

SOME ASPECTS OF DEVELOPMENT AND DECLINE OF SHAKESPEAREAN TRAGEDY

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0.1. The very concept of "Shakespearean tragedy" as opposed to "Shakespeare's tragedies" may be considered controversial (Muir 1973:12). It is the basic assumption of the existence of a collective entity of tragic plays written by Shakespeare and creating a sum total and a pattern of features characteristic of them all that provides the starting point of the present essay.

0.2. The next assumption is that the collective entity which we call "Shakespearean tragedy" constitutes one of the two fundamental types of tragedy, the other being the tragedy of Ancient Greece.

0.3. All the other phenomena of actual or attempted tragic drama are either derivative in their relation to those two types or represent varieties of mixed elements of their fundamental features.

0.4. The concepts of "development" and "decline" are not used here to denote a continuous and fluent process of gradual change, but are meant to represent features recognizable in a comparative chronological interpretation and analysis of certain traits present in individual tragedies or groups of tragedies of their differences or similarities. Those concepts also apply to the significance of the total absence of certain such features in particular plays. This is a methodological declaration the potentialities of which can be exploited only to a certain degree in this essay but which are all too often ignored, literature being not only a number of literary works but also a process in which those works originate and affect the consciousness of a nation. What applies to the literature of a period applies in a somewhat different way to an author's individual literary career.

0.5. The standards of valuation and comparison in this essay are provided mainly by what is generally accepted as Shakespeare's best in the period of his "great tragedies" and within that period sometimes by the quintessential

achievement of only very few of his plays, but some features of earlier plays must be included in the discussion. This means that the present essay is not an attempt at major revaluations but is concerned rather with giving another consideration to the problem of why we accept certain valuations as we do.

0.6. Shakespearean tragedy cannot be, and usually is not, regarded as something due to Shakespeare alone. It ought to be seen as the very epitome and transformed quintessence of what was best in the tragic drama of his time. There is no attempt, however, in this essay to substitute the concept of Shakespearean tragedy for the whole bulk of English Renaissance and baroque tragedy. Blurring the contours of Shakespeare's work and that of his contemporaries should always be avoided.

0.7. The dramatic collective entity which we call Shakespearean tragedy was evolved and developed by Shakespeare in a long process of imitation, experimentation and invention which took a direction away from some of the features of the tragedy of his immediate predecessors (Marlowe and Kyd) while at the same time striving to bring to perfection some other features of their drama. It is the differences that are more striking than the similarities in that process. Shakespeare's good fortune was to be part of the second or even the third "wave" (if we include the plays of the "false dawn") of a very dynamically developing dramatic literature. His plays however are variations on the themes and treatments provided by his contemporaries and they are variations of a very individual character. Measuring the stature of Shakespeare by what is merely typical of his age may prove sometimes as detrimental as seeing him in isolation from his age as it tends to read into his plays some limitations he did not share with his contemporaries. If examples are needed here, the most striking one is Shakespeare's treatment of the problem of revenge in *Hamlet* as compared to that of the "straight" revenge tragedy before and after his age in England. One might risk a statement that Shakespeare as a dramatist developed as long as he was able gradually to distance himself from the limitations of his contemporaries, and declined when he started to lose this ability and power and finally in his last plays conformed to the predominant trends.

0.8. Although *Julius Caesar*, universally accepted as the first of Shakespeare's "great tragedies" (a concept deliberately avoided in the present essay), was probably written in 1599, strict calendar divisions into centuries being of secondary importance only, one of the most important facts to remember is that Shakespeare's top achievement in tragedy must be associated with the seventeenth century, with the full conceptual implications of what the seventeenth century means in England and on the Continent of Europe in terms of ideas, art forms, aesthetics, poetics and philosophy. Too little attention has been paid to this aspect of Shakespearean tragedy.

