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ASPECTS OF REPENTANCE IN SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

BY

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A THESIS

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INTRODUCTION

If the characters in Shakespearean drama were marionettes pulled about by the strings of heredity and environment as are the literary creatures of Gorki, Strindberg, and Zola, to propose such a study as this would indeed be an absurdity. In general, the sense of moral responsibility is lacking in much of the literature of the past century. Not so in the drama of Shakespeare, which artistically presents ethical standards, sin, acknowledgment of sin, remorse, confession, amendment, and atonement. It is precisely the blatant contrast in awareness of morality between modern literature and the works of the great Elizabethan playwright which has prompted the following consideration of repentance in Shakespeare's plays.

Following an expository chapter on Elizabethan concepts of repentance (which include Catholic doctrine), this thesis will present in three further chapters a factual presentation of repentance as it appears in the comedies, the histories, and the tragedies respectively, according to the conjectural chronological order established by E. K. Chambers.¹ A fifth chapter will

interpret the more important facts and draw warranted conclusions. Dowden's four periods\(^1\) will be used throughout for comparative purposes. The Two Noble Kinsmen and King Henry the Eighth will be disregarded since large portions, at least, were written by Fletcher.\(^2\)

Since true repentance may include many elements and may be viewed from diverse angles, one might make an intensive study of any aspect of this act or limit research to a single play or to a group of plays. This treatise will be comprehensive and general in scope rather than exhaustive in any way. This survey of all the plays will itself suggest possibilities for more specific research of a deeper and more interpretative nature.

The purposes of this study are to determine only in a general way: (1) whether or not there are discernible patterns in Shakespeare's depiction of repentance, (2) whether repentance is usually complete or fragmentary, (3) the dramatic use of feigned repentance and final impenitence, (4) the extent to which Shakespeare's

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2 According to George Lyman Kittredge (ed.), "Introductions," *The Complete Works of Shakespeare* (New York: Ginn and Company, 1936), pp. 1409, 837. All references to Shakespeare used in this study are taken from this edition.
presentation seems to be distinctly Catholic or Protestant, and (5) the Elizabethan regard for the virtue of repentance as indicated by the plays.

In only ten of Shakespeare's plays is repentance bound up with plot and character development to such an extent as to challenge particular study. These are Measure for Measure, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale, The Tempest, 1 Henry IV, 2 Henry IV, Henry V, Hamlet, Othello, and King Lear.

The personal views which enter into any interpretation of apparent repentance superimposed upon the already subjective elements inherent in manifestations of this virtue obviously complicate an undertaking of this kind. A factual citation of lines and incidents throughout Chapters II, III, and IV, although it may seem monotonous and haphazard, will leave the critic free to draw his own inferences and select points for further study. In Chapter V, together with the statement of conclusions, a minimum amount of interpretation will be brought to bear on the facts already cited.

Strictly speaking, the study of repentance is not man's business but God's—and for Him it is no study but a comprehension of reality proper to His omniscience. Man can probe into this great spiritual
act only by evaluating appearances; it is merely an ob-
servation of such appearances which will be the subject
matter of this thesis.
CHAPTER I

ELIZABETHAN CONCEPTS OF REPENTANCE

Since an understanding of terms is fundamental to any study, it is imperative in this research problem that both writer and reader hold concepts of repentance which are clear and theologically correct. It is necessary, furthermore, to consider these concepts as they seem to have been known to Elizabethans, especially to Shakespeare.

The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is threefold: (1) to present an explanation of repentance as taught by the Catholic Church, (2) to suggest other current Elizabethan views regarding this act, and (3) to note ways in which Shakespeare may have been influenced by the popular theology of his time.

Repentance, according to the teaching of the Church, has as its chief characteristic detestation of sin.\(^1\) Reverend E. J. Mahoney, S.J., states that it includes all that is involved in the detestation of sin regardless of the motive and whether or not there is sacramental confession.\(^2\) Two other elements inseparably


\(^2\) Ibid., p. 45.
bound up with repentance are the purpose of amendment and the willingness to make satisfaction.\textsuperscript{1} On scriptural authority the Church requires sacramental confession for all grave sins excepting only such cases in which confession is impossible and in which perfect contrition therefore suffices. This foregoing statement of Catholic doctrine is indeed concise and simple. One might continue to enumerate and to explain many aspects of the great moral act under consideration here, but such an exposition seems superfluous after the terse explanation that repentance "includes all that is involved in the detestation of sin."

That the modern mind may grasp Shakespeare's concepts of moral conversion necessitates a shifting in point of view from twentieth century America to sixteenth century England. For scholars in the Catholic tradition this is less difficult than for those steeped in secularism because the Elizabethan age retained its medieval philosophical heritage.\textsuperscript{2} Although the typical modern mind can boast no more than a meager grasp of the conditions in sixteenth century England, thorough study

\textsuperscript{1}Ibid., pp. 48-49.

elucidates many points pertinent to this problem.

Hardin Craig assures his readers that the Elizabethans took deep interest in religious subjects, and both ecclesiastical history and English literature bear this out by numerous examples. Since the Elizabethans had as their religious background the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church, their spiritual heritage was undoubtedly Roman Catholic doctrine, but such doctrine somewhat modified by England's break with Rome during the reign of Henry VIII. It appears that the teaching concerning repentance remained basically unchanged although, according to Henry Hitch Adams, there was endless controversy about the nature and the consequences of this virtue. Carter, in explaining the "Ten Articles" formulated by Bishop Foxe of Hereford, states:

"Penance is a sacrament instituted by Christ, necessary to salvation for those who fall into sin after baptism, and consists of contrition, confession, and amendment of life displayed in prayer, fasting, and almsdeeds."

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The sermons of the period were of great importance in setting forth Elizabethan concepts regarding repentance. In an effort to stabilize religion thirty-three sermons were written about the middle of the sixteenth century and were authorized by Her Majesty to be read regularly in the churches throughout England. According to the Eightieth Canon of 1603, a copy of these sermons was to be in each parish church. This fact gives further evidence of the common man's means of understanding penance and other theological concepts. By constant repetition the book of homilies must have impressed on the people that sin is a reality.

On the assumption that all men are subject to sin, repentance was considered a necessity to everyone. There was disagreement, especially among the clergy, as to the efficacy of repentance and the formal steps leading to it. However, some truly representative sermons of the period set forth the basic steps of repentance with striking orthodoxy. John Bradford, in "A Sermon of Repentance," promised salvation to all who would repent. He defined repentance as "a sorrow or forthinking of our sins past, an earnest purpose to amend or turning to God, with a trust of pardon."¹ Another authorized sermon,

¹Adams, op. cit., pp. 7-12.
"An Homily of Repentance, and of True Reconciliation unto God," states that repentance has four parts: contrition, confession, faith and confidence in the mercy of God, and amendment of life.1

John Hankins, who attempts to synthesize the Elizabethan concepts of repentance through a comparative study of the Summa Theologica of St. Thomas Aquinas, the decrees of the Council of Trent, and Book VI of Richard Hooker's Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, concludes that "Catholic and Anglican agreed that its substance is contrition, confession, and satisfaction or atonement, but they violently disagreed as to its outward form."2 The extent and necessity of priestly mediation and the doctrine of satisfaction were highly controversial matters.3 Further complicating the repentance theology of the sixteenth century was the Anabaptistical heresy, only briefly popular, which stated that even the unrepentant would finally at some time arrive at salvation.4

1Ibid., pp. 16-17.
3Ibid., pp. 196-99.
4Ibid., p. 205.
It is noteworthy that repentance was a subject which was given significant and generally orthodox treatment not only in the realm of religion but also in the long stream of English literature which had flowered forth in the works of Chaucer, the miracle and morality plays of the late middle ages, and the later domestic tragedies. In "The Persones Tale," Chaucer presented a detailed explanation of repentance, basing his theology on Raymund of Pennafort's *Summa Casuum Poenitentiae*, a thirteenth century Latin tract which had been written as a guide for priests and was well-known in England during the fourteenth century.¹ Chaucer presents contrition, confession, and satisfaction as the three elements necessary for repentance.² Any survey of the miracle and morality plays, which constituted the chief dramatic fare of the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries and which were the root of Elizabethan drama,³ indicates that playgoers were acquainted with medieval


concepts of repentance.¹

The domestic tragedies, dating from 1575-1642, are so much concerned with this great spiritual act that Henry Hitch Adams considers familiarity with contemporary theology just as important to the understanding of these plays as is a knowledge of the capitalistic system for the appreciation of modern drama. The typical domestic tragedy followed a definite pattern: "sin, discovery, repentance, punishment, and expectation of divine mercy."²

"Echoes of the language of the sermons and the tracts were heard on the stages as the domestic tragedies were acted."³ These plays, as well as the authorized homilies, stressed the idea that sincere repentance brought forgiveness and heavenly reward.⁴ The facts that public acknowledgment of sins was popularly recommended rather than confession before a priest and that externals were considered rather important in showing contrition are both deviations from the Catholic heritage and give rise to the great number of "scaffold speeches" in which the

¹Joseph Quincy Adams (ed.), Chief Pre-Shakespearan Dramas (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1924), passim.
³Ibid., p. 25.
⁴Ibid., p. 11.
sinner summarizes his sins, confesses them, forgives enemies, and truly repents. Dramatists often showed the first steps of repentance, but good works as satisfaction were often impossible because the culprit usually was condemned to death. Conversion did not fore­stall the consequences of sin which were often welcomed because they might take the place of punishment after death.¹

In an environment where the virtue of repentance was enunciated formally by the church and informally by literature, Shakespeare lived and wrote. The personal religious views of the dramatist would indeed be interesting and of tremendous significance to this study. However, there is no need to contend that Shakespeare was either a Catholic or a nonconforming Puritan, for E. K. Chambers finds little evidence to support either contention.² He must have been familiar with many of the religious views of his times because the Bible was taught both at home and at school, and attendance at divine services was compulsory.³

¹Ibid., pp. 17-18.
²Chambers, op. cit., p. 15.
Shakespeare's death scenes reveal familiarity with the current literature of holy dying, which was both vast and comprehensive. The "art of dying" was considered the supreme art, and the Catholic deathbed ritual, which had been incorporated into both Anglican and Puritan practice, must have exerted some influence on every Elizabethan family.¹

Shakespeare, whose religious and literary heritage was thoroughly Elizabethan, must have shared the basic ideas concerning repentance—those on which there was agreement—namely, the necessity of contrition, confession, and satisfaction. With keen insight he has captured the elements of this great spiritual act not for the purpose of propounding virtue, but to give his audience an understanding and an appreciation of his characters.

¹Katherine Koller, "Falstaff and the Art of Dying," Modern Language Notes, LX (June, 1945), 384-86.
CHAPTER II

REPENTANCE IN THE COMEDIES

The comedies present a striking similarity to the tragedies in one respect, namely, in the subject matter for repentance, which is sin. However, as is essential to this type of play, the vices are recognized and properly dealt with in order to forestall a tragic ending.

