist carries our imagination from the horror of the tomb to the better life of men, when such love as that of Juliet and Romeo will be publicly honored and remembered by a gold memorial. Over the grave of the lovers, the bitter feud between the Capulets and the Montagues ends in reconciliation. "How beautiful is the close", says Coleridge. "The spring and the winter meet;—winter assumes the character of spring, and spring the sadness of

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55 Ibid.


57 Dowden, Edward, Shakespeare, p. 110.

The modern audience does not care for the long recitation by Friar Laurence, which comes at the close of Romeo and Juliet. As far as they are concerned, the play ends with the death of Juliet, and they do not wish to hear told what was already shown to them in action. Shakespeare's immediate audience, however, was interested in a story play, and so the Friar's narrative probably did not bore them.

Romeo and Juliet is often criticized because its denouement is brought about by a trifling accident. In tragedy, nothing ought to be left to chance and everything ought to be the result of the action of the various characters. But in this play the fatal termination is brought about at last by what is only an accident. If Friar Laurence had but thought of the device of the potion a few minutes earlier, before Romeo parted from Juliet in the cell, or if the letter the Friar sent after Romeo to

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59 Coleridge, S. T., Lectures and Notes on Shakespeare, p. 329.
60 Baker, G. P., The Development of Shakespeare as a Dramatist, p. 203.
61 Ibid.
63 Matthews, Brander, A Study of the Drama, p. 201.
Mantua had only not miscarried, then Romeo would have known that Juliet was not dead but sleeping. He would not have taken the poison, and Juliet would not have taken her life. 64

But whether we agree with Mr. Bradley that the operation of accident plays a prominent part in human affairs 65 or whether we say, as Mr. Matthews does, that to urge this is to confound the reality of nature with the reality of art, 66 we must concede that, in Shakespeare, accident usually does not occur until the action is well advanced and the impression of the causal sequence is too firmly fixed to be impaired. 67 In Romeo and Juliet, for example, we cannot help feeling that the fate of the lovers is already sealed. 68 If Romeo had known about the potion, something else would assuredly have brought about the unavoidable tragedy. 69 Violent delights could have only a violent

64 ibid.

65 Bradley, A. C., Shakespearean Tragedy, p. 15.


67 Bradley, A. C., Shakespearean Tragedy, p. 15.


Another reason why the obtrusion of accident in Romeo and Juliet does not shock us, or even annoy us, lies in the adroitness with which the dramatist handles the incident. Shakespeare does not show us the actual interference with the messenger who bears the Friar's letter to Romeo; he merely tells us about it. And on the stage, narrative does not make as much impression as action. The spectators keep in mind only what they have seen with their own eyes. In Elizabethan times, of course, narrative was used a great deal on the stage, and no doubt had considerable influence upon the audience. On the other hand, though, the spectators of the Renaissance probably cared little about the manner in which the catastrophe was brought about. They were interested primarily in the story.

Accident is also, in a measure, responsible for the outcome of King Lear. Cordelia would not have been executed if Edmund had been moved a little earlier to recall his order for the death of Cordelia and Lear. But, Mr. Bradley says, the tragic catastrophe of this play is not inevitable as is that of Romeo and Juliet. It is a

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70 Matthews, Brandor, Shakespeare as a Playwright, p. 116.
72 Matthews, Brandor, Shakespeare as a Playwright, p. 281.
73 Bradley, A. C., Shakespearean Tragedy, p. 252.
sudden blow out of the darkness, which strikes down our  
reviving hopes for the victims of so much cruelty.  
Surely, Mr. Bradley continues, the tragic emotions have been  
sufficiently stirred already. Surely the tragic outcome of  
Lear's error and his daughters' ingratitude has been made  
clear enough and moving enough. Why could Lear not spend  
the brief remainder of his days in peace and happiness by  
Cordelia's fireside?  

To Mr. Schlegel and Miss Woodbridge, however, the  
climax of "pity and fear" is in the sight of the mad Lear,  
with the strength of despair, carrying in his "poor fool"  
to show to all men. The tension breaks and he dies, but  
his death is a release. It is a fit, right, and necessary  
complement to his life. As Schlegel says, Lear can only  
die, and what more truly tragic end for him than to die  
from grief for the death of Cordelia?  