0.9. The purely Renaissance qualities of style, thought and content would not make it possible for Shakespeare ever to attain the artistic goals in tragic

drama which he more or less consciously was striving to attain from 1599 to 1608. Whether we call it "baroque" and thus rouse objections inexplicable to a Continental European mind or more neutrally dub it "secentismo" or even more cautiously abstain from using "labels", the fact remains that at the very moment when the figure of Hamlet appeared on the stage for the first time and especially when the words

How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable
Seem to me all the uses of this world (I. ii. 133, 134).

are uttered by Hamlet, something ends and something begins in English literature. Something associated with the "aspiring mind" of Marlowe's tragic heroes ends (Renaissance) and with it an optimistic belief in human potentialities. Hamlet's words here and elsewhere in the play are typical of the new *contemptus mundi* cum scepticism revived by baroque in its more secular versions (the official, religious version being as far from scepticism as possible). His words, his inquisitive soliloquies and his characteristic dualities are paralleled by some Continental poets with no possible link with Shakespeare. They are paralleled e. g. by some Polish poets (Samuel Twardowski and Mikołaj Sep-Szarzyński). It is true that apart from Donne, with whose poetry Hamlet's ideas seem to have some vague links, other poets of the seventeenth century in England seem to be slow and hesitant when compared with Hamlet as reflecting the above discussed new mode of thought.

1.0. Apart from the above mentioned spirit-of-the-age elements, Shakespeare's seventeenth-century tragedy may be demonstrated to represent a shift from fortune-oriented to hero-oriented tragedy, something Shakespeare seems to have always striven to attain but actually achieved only in the seventeenth century (Zbierski 1966:8-9).

1.1. It is impossible to discuss the development and decline of Shakespearean tragedy without taking into consideration some of his histories. The histories were for Shakespeare a testing ground for his experimentation in tragedy. While putting no strict obligations to follow all the then valid presuppositions of tragedy, they were, as a curious Elizabethan genre, "serious plays" with practically no limits to other ingredients, including comedy. Following most of his sources and perhaps his own inclinations, Shakespeare treated history more and more emphatically as the personal drama of kings under specific political circumstances. In this process the "king's body natural" played an increasingly important role at the expense of the "king's body politic" (Edmund Plowden *Reports*, as in Kantorowicz 1957:7), although the "lyrical" concentration on the "body natural" or rather "mind natural" of Richard II seems to belie all chronological considerations.

1.2. Among Shakespeare's sixteenth-century tragedies and serious plays *Ro-*

meo and Juliet was a tragedy in which the element of *'αμαρτία* was still very undeveloped (Zbierski 1966, 1970). Such plays as *Titus Andronicus* and *Richard III* were hero-oriented in their own way, which in the case of *Titus Andronicus* is still a product of Senecan crudeness. *Richard III*, a history with tragic implications of a sort particularly important for the later phenomenon of villain-hero as represented by Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, presents a world in which the hero creates the "initial tragic situation" by his own actions of an overtly criminal character. Apart from any strictly historical considerations Shakespeare created in that play a character too grotesquely diabolical to make it possible to associate the titular hero with normal humanity and its assumed values. We have little or none at all of that feeling of "waste" and "pity" as described by Bradley (1920:23). Thus, although the play is enjoyable as the study of murder as a fine art, it lacks many deeper layers of human psychology and it shifts our attention from the inward to the outward terms of reference to human psyche and conduct.

1.3. This was so in spite of Shakespeare's tangible effort to present Richard as a "case" which modern psychologists might like to label as that of inborn frustration leading to criminal activity.

1.4 The noble effort of Shakespeare's *Richard III* does not compare fully with Shakespeare's great seventeenth-century tragedy for one more important reason. Namely, we may establish that the core of Shakespeare's seventeenth-century tragedy lies in the presentation of the inward tragic torment in figures representative of humanity at its very best and if not perfect then even more representative. Richard III is presented too emphatically as imperfect to ignore the basic fact about that dramatic hero, namely that he is a study of a sort of morbid fringe and not the basic core of humanity.

1.5. Thus we may say that the only successful form of *'αμαρτία* (but not entirely so) that Shakespeare was able to evolve in the sixteenth century was that of obvious crime, again *Richard II* providing a kind of exception.