Repentance is linked to the comedies not only through their dramatic nature but also through their source material. The fables, upon which most of the comedies are based, before casually dismissing the sinners, demand penitence of them "or rather a token portion of the full schedule of open confession, repentance of sins, and amendment of life."

In each of the four periods determined by Dowden, one or more of the comedies present a marked conversion, detestation of sin, the desire to make satisfaction, and references to various forms of satisfaction. In addition to these aspects the plays of the first period, "In the


\(^2\) Ibid., p. 132.
Workshop," reveal also the efforts of women in effecting conversion, poorly motivated repentance, sacramental confession, direct acknowledgment of guilt, and man's gracious response to another's repentance. Nevertheless, most of the plays of this period are meager in repentance material as regards both quantity and depth. Since A Midsummer Night's Dream, by its fantastical nature, scarcely admits occasion for repentance, it will be excluded from this study.

The first play of the group, The Comedy of Errors, merits no more than mention. Hazelton Spencer criticizes it for its poorly motivated repentance and concludes that Shakespeare here is far from his best.²

Regarding the conversion of Katherine in The Taming of the Shrew, there is disagreement. It may be that the heroine's shrewishness is just a cloak and not her real nature,³ yet she is greatly changed at the close of the play with mind, heart, and reason subdued

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¹1590 to 1595-96, according to Dowden, op. cit., p. 47.


to her husband.¹

The Two Gentlemen of Verona, a drama of friendship which contains many minor allusions to repentance, presents the hero, Valentine, as ready to give up his lady to Proteus as soon as the latter openly detests his infidelity. At least twice in the play there are examples of a woman trying to convert a man from his inconstancy.

Two specific references to aspects of repentance occur in Act V—penance as satisfaction for sin and the reception of the sacrament of penance. Friar Laurence is referred to as wandering through the woods doing penance when he met Sylvia and Valentine, who are suspected of elopement. Further evidence of this same suspicion is linked with another reference to repentance,

Besides, she did intend confession
At Patrick's cell this even, and there she was ngt.
These likelihoods confirm her flight from hence.²

Proteus, severely rebuked by Valentine for his inconstancy in friendship, acknowledges his guilt, his sorrow, and his readiness to make satisfaction.

My shame and guilt confounds me.
Forgive me, Valentine. If hearty sorrow


²The Two Gentlemen of Verona, V, ii, 41-43.
Be a sufficient ransom for offence,  
I tender't here. I do as truly suffer  
As e'er I did commit.\(^1\)

In Valentine's gracious acceptance of his friend's re-  
pentance, Noble finds his reference to God's forgive-  
ness particularly touching:

Who by repentance is not satisfied  
Is nor of heaven nor earth; for these are pleas'd;  
By penitence th' Eternal's wrath's appeas'd.\(^2\)

The three lords and the king in *Love's Labour's Lost* repent of their folly; and the satisfaction which  
the ladies impose upon the gentlemen for a year and a day comes rather as a surprise at the close of the play climaxing its humor.

In addition to the four aspects of repentance  
common to the comedies of each of Shakespeare's four periods, the plays of the second period, "In the World,"\(^3\) present or suggest particular means of effecting repentance, as well as remorse, moral struggle, the joy of conversion, and repentance indicating the strength of the bond of friendship.

*The Merchant of Venice* presents a few references

\(^1\)ibid., V, iv, 73-77.  
\(^2\)ibid., V, iv, 79-81.  
\(^3\)1595-1596 to 1600-1601, according to Dowden, *op. cit.*, p. 47.
to moral reformation, although Granville-Barker considers the play only a fairy tale. There is no evidence of repentance on the part of Antonio, the Venetian merchant, over his imprudent generosity nor on the part of Shylock concerning his hatred and avarice, although the latter is made to conform to the law.

Professor Stoll believes that Shakespeare's treatment of Shylock is harsh. There is the suggestion that since Antonio really lost nothing it might be appropriate for Shylock to repent and "to bless his daughter and her husband as do other balked fathers in the comedies." Yet to have created such a conversion for Shylock might, on the other hand, have been more humiliating to the Jews than is Shakespeare's treatment of this character.

Most of the references to repentance center about the friendship between Antonio and Bassanio. When it seems that, according to Portia's judgment, Antonio must lose a pound of flesh, he says that he is prepared and that he shall thus be spared the "lingering penance" of "an age of poverty." Immediately

2Harbage, op. cit., p. 138.
3The Merchant of Venice, IV, i, 271.
after this, at the crucial moment, when it seems that the very cutting of the pound of flesh is about to begin, Portia asks Antonio whether he has anything to say. His speech is addressed to Bassanio.

Reptent but you that you shall lose your friend, And he repents not that he pays your debt; Perhaps Bassanio does regret his past irresponsibility, for he says (though in his customary rashness) that he would be willing to sacrifice his life, his wife, and everything else to the Jew in order to save his friend.

When Portia is praised by Lorenzo for her loyalty to her husband, she responds in a way truly becoming to her character.

I never did repent for doing good, Nor shall not now ...  

Most of the repentance in Much Ado About Nothing hinges about the slander of Hero, who, protesting her innocence, indicates that if she is in any way unchaste, she merits only strict judgment, refusal, hatred, torture, and death. Friar Francis suggests an interesting means to effect repentance in regard to her slander. When Hero has fainted immediately after the accusation of unchastity, the friar advises that she be published as dead for he thinks that if she is innocent, such a

1Ibid., IV, i, 278-79.  
2Ibid., III, iv, 10-11.
publication will bring her slanderer to repentance.

Old Leonato, easily convinced of his daughter's wantonness, is apparently influenced by the friar's advice so that when the fifth act opens, he shows that he repents having so mistrusted Hero. When Borachio confesses how Don John incited him to slander the girl, he seems truly repentant.

... My villany they have upon record, which I had rather seal with my death than repeat over to my shame ...

Claudio, whose deception by Borachio's slander caused him to make the accusation against Hero, realizes what evil he has caused through his mistake. Acknowledging his wrong, he says to Leonato,

Impose me to what penance your invention Can lay upon my sin. Yet sinn'd I not But in mistaking.

Pedro also acknowledges the same mistake and declares his willingness to undergo any satisfaction for the sake of Leonato. Claudio brings out the distinction between material sin and formal sin, here admitting the former. The guilt of rash judgment does not seem to occur to anyone.

1*Much Ado About Nothing*, V, i, 246-49.

2Ibid., V, i, 282-84.
The penance which Leonato imposes upon Claudio is that he publicize Hero's innocence, put an epitaph on her tomb and sing it that night, and in the morning marry his niece.

Noting that the character of Claudio is often distorted by critics, Hardin Craig states that Shakespeare depicts him as an attractive young lover who is deeply contrite once he becomes aware of his mistake. He expresses his repentance and his readiness for expiation. In giving himself as a husband to a relative of Leonato's (a procedure more intelligible to Elizabethans than to moderns), he shows a true spirit of generosity.¹

Although As You Like It lacks depth, both Oliver and Duke Frederick are converted from their envy. When Oliver is asked whether he is the one who so often tried to kill his brother, his answer indicates that he has truly "put on the new man" and is experiencing the joy of conversion.

'Twas I. But 'tis not I! I do not shame
To tell you what I was, since my conversion
So sweetly tastes, being the thing I am.²

In the closing act Jaques de Boys gives an

¹Craig, op. cit., p. 120.
²As You Like It, IV, iii, 136-38.
account of Duke Fredericks reformation, which reveals the means of his conversion and stresses the element of appropriate satisfaction. The Duke, who had come to the woods to slay his brother,

... meeting with an old religious man, After some questions with him, was converted Both from his enterprise and from the world, His crown bequeathing to his banish'd brother, And all their lands restor'd to them again That were with him exil'd. 1

Jaques, the malcontent, remarking that Frederick has entered religious life, refers to him and to Oliver as convertites.

Sir Toby Belch, in Twelfth Night, refers to penance jestingly when he speaks of the trick in which Malvolio has been convinced of Olivia's love. He says the joke will be continued for the pleasure of the pranksters and for Malvolio's penance.

Early in the play Sir Toby is advised by Malvolio,

'You must amend your drunkenness,' 2 and in Act V the former, having been wounded by Sebastian, renounces drunkenness and casts off the foolish knight, Aguecheek. 3

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1 Ibid., V, iv, 166-71.
2 Twelfth Night, II, v, 81.
3 Craig, op. cit., p. 160.
Shakespeare's third period, "Out of the Depths," contains an extensive amount of superficial talk about repentance and restitution, supplied chiefly by Falstaff. The period presents a slight reference to the spiritual peril of the state of impenitence and culminates in the first comedy of special significance to this study, namely, Measure for Measure, a play which not only mentions the sacrament of penance, but also stresses the importance of repentance in preparing for death.

The few allusions to conversion contained in The Merry Wives of Windsor center about Ford and Falstaff. Ford, chided by Page for his suspicion of his wife, acknowledges his fault and says that he suffers for it. He asks pardon of his wife for having doubted her fidelity, and promises to trust her.

Repentance for Falstaff is as superficial as is his character, although in whatever plays he appears he is sufficiently glib about it. He refers to his disguisal as Mother Prat as a transformation, concluding his speech with,

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1601 to 1608, according to Dowden, *op. cit.*, p. 47.

wind were but long enough to say my prayers, I would repent.\(^1\)

but Sir John is never depicted practicing the virtue about which he prates so much. There is a jesting allusion to restitution when he explains that he will bequeath his horns to the women's husbands.

Why, now is Cupid a child of conscience; he makes restitution.\(^2\)

Finally he mentions his guilt of mind and the fairies pinch him as punishment for his sins.

Falstaff played especially to the lower groups, and his lines are replete with material which appealed directly to them. From his speeches one quickly infers that repentance must have been common talk.

In *All's Well That Ends Well*, Bertram at last asks the King to pardon his "high-repent'd blames,"\(^3\) namely, his haughty reluctance to marry Helena and his desertion and infidelity following their marriage. He further explains,

That she whom all men prais'd, and whom myself, Since I have lost, have lov'd, was in mine eye, The dust that did offend it.\(^4\)

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\(^1\) *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, IV, v, 104-06.


\(^3\) *All's Well That Ends Well*, V, iii, 36.

He is won by Helena's devotion and by the fulfillment of conditions he had previously imposed.

Bertram's sudden transformation into an ideal husband is rather incredible to the modern mind. However, such a conversion was a literary convention of medieval and Elizabethan times, and, according to Lawrence, it provides no reason to doubt but that their lives would be happy.¹

In the final play of the period, Measure for Measure, Battenhouse finds "a cycle of action which participates by analogy in the Biblical cycle of sin, law, sentence, intervention, faith, suffering, and reconciliation."² Aspects of repentance which are brought out plainly are the importance of conversion as preparation for death, the formality of confession, the mediation of a priest, a supernatural motive, detestation of sin, and the desire to make satisfaction.