The difficulty lies, of course, in the attempt to  
rationalize or to apply ethical principles to the fate of  
the various characters in King Lear. Lear and Gloucester  

74 Ibid., p. 271.  
75 Ibid., pp. 252-253.  
76 Woodbridge, Elizabeh, The Drama, pp. 89-90.  
77 Schlegel, A. W., Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature, p. 413.  
78 Mable, H. W., William Shakespeare, p. 267.
succeumb to an end which is all out of proportion to their delinquencies. And Cordelia, particularly, does not merit death. It is true that at the beginning Cordelia does not stand upon that height of pure love and devotion, of self-control and self-denial, to which she subsequently rises, but her "most small fault" does not deserve punishment by execution.

Notwithstanding this fact, however, some commentators feel that there must be justice in Cordelia’s death or she would not be involved in the ruin of Lear. They ingeniously suggest, therefore, that Cordelia, in her effort to save her father, invades England, and this breach of patriotism needs atonement. But the whole notion of a sin against patriotism is foreign to King Lear itself. The truest patriots, Kent and Gloucester, are secretly confederate with Cordelia and look upon her as the hope of their unhappy country. Even Albany, who finds it necessary to repel the invader, feels that justice is on the side of Cordelia.

Still other critics do not seek a consideration of justice in Cordelia’s death, but are plainly dissatisfied.

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79 Ulrici, Dr. Hermann, *Shakespeare’s Dramatic Art*, p. 446.
80 Moulton, R. G., *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist*, p. 257.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
with her fate. Dr. Johnson, who liked to see persecuted virtue triumph at the close of a play, was in favor of Nahum Tate's version of *King Lear*, in which Edgar makes love to Cordelia and she retires in the end "with victory and felicity".\(^{84}\)

But, in my opinion, the play loses half of its beauty with this sort of a closing.\(^{85}\) What satisfies us and brings us strength and consolation is not that by happy concurrence of circumstances Cordelia should succeed in her enterprise, but merely that Cordelia existed.\(^{86}\) The earth is made more beautiful for us by her life and by her death.\(^{87}\)

And, finally, virtue and innocence are not always happy and successful. Perhaps, as Addison suggests, the guiltless must die if the tragedy is to arouse in us the proper commiseration and terror.\(^{88}\) Perhaps Mr. Bradley is right in feeling that our tragic emotions are already aroused sufficiently before Cordelia is hanged.\(^{89}\) But, be

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84 Dowden, Edward, *Shakespeare*, p. 203.
87 Ibid.
89 Bradley, A. C., *Shakespearian Tragedy*, p. 252.
that as it may, good and evil happen alike to all men on this side of the grave. The relation between the outward punishment and the inward sin is, in truth, absolutely incommensurable.

The catastrophe of King Lear requires no further comment except to point out that in the final act, when we are eager to follow the fate of Lear himself, our attention is distracted by the prolonged episode of the challenge and duel of Edgar and Edmund. This incident seems even longer in retrospect because upon its outcome depends Edmund's counter order to the captain who kills Cordelia. The play itself ends with the weary Kent preparing to go to his deserved place of rest, and with Albany and Edgar planning to take over the government of the state.

In direct contrast to the rapidity with which everything in Macbeth and Othello leads to the catastrophe is the slow movement of Hamlet. In the last scenes, the main action, that is, the action of Hamlet, stands still or appears to retrograde. After Hamlet fails to kill the King while he is at prayer, it is the King who takes the

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93 Schlegel, A. W. *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature*, p. 404.
offensive side of the conflict and Hamlet who takes the defensive. After Hamlet mistakes Polonius for the King, Claudius sends him to England with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who bear commands for his death. And when Hamlet accidentally returns to Denmark, the King has already persuaded Laertes to engage Hamlet in a duel and to use an unbuttoned and poisoned foil. And, finally, the unexpected solution of the complication is occasioned more by accident than by the premeditated action of Hamlet. If Hamlet had not got possession of the poisoned weapon and wounded Laertes with it, Laertes would not have confessed the King's part in the plot, and Hamlet probably would not have killed Claudius.

The hesitating movement of Hamlet is inevitable, however. It lies in the very nature of the subject and is the very character of Hamlet himself. The dramatist's purpose is to show that a calculating consideration, which exhausts all the relations and possible consequences of a deed, must necessarily cripple the power of acting. Shakespeare might have made Hamlet pursue his vengeance with a steady determination. Hamlet is not wanting in will, and certainly not in strength, as his thrust at Polonius, his fight with Laertes, and his soliloquies
show. But if the dramatist had led him through
difficulties arising from accidental causes, and not from
the doubts and hesitation of his own mind, the anxiety of
the spectator would have been for the event and not for the
person. And the indescribable charm in Hamlet lies in
seeing a man, who in other circumstances would have
exercised all the moral and social virtues, placed in a
situation in which even the amiable qualities of his mind
serve but to aggravate his distress and to perplex his
conduct.