1.6. It must be noted in passing, moreover, that only two plays written by Shakespeare in the sixteenth century are definitely accepted as tragedies, viz. *Romeo and Juliet* and *Titus Andronicus*, some others being classed in that way only by Elizabethans (the publishers providing the only clues by their front pages).

1.7. Although Shakespeare attained the goal of creating a sort of a villain-hero of remarkable dramatic strength in *Richard III*, as some would claim at the expense of historical truth (Kendal 1973) and presented "purely" tragic heroes in *Titus Andronicus* and *Romeo and Juliet*, those tragic heroes, of course differing in those two plays to a very high degree, were still far away from the perfectly Shakespearean creations of the seventeenth century. While this can easily be a point of general agreement, more ought to be done to explore the essential reasons for which this was so.

2.0. *Julius Caesar* is referred to in most cases as the first of Shakespeare's "great tragedies". For the purposes of analysing the landmarks of development and decline of Shakespearean tragedy that concept is practically useless, because the term "great" is too all inclusive, because it may provoke the question — "how great?" and because it also raises the question why we should deny "greatness" to *Romeo and Juliet*, even in terms of comparative valuation. Instead of it, as an all-inclusive term, the concept of "seventeenth-century tragedies" is used in this essay and within the group of plays it describes the element of development and decline is seen as operating in a somewhat different manner than in terms of a comparison of the "seventeenth-century tragedy of Shakespeare" with that of the sixteenth.

2.1. When we compare *Julius Caesar* with its immediate successors in the line of chronological sequence, we may observe that *Julius Caesar*, fine play as it is, especially as a political drama and also in some other aspects, is strikingly deficient in one of the most important qualities of the very best in Shakespeare. This quality may be termed concentration and focus. Concentration on the tragic hero and focus on inward psychological drama. It seems that his Roman subject owed very little in those two things to Shakespeare's English dramatic experience.

2.2. The fact that we have actually two and not just one tragic hero in that play not only belies its title but creates a number of interpretative problems unique for the play. In fact, it may be argued that Brutus is a character more consistently tragic and given more chance to develop than Caesar, a titular hero of a tragedy who dies in the third act. There is also Shakespeare's real or seeming but in any case rather enigmatic balance of commitment to the two contending parties and causes that the two heroes represent. All those features of *Julius Caesar* seem to indicate that Shakespeare was still tormented by some deep incompatibilities and conceptual difficulties in the arduous process of evolving his own type of tragedy towards its crowning phase of perfection. It must be also firmly stated that his difficulties pertained to the most sensitive balance element of construction and conception essential for his later achievement. In one word: the two-headed character of the play is not a mere outward and unimportant imperfection but seems to represent some not yet wholly defined weakness which Shakespeare as an author of plays succeeded in most cases in overcoming.

3.0. The *'αμαρτία* of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, the tragic hero, is more obviously striking, more powerful, clear and convincing than the *'αμαρτία* of Caesar and Brutus combined. This in a way provides an index of development in Shakespearean tragedy between 1599 and 1605.

3.1. *Julius Caesar* is, for instance, also a remarkably less hero-oriented play than *Hamlet*, even if we admit, in quite another sense, that Caesar was a hero

and the Prince of Denmark was not. This is so mainly because Hamlet is defined at least as much by what he fails to do despite his self-exhortations, as by what he actually does.

3.2. In *Julius Caesar*, perhaps because it is a political Roman play, we cannot help feeling that the actually important hero of the play is a historical process against which the belated idealists like the noble but evidently ineffectual Brutus may strive in vain. The humanity of both protagonists is overwhelmed by the abstract. This is very well shown in the insight into the marital relations between Brutus and Portia which Shakespeare apparently needed to make his point. The claims Portia makes are those of a noble Roman gentlewoman but they also represent the struggle of all women for a greater share in life, individual and social.

3.3. In *Hamlet* Shakespeare shows so much concentration on the tragic hero that one might suspect an attempt at a recompense for what happened in his *Julius Caesar*. It would wreck a play of any dramatist but a genius like Shakespeare. It still lacks complete integration of the individual and the collective, the dramatic and the lyrical.