Angelo, having commanded that Claudio be executed as a fornicator, demands that his confessor be summoned to prepare him for death. That repentance was considered


a necessary part of preparation for death is further
brought out in the Duke's concern about Barnardine,
whose head is to be substituted for Claudio's. When the
Duke asks whether Barnardine has conducted himself peni-
tently, the Provost says that he is completely indifferent
about everything. Concerning him there occurs an
archaic reference to the forgiving of sin when the Duke
says,

A present shrift . . . 1

The formality of confession is used as the means
of bringing out Juliet's repentance. Visited by the Duke,
who is disguised as a friar, she tells him that she re-
pents of the sin and with patience bears the shame. Al-
though the sin was committed mutually, the Duke says that
her share of guilt is greater than Claudio's. She as-
sents. Then the Duke becomes somewhat theological, prob-
ing into the cause of her repentance,

I'll teach you how you shall arraign your conscience,
And try your penitence, if it be sound
Or hollowly put on. 2

Juliet's motive seems to be supernatural.

I do repent me as it is an evil,

1 Measure for Measure, IV, ii, 223-24.
2 Ibid., II, iii, 21-23.
And take the shame with joy.¹

Detestation of sin and the desire to make satisfaction are stressed in regard to Angelo whom Isabella accuses of being a murderer, a virgin-violator, and a hypocrite. Although he is told of the bed-trick, he does not seem to believe it. However, when the Duke’s identity is revealed, Angelo confesses. He asks that his trial be his confession and begs only for "immediate sentence" and death. Rebuked by Escalus, Angelo gives further expression to his repentance,

I am sorry that such sorrow I procure;
And so deep sticks it in my penitent heart
That I crave death more willingly than mercy.
'Tis my deserving, and I do entreat it.²

Harbage says that Angelo’s guilt consists in "wayward intentions" and that he truly repents.³

Dinsmore notes that the later comedies are rich in repentance and interprets this fact as reflective of the dramatist's own quest for "a reconciliation with the world for his own soul's good."⁴

Shakespeare, "On the

¹Ibid., II, iii, 35-36.
²Ibid., V, i, 479-82.
³Harbage, op. cit., p. 91.
Heights,"\(^1\) depicts the transforming influence of a woman, feigned repentance, the relief afforded by confessing, remorse, confidence in God, shame, reconciliation, sacramental confession and its fruits, the power for moral reformation latent in the evil consequences of sin, the importance of conversion at death, restitution, and the necessity of prayer for obtaining the grace of repentance.

The ten-line scene which occurs in Act IV of *Pericles*, the first comedy of Shakespeare's last period, seems to exist solely for the purpose of indicating the conversions wrought by the presence of Marina in the brothel both by her words and by her beautiful example of virtue. Says the first gentleman,

> I'll do anything now that is virtuous, but I am out of the road of rutting for ever.\(^2\)

Repentance is plainly expressed though no inward struggle for conversion is set forth. However, the instrument of repentance, Marina's virtuous life, is depicted.

In *Cymbeline* the dramatic roles of Iachimo and Posthumus reveal many facets of the virtue under consideration here. Iachimo presents feigned repentance,

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\(^1\)608 to 1611 or 1613, according to Dowden, *op. cit.* , pp. 47-48.

\(^2\)*Pericles*, IV, v, 9-10.
the relief afforded by confession, and the desire to
make satisfaction, while the role of Posthumus contains
remorse, the thought of death as a penance, trust in the
mercy of God, the desire to make satisfaction, the ex-
pression of shame, and true reconciliation.

In the first act when Iachimo finds that Imogen
refuses to believe his lies and to accept his advances,
he tries to make amends by pretending that he meant
merely to test her fidelity to her husband. She seems
to accept his amends even asking him not to leave on the
morrow. Late in the play the crafty villain, when asked
how he procured the ring, finds relief in his confession,

I am glad to be constraint'd to utter that
Which torments me to conceal.¹

Further expressing his repentance, he says his "heart
drops blood" and his "false spirits quail to remember."²
He nearly faints as he laments his evil deeds. Finally,
after the reconciliation between husband and wife,
Iachimo kneels to Posthumus, offering his life in satis-
faction. Posthumus forgives him, admonishing him to
show his conversion by deeds.

... Live
And deal with others better.³

¹Cymbeline, V, v, 141-42.
²Ibid., V, v, 148-49.
³Ibid., V, v, 419-20.
Act V opens with repentance on the part of Posthumus for having commanded Imogen's death. There are evidences of his repentance both in the scenes of battle and in the prison scenes. He finds his conscience weighed down; life to him is distasteful; he looks to death as a penance for his sins; he recognizes the boundless mercy of God; and he acknowledges his willingness, even eagerness to make satisfaction.

... My conscience, thou art fetter'd
More than my shanks and wrists. You good gods,
give me
The penitent instrument to pick that bolt,
Then free for ever! Is't enough I am sorry?
So children temporal fathers do appease;
Gods are more full of mercy. Must I repent,
I cannot do it better than in gyves,
Desir'd more than constrain'd. To satisfy,
If of my freedom 'tis the main part, take
No stricter render of me than my all.

Posthumus' outburst of repentance is more meaningful than any cold moralizing.

When a man has behaved like a wicked fool he had better not be too philosophic in repentance. Posthumus, stamping and bellowing in his despair and calling for the street dogs to be set on him, is a far more attractive figure than Posthumus reasoning out retribution with the gods.

The twenty lines of chatter about the poison are dramatically designed to let Posthumus stand aside, quiet

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1Lawrence, op. cit., p. 194.
2Cymbeline, V, iv, 8-17.
3Granville-Barker, op. cit., p. 493.
and ashamed. He cannot face Imogen, but she watches, and, being a woman, she understands. All their love hangs in the balance of the tender embrace she gives him.

And what she says is one of those odd humorous things which make reconciliation easy, and with which Shakespeare knew so well how to temper feelings too secret and too sacred for fine words...

"Why did you throw your wedded lady from you? Think that you are upon a rock, and now Throw me again."

This is her forgiveness; he is man enough to take it; and his amending is pledged with "Hang there like fruit, my soul, Till the tree die!"

This play is the only comedy containing a reference to repentance for evil left undone. When Cornelius reports that the Queen of Cymbeline died repentant that

The evils she hatch'd were not effected, Cymbeline instantaneously recognizes how he has been misled by her beauty and flattery.

There is also the unique allusion to satisfaction preceding evil when Belarius confesses having kidnapped Cymbeline's two young sons, but expresses no repentance, explaining that the punishment had preceded the deed.

The Winter's Tale contains an allusion to sacramental confession and plainly stresses satisfaction, the redemptive influence of a noble woman, and the transforming

1Ibid., p. 494.

2Cymbeline, V, v, 60.
power of sin's natural consequences. The reference to repentance which occurs in Act I de Groot finds indicative of the sacrament of penance. Leontes likens the renewing effect of the confidence he takes in Camillo to the purification and peace which sacramental confession brings.

... I have trusted thee, Camillo, with all the nearest things to my heart, as well my chamber-councils, wherein (priest-like) thou hast cleans'd my bosom. I from thee departed thy penitent reform'd.

Although Leontes' conversion is of most importance, Paulina deserves mention for her ironical rebuke. She chides Leontes for his suspicions and appears so disgusted with him that she says he can't be forgiven and that there is nothing for him but despair. She mentions here various forms of satisfaction—prayer, fasting, endurance of solitude, cold, and storms—all of which she says could not bring the favor of the gods. Perhaps the lady deliberately exaggerates in an attempt to show the king the gravity of his offences. At any rate it would be unfair to attribute to her the belief that the divine mercy can be exhausted. When one of the lords chides her for her boldness in speech to Leontes, she says that

she is sorry and that she repents of all her faults once she recognizes them. Her brief speech of apology to Leontes for having reminded him of what he should forget is ironic in tone and is certainly directed to his conversion.

When the chief penitent of the play, Leontes, in a passion of jealousy comparable to Othello's, accuses Hermione of infidelity, she courageously and practically believes that her own patience will be the redemptive instrument which will bring her husband to repentance. Heroically she bears with his grim suspicions. Even after Leontes hears Apollo's oracle declaring the innocence of Hermione, Polixenes, and Camillo, it is not until word is brought of his son's death and his queen swoons that he is touched, whereupon he asks pardon of Apollo and resolves to be reconciled with Polixenes, to woo his queen anew, and to recall Camillo. The faithful Camillo, in Bohemia with Polixenes begging his king to permit him to return to Leontes, refers to the Sicilian King as repentant, but Polixenes reveals that he doubts Leontes' conversion.

Act V opens with Cleomenes condoling with Leontes, who, after sixteen years of expiatory prayer and good

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1Dinsmore, op. cit., p. 95.
works,\(^1\) is still overwhelmed with remorse. The Sicilian lord tells him that his satisfaction has exceeded his sin and begs him to forget the wrong he has done, reminding him of God's promise to reward repentance by forgiving and forgetting the evil.

Sir, you have done enough, and have perform'd
A saintlike sorrow. No fault could you make
Which you have not redeem'd; indeed, paid down
More penitence than done trespass. At the last,
Do as the heavens have done: forget your evil;
With them, forgive yourself.\(^2\)

Leontes reveals that through the instrumentality of Hermione's heroic patience he is moved to the remembrance of his wrong.

... Whilst I remember
Her and her virtues, I cannot forget
My blemishes in them, and so still think of
The wrong I did myself...\(^3\)

Holbrook considers Leontes' "almost perfunctory amends," revealed in the final speech of the play, as indicative of his superficiality.\(^4\) Dinsmore, nevertheless, believes that his nature has been thoroughly purged and that the play clearly demonstrates that the sinner may be converted by patience, purified by sorrow,

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\(^1\)Ibid., p. 96.

\(^2\)The Winter's Tale, V, i, 1-6.

\(^3\)Ibid., V, i, 6-9.

\(^4\)Holbrook, op. cit., p. 178.
and finally forgiven.  

Whether *The Tempest* represents, as E. K. Chambers\(^2\) and others\(^3\) believe, Shakespeare's own personal victory in life, whether it mirrors the mind of the great dramatist, depicting his ideal character,\(^4\) or whether it is a play in which his dramatic powers fall short,\(^5\) it, nevertheless, ranks with *Measure for Measure*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Winter's Tale* in its treatment of repentance. Aspects of this virtue which stand out particularly are the importance of repentance at death, prayer as a means of obtaining the grace of conversion, and the providence of God in permitting evils in order to effect good. Remorse and restitution are also included in the play, but neither of these aspects is developed at length.

The drama opens and closes depicting the necessity of repentance at death. During the storm which

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\(^1\)Dinsmore, *op. cit.*, p. 96.  
\(^4\)Dinsmore, *op. cit.*, p. 97.  
ushers in the play and makes death seem imminent, the audience learns that Gonzalo, the King, and the prince pray. Finally, when Prospero realizes that his life work is done, he desires but to see his daughter's marriage solemnized and then to retire to Milan to prepare for death.