It is beside the purpose of this study, of course, to
attempt a full explanation of Hamlet's character. But some
answer must be made to those who feel that Hamlet's revenge
should not be obtained at the expense of his own life. In the
first place, Hamlet does not know how he shall
justify the murder of his uncle to the world. How is he


\[98\] Ibid.

to vindicate himself from the very crime of which he must accuse another? Since he cannot subpoena the ghost, the evidence on which he is to act is available only in the court of his own conscience. And to serve any good end, the deed must stand in the public eye as it does in his own. Otherwise, the crown will seem to be the real motive for the murder and his duty but a pretense.

Hamlet's understanding, then, seems to be convinced. He thinks he ought to do the thing, resolves that he will do it, and blames himself for not doing it. But an unspoken law, deeper and stronger than conviction, withholds him. And, naturally enough, the same strength of conscience which keeps him from killing the King, also keeps him from abandoning the purpose entirely. Conscience urges him different ways, and whichever way he takes he is still haunted by the feeling that he ought to have taken the other. Death, then, is the only denouement which fits his character. Death delivers him from all uncertainty. Had he survived his mother and uncle he

101 Ibid.
102 Ibid.
103 Ibid.
104 Ibid.
probably would have killed himself.

The catastrophe of *Hamlet* is subject to criticism, however, in that it introduces two new characters, Orsino and Fortinbras. We do not even hear of Orsino before, and we have little desire to meet him now. Any one of the lords might tell Hamlet that the King has made a wager with Laertes about Hamlet's skill with the rapier. We do have a glimpse of Fortinbras near the close of act four, and we can tolerate him because Horatio must have someone to listen to him at the end of *Hamlet*.

The conclusion of the play is rather clumsy, though.

After Hamlet's death, what do we care for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern? Or for English ambassadors? Or for Fortinbras? What is the succession of the throne of Denmark to us? We have concerned ourselves only with Hamlet. And with his death our interest is at an end, entirely at an end. We do not want to know anything

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107 Ibid.

more. Incidentally, these final details are usually omitted from modern presentations of the play. But in Hamlet, as in Macbeth, King Lear, and Romeo and Juliet, Shakespeare concludes an overpowering tragedy with the prospect of a new and better state of things which rises up out of suffering, ruin, and death.

And now we turn to the last of Shakespeare's tragedies, Othello. In this drama, every word and every turn of the representation makes an important advance in the course of the action. From every side we see but the one goal; everything glides on in a natural flow to the tragic catastrophe. The threads by which Othello and Desdemona might be saved are not severed until the very last moment, and yet there is no forcing or disturbance. And the descent from the summit of the tragic action is just as rapid and natural as the ascent.

109 Ibid.
110 Ulrici, Dr. Hermann, Shakespeare's Dramatic Art, p. 503.
112 Ibid.
The way in which Othello is undeceived and Iago is unmasked and brought to confession is a masterpiece of dramatic development. 115

Some critics feel that the catastrophe of Othello does not arise directly out of the mode of action of the hero. 116 It is true that the deceit is so cunningly devised, so favored by circumstances that even the most cautious and most circumspect person would have been deceived by it. 117 But Othello is unable to hold his own against blind chance and common intrigue because his power of doing good is insufficient. 118 The catastrophe may be first introduced and occasioned by chance 119 and the demoniac power of Iago may drive Othello to the fatal act, 120 but the catastrophe finds its necessity in the nature of Othello. 121

We leave Othello feeling an abased, passive, hopeless weight, such as no other of the Shakespearean tragedies

115 Ibid.
116 Ibid., p. 453.
117 Ibid., p. 454.
118 Ibid., p. 455.
119 Ulrici, Dr. Hermann, Shakespeare's Dramatic Art, p. 421.
121 Ibid., pp. 144-5.
proposes. The source of this lies, I think, in the
manner of Othello's death. The effect of Desdemona's
touching death-scene is skilfully softened and kept in
strict subordination to the catastrophe which follows. But no after scene alleviates the gloom which surrounds
the suicide of Othello. "The object [which] poisons
sight" is hid from us only by the dropping of the curtain,
and the Moor has scarcely expired when the drama closes.