4.0. *King Lear* is the first play which starts an unbroken series of tragedies in which Shakespeare does not hesitate to present the hero as entirely personally and individually responsible for creating "the initial tragic situation" and thus for triggering off the latent forces of evil beyond his perception and control. Here we have definitely not only hero-concentration but hero-orientation in the causative sense. The intensity of Lear's tragedy is enhanced by the fact that, although he contributed more than any other Shakespearean tragic hero to an inadvertent triggering off of those forces, he also suffers more than any other Shakespearean tragic hero, "in excess" to his guilt. Thus we also have the highest degree of suffering in that play.

4.1. An unexploited or at least too little exploited avenue of investigation in the tragedy of Lear as a human image and of *King Lear* as play lies in the fascinating problem of the mutual relation, not of Lear and his bad daughters, but between him and his good daughter, Cordelia. It is true, some useful work was done in this field (Morris 1957) but too much has been said in sentimental praise of Cordelia to reverse some fundamental misunderstandings of her role in the drama of the first scene of the play and to give an explanation of the function and characteristic features throughout at one swoop. There are layers of temperamental differences between the two that are encoded even and especially in Cordelia's silences and shows of reserve. If they love each other, as the play undoubtedly shows, it is a precarious feeling of a father and daughter representing two different worlds. This makes the most crucial conflict and the clash burdened with the deepest strata of tragedy quite unavoidable. The contrast is as between water and fire, as between extrovert and introvert in

psychological terms, as "Asianistic" and "baroque" in a manner of speaking, flamboyant and on the other hand in Cordelia's case, reserved, "stoical" and perhaps even puritanical.

4.2. Macbeth is yet another kind of tragic hero. He not only triggers off the latent powers of evil but they are latent in him. They are triggered off actually from outside by superstition confirmed by coincidence. He is the author of a parent crime which entails a chain of other crimes that can be broken only with the hero's death. We should remember how horrible the crime of regicide was to the Elizabethan mind, although we should not forget how frequent it was not only in Scottish but in English history as well.

4.3. The last of Shakespeare's seventeenth-century tragedies, *Coriolanus*, is a play which is totally hero-oriented. Its subject is the "nemesis of pride", that is to say, the hero's pride and haughtiness is not only the triggering off mechanism of the play but the continuous drive in his action, leading him in a uniquely logical course towards the inevitable doom.

4.4. One cannot deny that Antony, the entirely new version of whom Shakespeare presented in *Antony and Cleopatra*, is largely responsible for his own fortunes and that he became "fortune's fool" first of all because he became Cleopatra's fool. But for all we know both about Antony and Cleopatra as historical figures and, which is more important here, as Shakespeare's dramatic figures, we cannot say that they suffer so much "in excess to their guilt" as most other heroes and heroines of Shakespeare's seventeenth-century tragedy do. This is so in spite of the fact that their guilt is not so great as that of Macbeth and his lady. In *Macbeth* we have great guilt and proportionately great suffering but the disproportion between the two somewhat belies the otherwise fundamentally true Bradleyan formula. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, in spite of the colossal dimensions so suggestively and lavishly imposed upon the hero and heroine and their world, and perhaps just because of latent disproportions in those colossal elements, we feel a remarkable if difficult to define deficiency of tragic stature in the two lovers that act their tragic parts on the great stage of the ancient world. The play as play, the play as poem, the play as story and the play as dramatic portraiture, all those aspects make it impossible and at least unwise to detract anything from it, as Shakespeare's poetic and dramatic powers were in their best condition when he wrote the play, but was his tragic vision so? In that play we have a great story of love rather than a story of great love. We all can appreciate the snares of the "fatal Cleopatra" as all too powerful to be avoided and we must admire the play as a study of the greatest mysteries of one of the most universal aspects of human life, namely why actually a couple of lovers select each other as they do. We all feel, however, that love determines too much to leave to tragic heroes room enough for choice and this will be shown to be of some importance to the subsequent argumentation in this essay. The play is a mine for similar