Prospero's epilogue, which Semper believes is Shakespeare disclosing how he himself desired to die penitent, reveals man's need for grace at the hour of death and the power of prayer in obtaining God's mercy and forgiveness.

And my ending is despair
Unless I be relied by prayer,
Which pierces so that it assaults
Mercy itself and frees all faults.

The instrument designed to effect repentance in Alonso, Antonio, and Sebastian is the magic power exercised by Prospero, who causes all creatures to be stirred up against them for their sin. Although Schücking objects strenuously to the symbolical explanation of the play or any of its parts, Dinsmore's allegorical interpretation presents Prospero as a figure of Providence, who, by the apparent evils He permits, brings souls to

1Semper, op. cit., p. 595.
2The Tempest, Epilogue, 15-18.
3Schücking, op. cit., p. 244.
repentance drawing good from evil.  

The storm, set in motion by the command of Prospero, brings shipwreck to Alonso and the seeming death of his son. After Ariel speaks to him of his misdeeds, the loss of his son, and threatening misfortunes, Alonso stands and stares until the moment comes in which he reveals recognition of his guilt.

O, it is monstrous, monstrous!
Methought the billows spoke and told me of it;
The winds did sing it to me; and the thunder,
That deep and dreadful organ pipe, pronounc’d
The name of Prosper. It did bass my trespass.

Alonso plainly makes restitution and begs pardon of Prospero.

Thy dukedom I resign and do entreat
Thou pardon me my wrongs.

In the opening of Act V, when Ariel tells Prospero that Alonso, Sebastian, and Antonio are sorrowful and dismayed, Prospero’s decision to break the spell is suggestive of the mercy of God.

... They being penitent,
The sole drift of my purpose doth extend
Not a frown further.

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2The Tempest, III, iii, 95-99.
3Ibid., V, i, 118-19.
4Ibid., V, i, 28-30.
Caliban, whose amorality may free him from culpability, suggests self-reformation when, in his final speech, he declares,

\[ \text{... I'll be wise hereafter,} \]
\[ \text{And seek for grace,} \]

and when he reproaches himself for having been infatuated with Trinculo and Stephano. His speech lacks significance, and the audience is indisposed to credit it.

The emphasis placed on the great virtue of repentance gives to *The Tempest* an extremely Christian tone. Semper, in his subjective interpretation of this drama, considers it a farewell to magic that is art and a welcome to the "finer magic of repentance and prayer."\(^3\)

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\(^2\) *The Tempest*, V, i, 294-95.

\(^3\) Semper, *op. cit.*, p. 595.
CHAPTER III

REPENTANCE IN THE HISTORIES

Although the histories present few examples of complete repentance, many aspects of the virtue grow out of the intrigue which characterizes these plays. The following discussion is limited to Dowden's first two periods, which include all the plays of this type except Henry VIII.

The histories which Shakespeare wrote "In the Workshop" are similar to those he wrote "In the World" in that one or more of the plays of each period present true conversion, feigned repentance, promise of amendment, remorse, restitution, satisfaction, and the importance of repentance in preparation for death. Besides these aspects the plays of the first period reveal confession, stifled remorse, prayer, moral struggle, the striking lack of repentance, and reference to this spiritual act as a taunt—all of which occur in the Henry VI trilogy. In the Richard plays occur references to sacramental confession and to repentance as preparation for the reception of the Holy Eucharist.

2 Henry VI presents many aspects of this virtue centering about the characters, Eleanor, Gloucester, Beaufort, the Armourer, Suffolk, and Cade. The last
three of these are unimportant. The Armourer, dying in combat with one who has accused him of treason, says, 

... I confess, I confess treason.¹

Suffolk states his refusal to be moved to remorse by the lieutenant who accuses him of many crimes and threatens him with death. Stifled remorse is depicted in Jack Cade who hears the pleading of Say, whom he is about to behead.

I feel remorse in myself with his words; but I'll bridle it . . . ²

Eleanor is shown undergoing a kind of public penance. Although Watt and Holzknecht speak of the Duchess as repentant,³ there is no clear indication that she accepts her sentence as a form of satisfaction for her ambition. It is probably merely a punishment from which there is no escape.

Several aspects of repentance are linked with the name of Gloucester. The king laments the lack of remorse in those who arrest him, and the second murderer indicates his own sudden and overwhelming repentance in the line,

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¹² Henry VI, II, iii, 96.

²Ibid., IV, vii, 111-12.

O that it were to do! What have we done?\(^1\)
The king, suspecting that someone has murdered Gloucester, asks God to forgive his suspicions if they be false.

Prayer, remorse, and moral struggle are aspects of repentance brought out in the apparent final impenitence of Cardinal Beaufort. According to the account of Vaux, the cardinal seems to be haunted by Gloucester's ghost and whispers,

The secrets of his overcharged soul.\(^2\)

Struggling with the movements of conscience the cardinal exclaims,

O, torture me no more! I will confess.\(^3\)

The king's prayer for the dying cardinal, although his inherent weakness renders it unimpressive, does reveal the Elizabethan awareness of the strength of temptation at the hour of death and of the necessity for repentance. The king asks for him not only the grace of repentance, but also the fruit of that virtue, which is peace. He again begs God to forgive the cardinal who fails to give a sign of repentance.

Lord Card'nal, if thou think'st on heaven's bliss,

\(^1\)Henry VI, III, ii, 3.
\(^2\)Ibid., III, ii, 376.
\(^3\)Ibid., III, iii, 11.
Hold up thy hand, make signal of thy hope.
He dies and makes no sign. O God, forgive him!  

In *3 Henry VI*, York, Clifford, and Warwick meet death without remorse, and Henry VI, whose conscience bothers him about his ill gotten crown, dies with a prayer which, though in itself direct and simple, remains dramatically ineffective in the mouth of so weak a monarch.

O, God forgive my sins and pardon thee!  

The references to repentance concern also five other characters—Margaret, the father and the son who kill each other, and Clifford and Warwick. York, meeting death in conflict with Margaret's army, denounces this queen as being remorseless.

The incidents of the father who has killed his son and a son who has killed his father show that each repents of his error. However, formal guilt is lacking. The incidents seem calculated to bring out in bold relief the turbulence of Henry's reign. If anyone is at fault it is the weak king in whom these incidents beget ineffectual laments.

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3*Henry VI*, V, vi, 60.
Terms of repentance have a unique usage when Richard, Edward, and Warwick find Clifford dead on the battlefield. Thinking that he may be only feigning death or perhaps that he is still able to understand them, they taunt him by urging him to repent.

Rich. Clifford, ask mercy, and obtain no grace.
Edw. Clifford, repent in bootless penitence.
War. Clifford, devise excuses for thy faults.¹

When Act V opens, the brothers have fallen into dissension and Clarence has joined Warwick against Edward and Gloucester. However, when Clarence meets his brothers at Coventry, he refuses to fight against them and, though his deceitful nature detracts from the weight of his statements, he plainly expresses repentance for having joined Warwick against the Red Rose faction and promises amendment.

I am so sorry for my trespass made
That, to deserve well at my brother's hands,
I here proclaim myself thy mortal foe;
With resolution, whereasoe'er I meet thee
(As I will meet thee if thou stir abroad),
To plague thee for thy foul misleading me.
And so, proud-hearted Warwick, I defy thee
And to my brother turn my blushing cheeks.
Pardon me, Edward! I will make amends;
And, Richard, do not frown upon my faults,
For I will henceforth be no more unconstant.²

When Edward promises to pardon Warwick's treachery if

¹Ibid., II, vi, 69-71.
²Ibid., V, i, 92-102.
he will acknowledge him as king, the latter says that rather Edward should acknowledge him as patron "and be penitent."¹

¹ Henry VI contains prayers for mercy, poorly motivated repentance, and the element of restitution. The dying Salisbury, shot by a French sniper,² prays,

O Lord have mercy on us, wretched sinners!³

and his companion utters a similar prayer.

Richard III presents feigned contrition and also a definite lack of repentance on the part of the villainous monarch himself. Positive aspects of the virtue included in this play are contrition, remorse, restitution, and the importance of repentance at death.

Richard, a demonic character,⁴ a man untouched by scruples regarding morality,⁵ refers to his freedom from remorse when he speaks of

These eyes, which never shed remorseful tear.⁶

¹Ibid., V, i, 27.
²Watt, op. cit., p. 126.
³Henry VI, I, iv, 70.
⁵Richard G. Moulton, Shakespeare as a Dramatic Thinker (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1921), pp. 36-37.
⁶Richard III, I, ii, 155.
and when planning to murder the little princes he remarks,

Tear-falling pity dwells not in this eye.¹

Richard speaks of wetting Henry VI's grave with his "repentant tears,"² and Anne says she is glad to see him "so penitent."³ However, he is only dissembling in order to win and wed Anne. In the following scene, when he braves the curses of Queen Margaret, he again feigns repentance saying,

She hath had too much wrong, and I repent
My part thereof that I have done to her.⁴

When Richard has had his two little nephews killed, he offers himself as husband for his niece, the Princess Elizabeth. Following a few philosophical lines to Queen Anne, which he means to be interpreted as signifying his repentance, he suggests his marriage to Elizabeth as a means of making amends.

Look, what is done cannot be now amended.
Men shall deal unadvisedly sometimes,
Which after-hours gives leisure to repent.
If I did take the kingdom from your sons,
To make amends I'll give it to your daughter.⁵

¹Ibid., IV, ii, 65.
²Ibid., I, ii, 215.
³Ibid., I, ii, 220.
⁴Ibid., I, iii, 307-08.
⁵Ibid., IV, iv, 291-95.
Richard, striving further to persuade Anne to win for him her daughter's love, says he intends to repent.

In the final scene Richard is made more human by the revolts of conscience which Small says the ghosts represent. However, Stoll considers the appearance of these spirits primitive and superstitious and not the voice of conscience, and Tillyard notes that the scene of the ghosts which follows Richmond's solemn prayer is patterned on the morality plays. Richard, like Judas, rants and rather than becoming more human becomes less so and a symbol of diabolism. It seems that Shakespeare meant to bring out the reproaches of conscience, for the villain exclaims,

O coward conscience, how dost thou afflict me!

and

My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
And every tongue brings in a several tale,
And every tale condemns me for a villain.

Almost thirty lines show remorse gnawing at his

1 Small, op. cit., pp. 67-68.
3 Tillyard, op. cit., p. 208.
4 Ibid., p. 211.
5 Richard III, V, iii, 180.
6 Ibid., V, iii, 194-96.
soul. This is one of God's instruments goading the sinner to repentance. It is a grace—one which evidently Richard chose to reject as indicated in his speech shortly before the fatal encounter with Richard.

Let not our babbling dreams affright our souls;
For conscience is a word that cowards use,
Devis'd at first to keep the strong in awe.
Our strong arms be our conscience, swords our law!¹

Clarence, earlier in the play, is tormented by his crimes much as Richard is at the end. He does not detest them, but acknowledges to the jail keeper that he has done wrong. He prays and recognizes that he must make satisfaction.