122 Edinburgh Review, Recent Shakespearian Literature:
(July, 1840), p. 491, as quoted by Furness, H. H.,
A New Variorum Edition of Shakespeare, VI,
pp. 218-19.

123 Ibid.
124 Ibid.
CHAPTER IV
CONCLUSION

Having examined the catastrophe of each comedy and
tragedy separately, we are now in a position to make some
summary remarks about the manner in which Shakespeare closes
his plays.

As we have seen, Shakespeare seems to have no one
method of bringing his comedies to an end. But there are
resemblances in details between the dénouements of the
different plays; and, making due allowance for overlapping
in our classification, we can group the comedies according
to type of ending.

The endings of the two farcical comedies, The Comedy
of Errors and The Taming of the Shrew, are really
admirably managed and are free from any objection on the
score of conventionality. In Shakespeare's third farce,
The Merry Wives of Windsor, and in Twelfth Night, the
interest at the very close of the action centers about the
characters of the sub-plot. In A Midsummer Night's
Dream and still more in The Merchant of Venice, the
catastrophe is clearly anti-climactic.

Almost all of Shakespeare's other comedies can be
grouped under one head as far as catastrophe is concerned.
In general, they are the plays in which the conclusion
does not seem to grow out of or to be the direct result of
what has preceded. In some of these comedies, the
inconsistency of character or other incongruity is not so conspicuous because of the light tone of the whole piece. To this group belong Love's Labour's Lost, As You Like It, Much Ado About Nothing, and The Two Gentlemen of Verona.

In the remaining plays, on the other hand, the so-called "happy ending" is not in accord with the rather tragic nature of the characters or with the sincerity and seriousness of the action. The comedies which belong to this class are All's Well that Ends Well, Measure for Measure, and Cymbeline.

For lack of a better place in which to discuss the other three comedies of Shakespeare, we treat them with the plays last mentioned. The dénouement of each of these plays, is unique, however. In Troilus and Cressida, neither of the plots terminates conclusively. The Winter's Tale seems to consist of two complete plays, the first of which is a tragedy and the second a comedy. And all five acts of The Tempest are an expanded dénouement.

On the whole, it may be said that Shakespeare brings about the catastrophe of his comedies directly and rapidly, and shows much compression at the close. But there are exceptions to this statement. This is manifestly not Shakespeare's manner of closing the two anti-climactic plays, A Midsummer Night's Dream and The Merchant of Venice. Neither is this his method in All's Well that Ends Well, where the reconciliation between Helena and Bertram.
is delayed by a complicated series of tricks and misunderstandings. And in Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale, and The Tempest, the plays in which Shakespeare shows the influence of Beaumont and Fletcher most, the dramatist multiples effective situations for the mere sake of postponing and heightening the happy ending. It must be said, however, that the final untying of the dramatic knots is accomplished with both skill and celerity.

Although we usually leave a Shakespearean comedy with the feeling that the action is complete, this is not always true. In Troilus and Cressida, nothing is concluded, and in Love's Labour's Lost, the dénouement is postponed for a year. In Twelfth Night and The Merchant of Venice, the action continues even after the curtain goes down. Malvolio is still to be entreated to peace and Portia is to "answer all things faithfully".

Shakespeare almost always leaves some loose ends in his comedies. We never learn what becomes of Sly in The Merry Wives of Windsor nor do we ever hear of the retaliation promised to mine host of the Garter. We shall never learn how Margaret happened to be wearing Hero's clothes, when Borsachio says that she knew nothing of Don John's villainy. It is not for us to know why Lorenzo speaks of a hermit returning to Belmont with Portia, when we never see or hear of him afterwards. And Mrs. Quickly and Autolycus are only two of Shakespeare's characters who
drop out before the end of the play is reached.

Two of the lighter comedies, *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Twelfth Night*, close with a little song, which is not very important but which allud es to the general significance of the whole piece. In both plays the song is sung by characters of the sub-plot. Others of the comedies either end with an entertainment by amateurs or else make use of such a performance near the close. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* there is the presentation of "Pyramus and Thisbe" by the rustics, in *Love's Labour's Lost* the characters of the sub-plot give "The Nine Worthies," and in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, there is the droll fairy dance. Neither of the first two representations is an integral part of the action, but the entertainment in the last play affords the opportunity for the solution of both the main plot and the sub-plot. *As You Like It*, *The Tempest*, and *Troilus and Cressida* all close with an epilogue, which is hardly more than a superfluous appendage.