subjects as it is a mine for the study of the structure of Shakespeare's plays, Shakespeare's style at its best, etc. but Antony and Cleopatra do not evoke the feeling of "pity" and "waste" as do the protagonists of Shakespeare's other love tragedy, *Romeo and Juliet*. Although that was an early play, it had the element of "pity" and above all "waste" in very high proportions even if we compare it to Shakespeare's seventeenth-century tragedy, which explains perhaps its very strong appeal, despite the weakness of the purely tragic element and above all of the *αμαρτία*. Far from saying "serves them right" we feel that the disproportion between their guilt and suffering is in the case of Antony and Cleopatra as narrow as is the margin in that play between real greatness and a kind of colossal unreality. We cannot help feeling that as compared with *King Lear* and *Macbeth*, *Antony and Cleopatra* is a dramatic hyperbole, something Bibiena-like, representing baroque in its most daring form. Thus, paradoxically, what makes it a very great and powerful play, partly detracts from its tragic essence or at least does not contribute to it.

4.5. Shakespeare's return to the subject matter of love as the main theme of a tragedy was, in a way, as fatal to him as Cleopatra was to Antony. This return and this subject matter and this theme were already under heavy fire from some critical quarters, but it seems that the shells were either empty or filled with cast iron of puritanism to impress us by anything but by their heaviness (Dickey 1957). Love was not the best choice of a subject for tragedy, it is true, but for different reasons than the moralistic ones. Although he struggled nobly, he, the connoisseur of its agonies expressed in his sonnets, neither in that unique record of man's troubles with his love or loves, nor in his plays was able to give it really satisfying tragic dimensions, perhaps because he was not a complete romantic (Hubler 1952: 38, 39, 40, 41, 51; Zbierski 1966: 156—163).

4.6. In *Romeo and Juliet* Shakespeare ultimately epitomized the endless struggle of love and death in which the tensions bring to the fore most human issues, but the real deficiency of the play lies in the fact that their loves are monolithic, "hundred per cent", not like the loves of most modern literature, warring within their own compounds.

4.7. In *Antony and Cleopatra* we have the struggle of an inner character, in the case of Antony, against the snares of love, but again the struggle is as between duty and happiness and as between a man's ideal of domestic bliss and his conscious and unconscious longing for the fascinations of *das Immerweibliche* which operates more freely on the plane of the wild undertones of sex war and the forbidden fruit. All this is great but on a plane other than that on which tragedy normally operates. Shakespeare scored a success in avoiding disaster in any sense of the word, when he utilized that subject matter, but his play, very "modern" or "contemporary" as it might seem on

the ground of sex war, was already a not too obvious symptom of the gradual disintegration of the excellent and monolithic tragic vision he had developed immediately before it.

5.0. In the development of Shakespeare as a tragic writer *King Lear* has been justly recognized by recent criticism as a peak. Above all, this is the most universal play in Shakespeare's canon. We should include as valuation criteria such aspects as: the range, the scope and the depth of the universals of human suffering and also the richness and beauty of the values wasted; the irony of the sudden reversal of the near triumph of good turned into a situation of nearly completely triumphing evil in the unique and remarkable ending of the play. This is implicit in the situations and the predicament of the tragic hero and the other tragic characters, in the demonstration of their experience in terms of dramatic poetry, psychological insight and philosophical generalization, elements present in most tragedies of Shakespeare but never so powerful and so fully integrated in all aspects of great art.

5.1. Just to point out the philosophical level of reference, one must recall that Shakespeare's tragic vision of the world was never before or after so well consolidated with what it commented. It was never so pessimistic and all embracing in its pessimism and tragic interpretation of man's place in the world as in *King Lear* and *Macbeth*. Of the two heroes, however, Lear was far more entitled to blame the world.

5.2. When we return to *Julius Caesar* as to the beginning of the series of plays discussed, we shall note that in terms of suffering this initial play was remarkably deficient when compared to *King Lear*. Julius Caesar, the titular hero, did not suffer at all, apart from the brief moment when he was surprised in the Capitol by his assassins and when he realized that even Brutus was his enemy. That particular detail is utilized by Antony in his speech even more than its real importance would allow, but here it must be noted that the concept of "ingratitude", so important in *King Lear*, is already remarkably present in *Julius Caesar*.