O God! if my deep pray'rs cannot appease thee,
But thou wilt be aveng'd on my misdeeds,
Yet execute thy wrath in me alone.
O, spare my guiltless wife and my poor children!²

Later one of his murderers counsels him,

Make peace with God, for you must die, my lord.³

Restitution is mentioned in the conversation between the two murderers. The second who is troubled by his conscience says,

How fain (like Pilate) would I wash my hands
Of this most grievous guilty murther!⁴

¹Ibid., V, iii, 309-12.
²Ibid., I, iv, 69-72.
³Ibid., I, iv, 255.
⁴Ibid., I, iv, 278-79.
He tells the first murderer, who is unrepentant, to take the fee, and adds,

For I repent me that the Duke is slain.¹

Hastings shows the need for repentance at death when Richard suddenly orders his execution. Within a few lines there are two references to sacramental confession. Hastings says,

O, now I need the priest that spake to me!²

Ratcliff, one of those responsible for the execution, bids the victim,

Make a short shrift ...³

Tyrrel mentions the remorse of Dighton and Forrest, whom he suborned to kill Edward's two sons and who he says

Melted with tenderness and mild compassion,
Wept like two children in their death's sad story.⁴

When Buckingham, once Richard's second self, faces execution, he regrets having been the villain's accomplice in so much wickedness and acknowledges that he is receiving his due.

¹Ibid., I, iv, 284.
²Ibid., III, iv, 86.
³Ibid., III, iv, 94.
⁴Ibid., IV, iii, 7-8.
Wrong hath but wrong, and blame the due of blame.¹

Edward IV, seeing his own death approaching, repents that he ordered Clarence's death and chides himself for having done so.² As Tillyard points out, the great men of this play die aware of their guilt and considerate of others, while the main characters of ³Henry VI die defiant and remorseless.³

Richard II provides no examples of complete repentance, but several aspects are treated including an imperfect type of satisfaction. Mowbray, summoned by King Richard, acknowledges having plotted against His Majesty's life and says he confessed it before the last time he received the Holy Eucharist. This brings out a point of Catholic doctrine--the necessity of purifying the soul by repentance before receiving the Holy Eucharist.

Remorse is mentioned in connection with several characters. Gaunt laments having had a part in Woodstock's death. Sir Pierce of Exton, who killed Richard because he thought that Henry IV desired it, is also tortured by remorse.

¹Ibid., V, i, 29.
²Tillyard, op. cit., p. 205.
³Ibid., p. 204.
O, would the deed were good!
For now the devil, that told me I did well,
Says that this deed is chronicled in hell.¹

The necessity of confession for removing guilt is shown in Bolingbroke's counsel to Mowbray, who is about to be banished for having misappropriated funds and plotted the death of the Duke of Gloucester.

Confess thy treasons ere thou fly the realm.
Since thou hast far to go, bear not along
The clogging burthen of a guilty soul.²

Richard gives one indication of impenitence and another of the resolve to repent. Northumberland urges him to read, as a confession, the accusations against him. He protests,

Fiend, thou torments me ere I come to hell!³

Speaking to his queen in the final act, Richard, deposed and being led to the tower, seems to resolve to atone for his evil deeds.

Our holy lives must win a new world's crown,
Which our profane hours here have stricken down.⁴

This purpose of amendment is probably prompted by the facts that he has nothing more to lose in this life and that death seems inevitable.

¹Richard II, V, v, 114-16.
²Ibid., I, iii, 198-200.
³Ibid., IV, i, 270.
⁴Ibid., V, i, 24-25.
There is also the case of Aumerle's feigned repentance when danger to his own life moves him to plead abjectly for Bolingbroke's pardon.\(^1\) With clear insight York states that this penitence is born of fear.

At the close of the play, King Henry IV laments that a remark of his has caused Exton to murder Richard, but actually he realizes that he is guilty, for in satisfaction he promises to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, stating his purpose thus,

To wash away this blood off from my guilty hand.\(^2\)

Henry, instead of offering to give up the throne in atonement for Richard's death, chooses a form of satisfaction not at all consonant with his crime. His repentance is not genuine.

Repentance in _King John_ centers about the death of Arthur who, having been frightened after Hubert threatened to put out his eyes, leaped from the castle walls and was killed. John speaks of the English noblemen who believe that he has ordered Arthur's death.

They burn in indignation. I repent.\(^3\)

The king, trying to explain that Hubert had misinterpreted

\(^1\)Moulton, _op. cit._, p. 18.

\(^2\)Richard II, V, vi, 50.

\(^3\)King John, IV, ii, 103.
his words and signs, reveals his remorse nevertheless.

Nay, in the body of this fleshly land,
This kingdom, this confine of blood and breath,
Hostility and civil tumult reigns
Between my conscience and my cousin's death.¹

The Prince Hal plays, the only histories of Shakespeare's second period, show several distinct aspects of repentance, particularly the prince's promises of reformation, Falstaff's humorous references to mortification and conversion, the idea of avoiding occasions of sin, and encouragement to moral regeneration.

Repentance in 1 Henry IV concerns Hal's proposed conversion and the humor of Falstaff's reference to the virtue. The young prince tells his father that his reformation will be sensational.

And, like bright metal on a sullen ground,
My reformation, glitt'ring o'er my fault,
Shall show more goodly and attract more eyes
Than that which hath no foil to set it off.
I'll so offend to make offence a skill,
Redeeming time when men think least I will.²

He assures the king that he is falsely charged with many things, but he begs that for his true submission he be pardoned those things in which he actually has been at fault. As this conversation continues, Hal promises with frankness and respect,

¹Ibid., IV, ii, 245-48.
²1 Henry IV, I, ii, 236-41.
I shall hereafter, my thrice-gracious lord,
Be more myself.1

When the king goes so far as to say that he believes Hal
may even let himself be bribed by Hotspur, the prince
shows his mettle, denounces the tongues which have given
the king such thoughts, and declares,

I will redeem all this on Percy's head
And, in the closing of some glorious day,
Be bold to tell you that I am your son,
When I will wear a garment all of blood,
And stain my favours in a bloody mask,
Which, wash'd away, shall scour my shame with it.2

In the closing act when Hal realizes the gravity of the
rebels' threats, he acknowledges the impropriety of his
past conduct.

For my part, I may speak it to my shame,
I have a truant been to chivalry;3

The play has an element of humor, much of which
springs from Falstaff's jesting references to his sins
and his garrulity about repentance.4 This taverner, in
speaking to Hal, who he says is "able to corrupt a saint,"5
declares,

1Ibid., III, ii, 92-93.
2Ibid., III, ii, 132-37.
3Ibid., V, i, 93-94.
4Koller, op. cit., p. 385.
51 Henry IV, I, ii, 102.
I must give over this life, and I will give it over! By the Lord, an I do not, I am a villain! I'll be damn'd for never a king's son in Christendom.¹

Hal, using words which Shakespeare may have known from the Genevan Bible, the "Homily on Repentance," or common prayers,² says to Falstaff in jest,

I see a good amendment of life in thee—from praying to purse-taking.³

After the Gadshill episode, Falstaff says he is withering and his patter about repentance seems linked to the thought of death.

... Well, I'll repent, and that suddenly, while I am in some liking. I shall be out of heart shortly, and then I shall have no strength to repent.⁴

Referring to Bardolph's red nose, the chewet says,

Do thou amend thy face, and I'll amend my life ... .⁵

Mortification and amendment are related to repentance when Falstaff says,

... If I do grow great, I'll grow less; for I'll purge, and

¹Ibid., I, ii, 107-09.
³Ibid., I, ii, 114-15.
⁴Ibid., III, iii, 5-8.
⁵Ibid., III, iii, 27-28.
leave sack, and live cleanly, as a nobleman should do."

Repentance in 2 Henry IV concerns not only Hal and Falstaff, but also the king. In Act IV, the prince speaks to his dying father, who is asleep. It is after he has placed the crown on his head and accepted the king's consequent rebuke that Hal speaks his deep regret that the king has taken this incident amiss. Acknowledging his wild ways and again referring to his reformation, he says,

"... If I do feign,
O, let me in my present wildness die,
And never live to show th' incredulous world
The noble change that I have purposed!"

Showing that the death of the king is the turning point in his conversion, the prince declares,

"... in his tomb lie my affections,
And with his spirit sadly I survive,
To mock the expectation of the world,
To frustrate prophecies, and to raise out
Rotten opinion, who hath writ me down
After my seeming."

The prince continues his speech, likening his conversion to the turn of the tide.

"The tide of blood in me
Hath proudly flow'd in vanity till now."

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1Ibid., V, iv, 167-70.
22 Henry IV, IV, v, 152-55.
3Ibid., V, ii, 124-29.
Now doth it turn and ebb back to the sea,  
Where it shall mingle with the state of floods  
And flow henceforth in formal majesty.¹

Commanding Falstaff to reform, King Henry V admonishes him regarding the need of mortification as a prelude to the influx of grace and also reminds him of death.

Make less thy body, hence, and more thy grace;  
Leave gormandizing. Know the grave doth gap  
For thee thrice wider than for other men.²

Speaking of the thoroughness of his own reformation, the young king shows his wisdom in cutting himself off even from the occasions of evil.

Presume not that I am the thing I was;  
For God doth know (so shall the world perceive)  
That I have turn'd away my former self;  
So will I those that kept me company.  
When thou dost hear I am as I have been,  
Approach me, and thou shalt be as thou wast,  
The tutor and the feeder of my riots.  
Till then I banish thee, on pain of death,  
As I have done the rest of my misleaders  
Not to come near our person by ten mile.³

When the prince becomes king, he encourages Falstaff to reform proffering a pension to keep him from evil ways and promising to advance him in proportion to his reformation. Falstaff, too, had been concerned with

¹Ibid., V, ii, 129-33.  
²Ibid., V, v, 56-58.  
³Ibid., V, v, 60-69.
Hal's conversion, and on one occasion wrote to him advising him to repent for having boxed the Lord Chief Justice's ear. The foolish Sir John assures the justice,

... I have check'd him for it, and the young lion repents--marry, not in ashes and sackcloth, but in new silk and old sack.¹

Critics find that variations of the idea of repenting in sack have been used in literature and that in each case the phrase refers to feigned sorrow or repentance.²

The justice who accuses Falstaff of having wronged Hostess Quickly "both in purse and in person,"³ uses some rather sound theology in recommending the restitution he must make.