The chief criticism on the endings of Shakespeare's comedies is to be directed at the sudden conversions and hasty marriages of the rogues and villains. The transformation of the chief wrong-doers is in itself impossible or else Shakespeare fails to make it dramatically plausible. The act of forgiveness is also either humanly unbelievable, or else it seems so because of the haste with which the pardon is effected. Reconciliation,
forgiveness, and the restoration of good will between the injured and injurer must be, in the nature of things, a slow process. And, finally, the matrimonial ending is often not in consonance with the characterization, but is merely a convention.

The most satisfactory explanation of the manner in which Shakespeare closes his plays seems to lie in the nature of his audience. The Renaissance spectators were apparently careless of improbabilities and striking contrasts. The dramatist, then, sometimes relies on the moral callousness of his audience to make acceptable an undeniable departure from psychological veracity, and to enable him to obtain the happy ending which a comedy demands.

As we pass from Shakespeare's comedies to his tragedies, we find that he takes more care to round out the latter than he takes to close the former. In place of leaving loose ends, the dramatist is reluctant to leave the audience without the prospect of a new and better state of things which follows the downfall of the tragic hero. After the deaths of Hamlet and Laertes and the King and the Queen, the stalwart figure of young Fortinbras appears to take up the reins of government in Denmark. The people of Scotland are to enjoy a healthier and saner life under the reign of Malcolm. And the deaths of Romeo and Juliet put an end to the fatal feud between the
Capulets and the Montagues and stop the strife in Verona.

The catastrophe of Shakespeare's tragedies, which leads up to and includes the death of the hero, is not always brought about in the same manner, but is always effected by the same means. It is the inevitable result of man's deeds; and these deeds usually find their main source in a flaw or weakness in the character of the tragic hero. Shakespeare very rarely makes the least attempt to surprise by his tragic catastrophes. Occasionally, however, where we dread the catastrophe because we love the hero, a moment occurs, just preceding the close, in which a gleam of false hope lights up the darkening scene. The most outstanding example is in the fifth act of King Lear. For just a minute we feel that Edgar may arrive at the prison in time to save Cordelia and Lear. Antony's victory on land and the outburst of pride and joy as he and Cleopatra meet also tend to give us hope for a final victory of the lovers. And the apparent reconciliation between Hamlet and Laertes almost blinds us to our better knowledge as to the outcome of the drama. But, all in all, though we cannot foresee the precise way in which the catastrophe will be brought about, we feel that it is unavoidable.

In many of Shakespeare's tragedies, chance or accident has an appreciable influence at some point in the action. It is mere accident that Romeo does not receive the Friar's message, that Desdemona drops her handkerchief at
at the most fatal moment, and that the pirate ship attacks
the ship of Hamlet or that he and Leertes exchange swords
as they scuffle. But few of the important accidents occur
until the action is well advanced and the impression of the
causal sequence is too firmly fixed to be impaired.

Where there is some character, besides the hero, who
engages our interest in the highest degree, and with whose
fate the hero's is bound up, Shakespeare spreads the
catastrophe out, so to speak. In Antony and Cleopatra, for
example, the death of the hero occurs in the fourth act,
while that of the heroine does not come until the very end
of the tragedy. In like manner, the deaths of Romeo and
Juliet, of Desdemona and Othello, and of Lady Macbeth and
Macbeth are separated by some distance.

Finally, Shakespeare disdains the pettiness of so-
called poetic justice, dear to Dr. Johnson and other
critics of his century. Villainy never remains victorious
and prosperous at the last. But happiness and misery, or
even life and death, are not assigned in proportion to
merit. One needs only to think of Desdemona and Cordelia
to realize that poetic justice is absent from Shakespeare's
tragic picture of life.

Although it is impossible to speak of Shakespeare's
art without indulging in platitudes, it is also impossible
to conclude a study of Shakespeare's method of closing a
play without recognizing his skill as a dramatic artist.
We see him follow the so-called rules of dramatic technique and end a play as we think it should end. We see him terminate a play so as to make it dramatically effective but psychologically untrue. And we even see him make the catastrophe psychologically true though dramatically ineffective. Sometimes we look for the elucidation of Shakespeare's method in the nature of his audience. At other times, we feel that he is simply exhibiting a lordly carelessness. But the very fact that no one explanation of his work proves entirely satisfactory, coupled with the fact that so many of his dramas have remained on the stage, seems to indicate that Shakespeare possesses the "peculiar quality" of the playwright, and that he wrote not for one age "but for all time."
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