5.3. The stoicism of Brutus is meant to alleviate his kind of suffering and it actually operates in that way. He dies in the way of a typical noble Roman. Thus suffering in *Julius Caesar* is remarkably weak and bears no comparison with *King Lear*.

5.4. *King Lear* as a tragedy deals with a situation most deeply and universally human. *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth*, in their different ways, present private and public fortunes of men resulting from their political ambitions, commitments, ideals and activities. *King Lear* is a play in which this is reversed—Lear wants to renounce and actually does renounce all political duties, but wants to retain the private joys of being a king. This and the division of his kingdom is a lack not only of political ambition, which he shares in a way with

Hamlet, but of political responsibility at its worst, and it is the political folly in terms of Elizabethan political thought and in more universal terms as well that finally brings about all his private calamities. He wants the best and gets the worst. He wants to retire and to be an honoured monarch at the court of his beloved daughter Cordelia. Should we say that he wanted to renounce the royal responsibilities too early and that this was the core of his *ἁμαρτία*? To us, moderns, this may appear more reasonable, i.e. Lear's decision to retire, than it could have appeared to the Elizabethans (though we might ask, did monarchs "retire" so frequently even in modern times?), but his division of the kingdom was a feudal political "original sin" from any point of view, though often practised.

All those political elements are not over-emphasized by Shakespeare and there must be some reasons for this restraint. One perhaps is that it is the private folly of making no effort to understand and to *know* Cordelia that is meant by Shakespeare to be part and parcel of Lear's *ἁμαρτία*. Anyone would suspect an emotional lack of balance in it. The clue to the tragedy seems still to be hidden in this opposite orientation of characters so near and dear to each other and yet so remote and unknown to each other as all the other conflicts are generated by it.

5.5. The universality of the inherent appeal of Shakespeare's *King Lear* lies in the fact that not all, indeed, very few people are generals, kings, heirs to the throne, politicians aspiring to power and preventing others from aspiring to it, who have just left a famous university, but all typical and usual people, all normal people, that is to say people from every walk of life, may eventually become parents and grow old as parents.

5.6. Although Lear commits his folly as a king, he suffers primarily as a parent. The whole depth of Lear's tragic suffering, as explicit and implicit in the play is enhanced by the fatal combination of his "estate", that is being a king, with the political implication of that "estate" and his "human condition" of being a father. We may agree that the private and the public side of Lear's predicament is hard to separate, but I must insist that it is on the plane of the private, familial life that Lear is exposed to a spectrum and spiritual torment of his "wheel of fire". Lear is a subject to gradual regicide and patricide unfolding with all the ferocious cruelty of a callous human contribution to the suffering of others. The fact that all this was done by his own daughters only emphasizes the revolt of his own flesh and blood against him. Shakespeare takes care to stress this strictly biological aspect in Lear's consciousness. His madness and seemingly incongruous reveries in it illustrate this very emphatically as does his seeming obsession with sex and procreation or rather deep loathing of both. This biological trait is of particular importance as another universal and as an element underscoring other universals of the play.

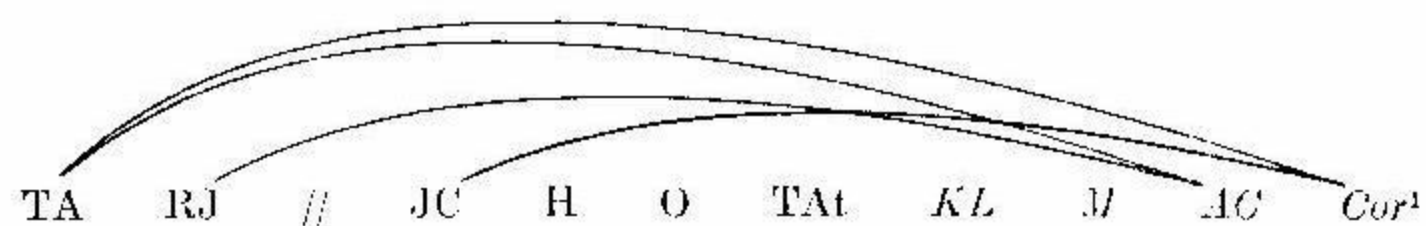
5.7. Wherever there is a peak there must also be slopes. The formula of