... Pay her the debt you owe her, and unpay the villany you have done her. The one you may do with sterling money, and the other with current repentance.⁴

The reader is again reminded of repentance as a preparation for death when Doll questions Falstaff,

... when wilt thou leave fighting a-days and foining a-nights, and begin to patch

¹Ibid., I, ii, 220-22.
³2 Henry IV, II, i, 127.
⁴Ibid., II, i, 129-32.
up thine old body for heaven?\textsuperscript{1}

It is interesting to note that Sir John never did prepare for death by repentance, but died even without any of the customary ritual. His death, as described by the hostess of the Boar's Head Tavern, seems ironically appropriate.\textsuperscript{2}

The death of Henry IV might have provided a real study of repentance. In his last talk with his son he elaborates on the "bypaths and indirect crook'd ways"\textsuperscript{3} by which he gained the crown. He closes with the couplet,

\begin{quote}
How I came by the crown, O God forgive,  
And grant it may with thee in true peace live!\textsuperscript{4}
\end{quote}

He realizes the guilt of his single ambition and in an effort to ease his conscience has resolved to make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land.\textsuperscript{5}

When \textit{Henry V} opens, the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Bishop of Ely speak of Hal's sudden reformation. The Archbishop uses the figure of a flood to describe this sudden conversion, while the Bishop compares his

\begin{footnotes}
\item[1]Ibid., II, iv, 251-53.
\item[3]\textit{Henry IV}, IV, v, 185.
\item[4]Ibid., IV, v, 219-20.
\item[5]Moulton, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 16-17.
\end{footnotes}
fine character to the strawberry which ripens under the nettle and to the summer grass which grows quickly at night.

When Cambridge, Scroop, and Grey are accused of their treachery and sentenced to death, each gives expression to repentance. Scroop and Grey consider death the price of the king's forgiveness. Cambridge admits his treachery and begs God and the king to pardon him. Henry, in condemning them, prays that God will grant them sincere repentance.

Henry refuses to provide for his own ransom from the French although Montjoy threatens that he shall repent his having failed to do so. Henry goes on to brag about the strength of the English and then asks God to forgive him his boast, saying that he must repent. He also says of the French who feel confident of victory before the Battle of Agincourt,

Besides, they are our outward consciences,
And preachers to us all, admonishing
That we should dress us fairly for our end.¹

Charged with the responsibility for the souls of those in war, Henry states that the care of one's soul is an individual responsibility, and again the death preparation is made plain.

¹Henry V, IV, i, 8-10.
Therefore should every soldier in the wars do as every sick man in his bed--wash every mote out of his conscience . . .

The lines having the most bearing on repentance are uttered by Henry just before the Battle of Agincourt in what Moulton calls "an agony of penitence--not for his own sins, but for his father's, which may be visited upon him." His father's guilt in gaining the crown disturbs him, and in prayer he lists the ways in which he has attempted to make satisfaction. He has given Richard's body a better burial and has wept over it; yearly he pays five hundred poor persons to pray twice daily for pardon of the crime; he has built two chantries where priests pray for Richard's soul; and he resolves to do more. Yet he has spiritual perception enough to know that all this satisfaction misses the mark. His penitence is imperfect so long as he fails to restore the crown to its rightful heirs.

Though all that I can do is nothing worth, Since that my penitence comes after all, Imploring pardon.  

Again the death preparation is mentioned when the Lord Constable sends word by Montjoy advising Henry

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1Ibid., IV, i, 189-91.
2Moulton, op. cit., pp. 28-29.
3Henry V, IV, i, 320-22.
to remind his followers of repentance that they may be ready for death.

Kittredge finds the reformation of Hal dramatically weak. To him Prince Hal and King Henry V are two persons so different that the latter could not have developed from the former.¹

¹Robert W. Babcock, "Mr. Dover Wilson, the Critics and Falstaff," *Shakespeare Association Bulletin*, XIX (October, 1944), 182.
Although the tragedies seldom present a complete development of repentance, they do depict a number of extremely interesting cases as regards this study.

Aaron, the villain in *Titus Andronicus*, considers repentance an act of weakness,

I am no baby, I, that with base prayers I should repent the evils I have done.\(^1\)

and he repents any good he may have done.

If one good deed in all my life I did, I do repent it from my very soul.\(^2\)

In *Romeo and Juliet*, several casual references to this virtue center about the slaying of Mercutio and Tybalt, and late in the play Romeo asks pardon of the latter when he proposes to cut off his own youth in amends for having done likewise to Tybalt's.

When Juliet refuses to marry according to the designs of her parents, both her mother and her father denounce her. However, after having taken counsel from the friar, she approaches her father pretending to repent her refusal to marry Paris. When Capulet asks

\(^1\) *Titus Andronicus*, V, iii, 185-86.  
where she has been, she answers,

Where I have learnt me to repent the sin
Of disobedient opposition
To you and your behests, and am enjoin'd
By holy Laurence to fall prostrate here
To beg your pardon. Pardon, I beseech you!
Henceforward I am ever rul'd by you.1

Capulet accepts the repentance as genuine.

My heart is wondrous light
Since this same wayward girl is so reclaim'd.2

John Hankins considers Romeo and Juliet Catholic characters, and finds definite allusions to the ritual of confession. According to this authority, both Romeo and Juliet regularly receive the sacrament of penance as can be concluded from Juliet's using the fact that she has angered her father as an alibi for going to Friar Laurence. Romeo refers to the friar as

a divine, a ghostly confessor,
A sin-absolver.

and the friar demands a clear confession for

... riddling confession finds but riddling shrift.3

After Juliet commits suicide, the Montagues and the Capulets, filled with alarm, try to ascertain just what has happened. The friar, who seems guilty, explains

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1Romeo and Juliet, IV, ii, 17-22.
2Ibid., IV, ii, 46-47.
Juliet's secret marriage, the sleeping potion, and the delayed letter to Romeo. He sincerely repents whatever fault of his is involved, offering his life in atonement.

All this I know, and to the marriage
Her nurse is privy; and if aught in this
Miscarried by my fault, let my old life
Be sacrific'd, some hour before his time,
Unto the rigour of severest law.¹

The reconciliation which closes the play implies effective repentance or at least amendment on the part of the families.

Shakespeare, "In the World," produced only one tragedy, and, although there is material for repentance, this virtue is not explicitly present. Only confused sentiments of repentance on the part of the conspirators are depicted in Julius Caesar, and Brutus ineffectually wishes "things done undone."² Although G. Wilson Knight believes that it is only Brutus who suffers from guilt of conscience,³ both he and Cassius feel that by dying themselves they are revenging Caesar's death. Repentance, at least on a natural plane, seems to be implied as far as detestation of sin is concerned; however, it does not flower forth into amendment and satisfaction,

¹Romeo and Juliet, V, iii, 265-69.
²Julius Caesar, IV, ii, 9.
but dies in despair and suicide.

Brutus' stoical introspective nature may, as Small implies, be a reason for Shakespeare's letting him keep his pricks of conscience to himself and making him suppress any direct expressions of repentance.¹

The great tragedies of Shakespeare's third period, "Out of the Depths," present characters whose lives show recognition and acknowledgment of guilt, detestation of sin, confession without priestly mediation, amendment, and satisfaction.

John Erskine Hankins, in his book The Character of Hamlet and Other Essays, in his chapter entitled "Religion in Hamlet: Repentance," presents a thorough study of repentance in the first of the great tragedies. He makes strenuous efforts to study the aspects of this great spiritual act in the light of the Catholic doctrine of repentance modified by Anglican teaching. Although his literary analysis seems excellent, his theological interpretations may at times be questionable.

Hankins considers Claudius' and Queen Gertrude's struggles for repentance two of the most poignant conflicts in literature. In Scenes iii and iv of Act III, both the king and the queen try to repent and both

¹Small, op. cit., pp. 69-71.
fail.  

For Claudius, "The Mousetrap" was the mirror which revealed to him his sins. His soliloquy, "My offence is rank . . ."\(^2\) sets forth not only the transition from the stage of recognition to that of sorrow, but also his failure to resolve amendment.\(^3\)

Versed in theology,\(^4\) he knows the necessity for amendment.

May one be pardon'd and retain th' offence?\(^5\)

He knows that true repentance can triumph over all evil, 

Try what repentance can: what can it not?\(^6\)

but his next line shows the weakness of his will in the battle against his passions,

Yet what can it when one can not repent?\(^7\)

The struggle continues in all its vehemence,

O wretched state! O bosom black as death! 
O limed soul, that, struggling to be free,

\(^1\)Hankins, The Character of Hamlet and Other Essays, p. 193. 

\(^2\)Hamlet, III, iii. 

\(^3\)Hankins, The Character of Hamlet and Other Essays, p. 215. 

\(^4\)Ibid., p. 214. 

\(^5\)Hamlet, III, iii, 56. 

\(^6\)Ibid., III, iii, 65. 

\(^7\)Ibid., III, iii, 66.
Art more engag'd! Help, angels! make assay,
Bow, stubborn knees; and heart with strings of steel,
Be soft as sinews of the new-born babe!
All may be well.¹

Nicoll believes Claudius a normal, sincere,
weak-willed man who, "while repenting of his sin, has
not the strength to put off its effects."² This sinner
acknowledges,

My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent,
And, like a man to double business bound,
I stand in pause where I shall first begin,
And both neglect . . .³

He knows that his repentance is ineffectual without
amendment and that he must renounce the very things for
which he committed the murder. Plainly he lists these,

My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.⁴

In spite of his knowledge and the violence of the strug­
gle, passion triumphs.

My words fly up, my thoughts remain below.
Words without thoughts never to heaven go.⁵

At this point Hankins introduces a unique sup­
position. He believes that had Claudius been stabbed

¹Ibid., III, iii, 67-72.
²Allardyce Nicoll, Studies in Shakespeare (New
³Hamlet, III, iii, 40-43.
⁴Ibid., III, iii, 55.
⁵Ibid., III, iii, 97-98.
at the moment that his soul was straining for true re-
pentance, a few closing moments of life would have moved
his free will toward his Creator and enabled him to join
his brother in purgatory. Certainly, such judgment
seems an infringement on God's own prerogative. It is
presumptuous to conjecture just how many remaining mo-
ments (after stabbing) would be required for the move-
ment of the free will toward God.

The futility of Claudius' struggle is echoed
later in the play when, after the death of Polonius, he
admits to Gertrude,

My soul is full of discord and dismay.  

Claudius' efforts at repentance are unquestion-
ably ineffectual, but the outcome of Gertrude's moral
struggle is a subject of debate. No doubt, recognition
and acknowledgment of guilt are present, as well as a
kind of contrition, but the question of her amendment
has not been solved.

Recognition of guilt is wrought in the heart of
the queen by Hamlet, who in ministering to the soul of
his mother has been likened to a father confessor.  

1Hankins, The Character of Hamlet and Other Es-
says, p. 217.

2Hamlet, IV, i, 45.

3A. C. Bradley, Shakespearean Tragedy (New York:
Having proposed to wring her heart,

If damned custom have not braz'd it so
That it is proof and bulwark against sense. ¹

he scourges her ruthlessly towards repentance. ²

At last the step of recognition is reached.

O Hamlet, speak no more!
Thou turn'st mine eyes into my very soul,
And there I see such black and grained spots
As will not leave their tinct. ³

and Hankins believes that this is followed by sorrow
almost at once. ⁴ This conjecture is indicated by her
words,

O, speak to me no more!
These words like daggers enter in mine ears.
No more, sweet Hamlet. ⁵

Hamlet continues until the ghost bids him stop. Granville-Barker believes that Gertrude's insensibility to
the ghost signifies her spiritual insensitivity. Her
son, by his vituperation, has moved her to admit carnal
sin, but he cannot give her spiritual perception. How­
ever, the sincerity of her struggle is indicated by the
ghost's command,

¹Hamlet, III, iv, 37-38.
²Granville-Barker, op. cit., p. 229.
³Hamlet, III, iv, 88-91.
⁴Hankins, The Character of Hamlet and Other Es­savs, p. 208.
⁵Hamlet, III, iv, 94-96.
0, step between her and her fighting soul.¹

When Gertrude speaks of the ghost as the coinage of his brain, Hamlet, fearing that she will cease to take his accusations seriously, warns her against self-flattery by which she might believe that it is his madness that speaks to her soul instead of her sins.²

He then advises her as to confession and amendment.

... Confess yourself to heaven; Repent what's past; avoid what is to come;³

This counsel Hankins cites to show that the characters in Hamlet, unlike those of Romeo and Juliet, are Protestant. "Confess yourself to heaven" indicates that priestly mediation was unnecessary.⁴

Gertrude has gone far along the way of repentance when she says,

0, Hamlet, thou hast cleft my heart in twain.⁵

She would have gone the whole way by amendment had she followed the advice her son gives in answer,


²Hankins, The Character of Hamlet and Other Essays, p. 208.

³Hamlet, III, iv, 149-50.

⁴Hankins, The Character of Hamlet and Other Essays, p. 196.

⁵Hamlet, III, iv, 156.
O, throw away the worser part of it,  
And live the purer with the other half.  

Concluding that Gertrude fails to repent, Hankins cites words of remorse uttered the day before her death.

To my sick soul (as sin's true nature is)  
Each toy seems prologue to some great amiss.  
So full of artless jealousy is guilt  
It spills itself in fearing to be spilt.

Granville-Barker, nevertheless, states that the queen "is repentant," and Myrick finds that she has "gone at least some distance toward a full repentance."

The high regard for repentance as a preparation for death is brought out forcibly in this play. The ghost explains to Hamlet,

Thus was I . . .  
. . . at once dispatch'd;  
Cut off even in the blossoms of my sin,  
Unhoused, disappointed, unated,  
No reck'ning made, but sent to my account  
With all my imperfections on my head.

Hamlet recalls this when he has an opportunity to kill

1Ibid., III, iv, 157-58.  
3Granville-Barker, op. cit., p. 230.  
5Hamlet, I, v, 74-79.
Claudius at prayer and realizes that this would be "hire and salary"\(^1\) rather than revenge, for he believes that Claudius "is fit and season'd for his passage."\(^2\) Claudius, he explains, killed his father,

\[
\text{With all his crimes broad blown, as flush as May;}
\]
\[
\text{And how his audit stands, who knows save heaven?}
\]
\[
\text{But in our circumstance and course of thought,}
\]
\[
\text{"Tis heavy with him . . . .}^3
\]

The aspect of atonement is prominent in the play's depiction of purgatory. This realm of atonement is described by the ghost who says,

\[
\text{I am thy father's spirit,}
\]
\[
\text{Doom'd for a certain term to walk the night,}
\]
\[
\text{And for the day confin'd to fast in fires,}
\]
\[
\text{Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature}
\]
\[
\text{Are burnt and purg'd away.}^4
\]

Earlier in the speech the ghost speaks of the "sulph'rous and tormenting flames"\(^5\) to which he must soon return. That spirits must sometimes walk the earth as part of their atonement is stated by Horatio the first time he encounters the ghost.

Hamlet recognizes the power of prayer in atoning

\(^{1}\text{Ibid., III, iii, 79.}\)
\(^{2}\text{Ibid., III, iii, 86.}\)
\(^{3}\text{Ibid., III, iii, 81-84.}\)
\(^{4}\text{Ibid., I, v, 9-13.}\)
\(^{5}\text{Ibid., I, v, 3.}\)
for sin and applies that knowledge to himself when he speaks to Ophelia,

... Nymph, in thy orisons
Be all my sins rememb'red.¹

Commenting on these lines, Granville-Barker rejects J. Dover Wilson's discovering therein affectation and sarcasm, protesting that Hamlet by nature would not be sarcastic about his sins, and that at this particular time he is by no means in a sarcastic mood.²

The next tragedy, Troilus and Cressida, along with the last two, Coriolanus and Timon of Athens, can be dismissed at once as failing to develop any aspect of repentance.

Othello, the next tragedy which falls in the scope of this study, depicts the moor's recognition of guilt and implies his detestation of sin. After the murder of Desdemona and following Emilia's disclosure of the truth about her mistress, Othello stands in silent consideration while others about him lament the tragedy. His recognition of guilt becomes evident as he falls on the bed exclaiming,

O! O! O!³

¹Ibid., III, i, 89-90.
²Granville-Barker, op. cit., p. 241, n. 28.
³Othello, V, ii, 198.
Later in the same scene, after he reviews the punishment that awaits him, he exclaims,

O Desdemona, Desdemona! dead!
C! O! O! O!1

and when he learns the trick of the handkerchief, he acknowledges the deep guilt that is his,

O fool! fool! fool!2

Certainly the soul seems ready for amendment and satisfaction, although no statement of repentance is made apart from the short iterative passages just quoted. Myrick believes that Othello dies ennobled by contrition, and that expressions of repentance are lacking merely because they would mar the tragic dignity of this play. The moor's grief shows contrition; his acknowledgment is confession; and his apology to Cassio is partial satisfaction.3 Although Tillyard finds that Othello dies an enlightened and changed man,4 Granville-Barker states that his soul remains unpurged.5

His suicide shows his inability to face reality

1Ibid., V, ii, 281-82.
2Ibid., V, ii, 323.
3Myrick, op. cit., p. 244.
5Granville-Barker, op. cit., II, 114.
and his lack of humility and confidence in God. Rather than trusting confidently that he will be forgiven by God, he gives evidence of despair.

This play, as so many of the others, demonstrates how highly Shakespeare regarded repentance at death. Othello asks this peerless lady whether she has prayed this night, and adds,

>If you bethink yourself of any crime Unreconcil'd as yet to heaven and grace, Solicit for it straight.¹

Because she is puzzled at his solicitude, he explains,

>I would not kill thy unprepared spirit. No, heaven forfend! I would not kill thy soul.²

His next command,

>Therefore confess thee freely of thy sin,³ is similar to Hamlet's counsel to his mother in that it reveals the Protestant idea of confession made directly to God.

Mere recognition of guilt is set forth by Roderigo and by Iago. The former, early in the play, futilely admits his lust,

>What should I do? I confess it is my shame to be so fond, but it is not in my virtue to amend it.⁴

¹Othello, V, ii, 26-28.
²Ibid., V, ii, 31-32.
³Ibid., V, ii, 53.
⁴Ibid., I, iii, 319-21.
Iago's recognition of guilt and partial confession seem only to add to his villainy.

Repentance in King Lear is not bold and startling, but a kind of mellowing of character. Farnham finds a similarity here to the old moral plays in that Lear "loses the world only to save his soul by confession and penitence." Rejection by his daughters and subjection to the fury of the elements are the instruments which bring about his realization of sin and consequently his regeneration.

After exclaiming against the bitterness of filial ingratitude and the inclemency of the elements, the old king resolves,

No, I will be the pattern of all patience; I will say nothing.2

Even this isolated expression of resolution to practice patience offers a sharp contrast to the king's innate irascibility.

His famous lines in the second storm scene show his awakened realization of his own weakness and of the needs of humanity. In his apostrophe, "Poor naked


2 King Lear, III, ii, 37-38.
wretches. . . ." he reviews with new-found sympathy the suffering which the storm brings to humanity, and adds reproachfully,

O, I have ta'en
Too little care of this! Take physic, pomp;
Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel,
That thou mayest shake the superflux to them
And show the heavens more just.  

O. J. Campbell objects to Bradley's contention that these lines mark Lear's redemption, for, according to the former, the humility here expressed is but transitory and ineffectual. However, it is certain that Lear is changed sometime before he returns to his faithful daughter.

In Act IV, Kent reports the old king deeply moved by the recognition of his acts of unkindness to Cordelia.

His mind so venomously that burning shame Detains him from Cordelia.  

However, her filial loyalty renders his conversion less painful. His confession to her includes all in its

1Ibid., III, iv, 28-36.
2Ibid., III, iv, 32-36.
4King Lear, IV, iii, 47-49.
simplicity and brevity.

You must bear with me.
Pray you now, forget and forgive. I am old and
foolish. 1

In the next scene he again speaks to her in all humility,

When thou dost ask me blessing, I'll kneel down
And ask of thee forgiveness . . . . 2

Granville-Barker finds in the tragedy of Lear
masterly depiction of "spiritual death and resurrection." 3
Schücking questions this interpretation as being perhaps
inconsistent with Shakespeare's philosophy. To this
critic Lear's final state is characterized by weariness
rather than conversion, a condition consistent with the
melancholy type of character. 4 However, he has under­
gone the stages of recognition, acknowledgment, detesta­
tion, and confession, and seems to imply amendment.

A second plot in this tragedy concerns Glouces­
ter's sin of adultery and his repentance brought about
chiefly by the machinations of his bastard son, Edmund.
As Edgar, the legitimate son, explains,

The gods are just, and of our pleasant vices

---

1Ibid., IV, vii, 83-84.
2Ibid., V, iii, 10-11.
3Granville-Barker, op. cit., I, 266.
Make instruments to scourge us.¹
It is when Gloucester's eyes are put out that he be­
comes overwhelmingly aware of his guilt. After seeking
to end his own life, his son explains that the gods pre­
served him from this intended death, whereupon he re­
solves on expiation,

... Henceforth I'll bear
Affliction till it do cry out itself
'Enough, enough,' and die ... ²

Repeating his attempted suicide, he prays revealing his
purpose of amendment,

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

It is through the fidelity and patience of Edgar that
Gloucester comes to recognize true values, but too weak
for the inner struggle between good and evil his heart

Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief,
Burst smilingly.⁴

Recognition of guilt is indeed depicted in
Macbeth, and this play has been called a tragedy of re­
morse, although some critics disagree on such a desig­
nation. Both Bradley and Campbell find revulsions of

¹King Lear, V, iii, 170-71.
²Ibid., IV, vi, 75-77.
³Ibid., IV, vi, 221-23.
⁴Campbell, op. cit., p. 108.
conscience in the thane and his lady, although Professor Sharp, whose opinion Stoll shares, declares that neither has remorse but rather fear—"not sorrow for sin, but fear of the dagger and the poisoned cup."\(^1\)

Blackmore likens Macbeth to the first murderer who, fearing the terrible retribution which awaited him, despaired and died unrepentant.\(^2\) Curry finds in him an ethical sense which gives rise to the act of conscience.\(^3\) Harbage believes that he has two personalities always in conflict, and likens him to Faustus, who repented before, during, and after selling his soul.\(^4\) Hunter notes three brief passages which particularly concern Macbeth's spiritual state. "Fil'd my mind" and "put rancours in the vessel of my peace," he believes, reveal remorse; and the third, "mine eternal jewel given to the common enemy of man," he interprets as referring to a compact with the devil.\(^5\)

\(^1\) Stoll, op. cit., p. 351.
\(^3\) Walter Clyde Curry, Shakespeare's Philosophical Patterns (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1937), pp. 104-05.
\(^4\) Harbage, op. cit., p. 69.
That Macbeth recognized his guilt is evident when, returning from the murder of Duncan, he found it impossible to answer, "Amen," to the sleepy "God bless us" uttered by one of the guards. Macbeth's final speech in the same scene is worth noting too.