tragedy operating in *King Lear* could never be improved by Shakespeare and gradual, nearly imperceptible decline was inevitable, a decline that was not steep and disastrous not only because the tragedies Shakespeare wrote after *King Lear* are great in their own right, but perhaps also because Shakespeare knew when to stop writing tragedies.

6.0. I suggest that we could establish as a platform of discussing the development and decline of Shakespearean tragedy in terms of his ability to arrive at a perfect dramatic, poetic, and philosophical presentation of human universals in terms of a perfect hero-oriented play.

6.1. I hope I have established that there is a link between the selection of subject matter and measure of success in Shakespeare's tragic writing. His return (a) to a Roman theme and (b) to love tragedy was thus in a specific way an inevitable journey down the slope he had so remarkably climbed up. The Roman subject of *Coriolanus* and *Antony and Cleopatra* made it necessary for him once more to follow Plutarch, one of the humanist "authorities". We might also note in passing that the Roman civilization, unlike the Greek, which Shakespeare nearly left untouched, was incapable of producing really great tragedy. This might have been another and a more complex factor limiting Shakespeare's purely tragic achievement in his Roman plays. All the three plays which anyone would select as Shakespeare's best tragedies are based on legendary, non-classical or "dark age" material. Shakespeare's change of the ending of the Lear story and particularly the change of the ending of the anonymous *King Lear*, perhaps the most significant deviation from his source material, is also a very significant mark of the greater freedom he enjoyed and needed for the full scope expression of his tragic vision.

6.2. As may be seen in the diagram presented below, there is a certain "cyclical" element in the chronological sequence of Shakespeare's tragedies as seen in this essay: Shakespeare started early in his career with a Roman play (*Titus Andronicus*) and ended his tragic "cycle" with one (*Coriolanus*). Second in succession was a typical love tragedy (*Romeo and Juliet*) and the last but one tragedy was another love tragedy (*Antony and Cleopatra*). The first of his "great" or "seventeenth-century" tragedies was a Roman play (*Julius Caesar*) and so was the last (*Coriolanus*). *Antony and Cleopatra* unites the "love" and "Roman" elements. This kind of "cycle" might be regarded as a coincidence were it not for Shakespeare's obvious experience and experiment with a similar though reversed cycle in the two tetralogies of his histories, also the fact that he most probably started his whole literary career with a history (*Henry VI*) and nearly ended it with one (*Henry VIII*). I point out the curious facts being aware of restraint as a necessary factor in drawing conclusions from them, but at least, I hope, they illustrate some of the points made above.



7.0. From the point of view proposed in this essay, Shakespeare's plays of his last period, called by critics "romances" or "tragicomedies" are, at least indirectly, a product of the decline of Shakespearean tragedy. Far from being an "improvement" or "refinement" as suggested by some recent scholars (Hartwig 1972), they demonstrate Shakespeare's loss of artistic independence in a double sense: Guarini's tragicomedy was definitely a foreign invasion of the realm of English drama on an unprecedented scale and Shakespeare's compromise with literary fashion of the time was his personal loss of independence. And yet, perhaps, it was in a specific way a necessity: after exploiting both the potentialities of comedy and tragedy and after having lost his grip on tragic drama and his tragic vision he fell into the trap of the new genre, tragicomedy.

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¹ The italicized abbreviated titles of Shakespeare's plays in the diagram are those in which he arrived at a complete re-orientation.

² Anyone writing on a subject like this obviously owes much to a very great number of scholars and also must take issue with some of their views. To do justice to them all would make a list of references actually as long as the essay itself. Therefore I decided to limit the number of references to an absolute minimum and to cases where my views actually do have a very direct contact with those of others, positive or negative, and where I have already elaborated a point in my own publications.