Wake Duncan with thy knocking! I would thou couldst! Literally, this might suggest repentance, yet one is inclined to feel that, should Duncan awake, the murder would only be repeated.¹

The imaginary dagger which Macbeth sees and his disturbance at the apparition of Banquo's ghost both indicate his recognition of guilt. To his attending officer, Seyton, he confides toward the close of his life,

... My way of life
Is fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf;²

and in his final encounter with Macduff he admits,

... My soul is too much charg'd
With blood of thine already.³

Recognizing that he is guilty, he is tortured by remorse, but there is no repentance. Lady Macbeth, like her husband, is aware of guilt and can go no further toward conversion.

²Macbeth, V, iii, 22-23.
³Ibid., V, viii, 5-6.
The most direct reference to repentance, although it remains undeveloped, occurs in Malcolm's account of Cawdor when he faces execution. The former reports to Duncan,

That very frankly he confess'd his treasons, Implor'd your Highness' pardon, and set forth A deep repentance.¹

The aspect of satisfaction, although isolated from the other elements of repentance, is brought out when Macduff considers the murder of his wife and children as punishment for his own sins.

... Sinful Macduff, They were all struck for thee! Naught that I am, Not for their own demerits, but for mine, Fell slaughter on their souls ...²

In Antony and Cleopatra, the references to repentance are negligible except in the case of Enobarbus, who recognizes, acknowledges, and detests his sin of desertion but, without trusting in forgiveness either from God or man, dies in his contrition. It is Antony's kindness which moves Enobarbus to repentance. When the soldier compares the punishment Caesar inflicts on deserters with the treatment his own master gives them, he reproaches himself,

¹Ibid., I, iv, 5-7.
²Ibid., IV, iii, 224-27.
... I have done ill,
Of which I do accuse myself so sorely,
That I will joy no more.\(^1\)

Then when Antony magnanimously sends him treasure, he is deeply moved.

I am alone the villain of the earth,
And feel I am so most. O Antony,
Thou mine of bounty, how wouldst thou have paid
My better service, when my turpitude
Thou dost so crown with gold! This blows my heart.\(^2\)

It is Antony's great token of forgiveness which breaks Enobarbus' heart.\(^3\) Just before he dies he exclaims,

Be witness to me, O thou blessed moon,
When men revolted shall upon record
Bear hateful memory, poor Enobarbus did
Before thy face repent!\(^4\)

and then he begs that Antony forgive him.

\(^1\)Antony and Cleopatra, IV, vi, 18-20.
\(^2\)Ibid., IV, vi, 30-34.
\(^3\)Granville-Barker, op. cit., I, 453.
\(^4\)Antony and Cleopatra, IV, ix, 7-10.
CHAPTER V

INTERPRETATION AND CONCLUSION

A careful study of Shakespeare's plays clearly shows notable progression of concern with repentance throughout the four periods as the artist grows in the mastery of his art. The conversions or partial conversions are scarcely developed in the first period. When characters change, they do so without bothering about repentance. This seems to be in keeping with the psychological superficiality of many of the earliest plays. The most definite steps toward repentance are taken by the Duke of Clarence, Clarence's second murderer, and Henry IV, but not one of these steps perceptibly furthers the plot, although they help slightly to reveal character.

The plots of the second period seem more dependent on repentance, although Duke Frederick's conversion is recounted by another and Borachio merely states his repentance. The only transformation which is really developed is Prince Hal's--one which is essential to the Henry trilogy of this period. The steps to repentance reflected by Falstaff's discourse are only so much talk by the taverner.
In the third period, repentance supplies some of the greatest problems of all drama and goes far toward humanizing the tragic figures. Although even the distinguished characters fall short usually in amendment and satisfaction, their moral struggles are depicted with an intensity found in no other period of Shakespearean drama. This is especially true of King Claudius and Queen Gertrude. These two characters, as well as Othello and King Lear, recognize, acknowledge, and detest their guilt. Claudius' repentance dies in his effort to pray sincerely for forgiveness and to resolve amendment. Gertrude's amendment is indeed questionable, although there are scholars who believe that she was truly converted. Othello's only confession is his triple exclamation, "Fool! fool! fool!" One believes that he would never again be suspicious, although nothing in this regard is stated. Lear's regeneration and Gloucester's too include confession and amendment, and each seems to have expiated his guilt through bearing misfortune. Angelo's conversion is important to plot; Ford's brings about a happy ending; and Enobarbus' repentance shows the kindness of Antony.

Although not one of the plays presents a complete depiction of repentance, that is, moral regeneration in which sacramental confession is included and
confidence and trust in God underlie the steps toward conversion, two of the late comedies most nearly approach this ideal. In Cymbeline, Shakespeare does not dramatize Posthumus’ initial recognition of his sin, but he gives his audience all the other steps of repentance including confession (in a soliloquy) and expressed confidence in God. Leontes in The Winter’s Tale also provides all the steps of conversion. Repentance is essential to the very nature of these plays if they are to remain comedies. In addition to these two instances, in which repentance bears the fruits of joy and peace, there are the almost complete conversion of Alonso and the unexpected transformation of Iachimo.

It is therefore evident that as Shakespeare continued to write, repentance became increasingly important to his plays. When one looks to details for patterns, the thought occurs that perhaps Shakespeare linked repentance or particular aspects of the virtue with certain types of characters. This does not seem to be the case except in the matter of motivation. While it is obvious that generally repentance is best developed only in the great characters of his drama, still it is found in some aspect in people from every stratum of society—king and commoner, hero and villain, tragic figure and prankster. That few women are
depicted as repenting seems to rise from the fact that Shakespeare presents but few women as great sinners.

The instruments effecting repentance are noteworthy, and there, as one might expect, the gentler sex is outstanding. Women who through their virtue exert a particularly redemptive influence are Helena, Cordelia, Desdemona, Marina, Imogen, and Hermione. Among the men who find a special device or speech to touch the soul are Friar Francis, Page, "an old religious man," a duke disguised as a confessor, Hamlet, Edgar, and Antony. Other instruments of repentance besides the supreme one, the grace of God, are high moral perception, a sense of honor, prayer, suffering, and the imminence of death.

Besides the above generalizations, it may be stated with certainty that repentance in the plays is most frequently present in only one or two of its aspects and these are usually treated only casually. In this way they come naturally from the persons portrayed and thus contribute best to natural and effective dramatic characterizations.

Recognition of guilt, and in some instances remorse, isolated from the other aspects of repentance, come from the armourers in 2 Henry VI, the second murderer of Humphrey, Buckingham, the Duke of Clarence, Richard III, Sir Pierce of Exton, King John, Scroop,

Amendment is provided by Katherine and Oliver; it is resolved by Richard II when he is led to the tower; and it is implied regarding the Capulet and Montague families at the close of Romeo and Juliet.

Feigned repentance, except in the case of the tragic Juliet, serves the dramatic purpose of accentuating the superficiality or the villainy of a character. Final impenitence has the same effect and in the case of Cardinal Beaufort it seems further to stress Henry VI's weakness and unmoving piety.

Shakespeare's depiction of repentance cannot be considered strictly Catholic or Protestant. As a whole, it is a blend of both doctrines since both still held much in common in Elizabethan England. Confessing oneself "to heaven" as Hamlet bids Gertrude do is, however, distinctly Protestant. The same idea occurs in Othello's commands to Desdemona. Confession usually was made "to heaven," to one's fellowmen, to the audience in a soliloquy, or to a priest. The mediation of a priest has been cited as indicative of Catholicity, yet this point
of doctrine was practiced also by many Protestants.¹

That Shakespeare's familiarity with confessionary and expiatory practices was Catholic, or at least derived from Catholicism, is evidenced by a number of references, most of which occur in his earliest plays. It seems that at least some of the early characters were Catholic. Sylvia goes to confession; Hastings, when condemned, asks for a priest and is advised to "make a short shrift." Mowbray says he confessed his guilt before last receiving the Holy Eucharist. Juliet seems to confess regularly, and Friar Laurence, who is referred to as "a ghostly confessor" and "a sin-absolver," advises clarity of confession. In one of the latest comedies there is a reference in which Leontes likens the relief afforded by taking confidence in a friend to the purifying effect of the sacrament of penance.

Included among the forms of satisfaction which Shakespeare mentions are solitude, poverty, death, prayer, fasting, endurance of cold and storms, giving honorable burial, tears, alms, apology, deprivation of wife and children, and the sufferings of purgatory.

Although these means of satisfaction are in keeping with Catholic doctrine, they do not differ from prevailing dogma and cannot be used to prove that Shakespeare’s presentation of repentance is intended to represent Catholic theology.

The plays clearly evince that the Elizabethans considered the virtue of repentance of extreme importance, especially in preparation for death. Falstaff, who patters so much about the virtue, although even at death he does not repent, reveals that it was common talk among the lower classes. With few exceptions, the persons who do repent in Shakespeare’s plays are ones who, though guilty, have proved themselves worthy of the grace of conversion. None of the great characters belittles this virtue; scorn in regard to it is left to the villains, Aaron and Richard III, and even Richard does not despise it when death approaches, although he cannot repent. The noble Henry V desires repentance for traitors whom he has condemned to death and finds it necessary for every soldier on the battlefield. Hastings, when sentenced to death, wants a priest; a confessor is brought for the condemned Claudio; and the duke is concerned about Barnardine’s repentance before death. The tremendous significance of repentance at death is shown in the discussion of the murder of
Hamlet's father and in the prince's considerations about Claudius during the prayer scene, as well as in the opportunity for repentance which Othello gives to Desdemona.

It is therefore clear that Shakespeare's presentation of repentance progressively takes on greater dramatic significance, that well developed problems of repentance are usually found in the portrayal of noble characters, and that women serve strikingly in the redemptive role. Repentance in the plays is fragmentary far more frequently than it is complete or even fairly well developed. Feigned repentance and final impenitence usually serve to emphasize superficiality or vil

lainty. Shakespeare's repentance is neither distinctly Catholic nor distinctly Protestant, but a combination of both with scarcely any well-defined boundaries of the two doctrines. Both the playwright and his Elizabethan audience were familiar with repentance theology and had a high regard for this momentous spiritual act.
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