TRAGEDY VIEWED FROM A KOHLBERG STAGE

THESIS

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This thesis evaluates tragic characters from three representative tragedies, *Macbeth*, *Antigone*, and *Death of a Salesman*, in terms of Lawrence Kohlberg's six stage theory of moral development. A tragic character's moral judgment is described as being founded on universal values and principles which determine stage placement. The tragic situation is precipitated by conflict experienced by a character between his present stage form of evaluation and the more preferred, differentiated and integrated form of the next higher stage. Since Kohlberg's theory is cognitive-developmental with the moral principle of justice emerging autonomously at the stage six level, its application aids in supporting a view of tragedy based on a moral order having justice as its highest principle and on a continuity independent of historical and cultural influence.
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INTRODUCTION

Aristotle is one of those rare persons who do not lose their heads. We picture him sitting in sublime security undisturbed by the tumultuous undercurrents of modern criticism. It is really quite questionable if he is at all concerned with the petty thoughts of such a barbaric and chaotic race dedicated to reducing even the atom to rubble. Such one-sided natures have learned little from his discussion in *The Poetics*. Yet to speak truly, there are very few who go flying into the aged Attic's face with hostile argument, much less dare dispute his right to the domain he occupies. Any that do are quietly put to silence by an Argive army larger than any that ever went to Troy. In such manner, Aristotle has weathered Christ, Copernicus, and Camus; and so much so that any discussion of tragedy, if it would wish an audience with the world, must first gain one with the Greek who originally created our horizons.

But why such loyalty to a man who lived almost 2500 years ago? Perhaps, first of all, for precisely that reason—he did live 2500 years ago. He was alive and present at the time that Greek tragedy reached its zenith, when the three major Greek tragedians, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides, had taken a primitive Dionysiac
ritual and transformed it into an art now almost universally recognized as defining the concept of tragedy itself. And, it was certainly to Aristotle's advantage that he could dispense with any objections to cultural misinterpretation.

But perhaps what gives Aristotle his greatest following is his reputation as a scientist. Mankind respects the scientist and even excuses him his errors, simply because of the sincerity of his approach. The scientist, in his turn, rewards mankind for this trust; he gives order and meaning to the seemingly chaotic construct of the world and thereby reaffirms life. It is a unique and symbiotic relationship in which Science, long considered the enemy of Religion, finds itself paradoxically performing the same task; that is, assimilating, connecting and explaining man's world to him. Such similarity of purpose proves the scientist as much a teleological prophet as any of Isaiah's tribe. He is a seeker of truth and, when he finds it, is impelled to proclaim it regardless of the wilderness he finds himself in. The true scientist has at heart a faith in order and purpose—though it be but a mechanistic one—which makes him wear robes cut from the same cloth as the prophet, for a belief in order and a belief in purpose are the distinguishing characteristics of the
religious mind. If we would seek the atheist, we will find very few among the ranks of Aristotle's disciples. Theirs is a tribe of the religious and what they preach aims towards the support of man and the preservation of his civilization. It is Aristotle's reverence that we trust, his spirit rather than his knowledge.

Aristotle can find little in common with his more modern counterparts who ruthlessly rip the curtain before the altar of knowledge in their haste to unveil the truth behind it. Indeed, very few of the unprepared have the fortitude to look upon the primordial without giving way to madness and brutally dragging those of its servers off by their hair. Knowledge is more often than not irreverently handled and the gods are offended. Those of mankind's heroes who commit this sacrilege usually come to their senses only to find themselves participants in a great odyssey of their own making.

This is not Aristotle's way. There is method in his madness. Here is a man, a seeker of truth, but one who disdains the pressure of time and the modern reverence for expediency. Aristotle will define tragedy but only after having patiently dissected its representatives. There will be a definition, but one organically derived. When Aristotle approaches the altar of truth,
he has a fairly good idea of what he will see behind the curtain. When he seeks to analyze the universe, he looks at the sun, the moon, the stars, the changing seasons, the night, the day, and his theory is the sum of what these things tell him it will be. In his quest, he uses every possible instrument at his command. If he had had a telescope, his theory would probably have been different, but it would have been based on exactly what he expected from his observations. We would certainly not expect to find Aristotle sitting among Galileo's judges at the Inquisition, but we might expect to find the two of them enjoying a quiet evening in an observatory viewing the universe through a glass.

A seeker of truth never builds an edifice that he would not willingly tear down were it necessary. Neither does he commit himself to the wholesale destruction of other ideas alien to his own. His one movement-of-spirit is theoria, the necessity to grasp and understand, a movement which demands self-effacement and mutability. It is not Aristotle who has frozen his theories but those of his subjects who find in his theories a comfortable security in the possession of truth. Unfortunately for Aristotle, he did his work too well. So precisely did he analyze and dissect that his theories became unquestionable and what began as knowledge ended as dogma. His
position as an avatar of truth became secured not so much because of his initiative as because of mankind's fear of the dark. But, this was not Aristotle's intent.

The question "What is truth?" will never be answered by one man. True scientists know and respect this. At best, they realize their roles as mediators for the moment. The force that Descartes attributed to whirling vortices, Newton called gravity. The force that Newton called gravity, Einstein explained with his theory of relativity. But what Einstein explained with his theory of relativity is appearing to look more and more like vortices. The force does not change, only the theory that interprets it. And, who is to say the theory that best explains?

If we would be truth seekers, we must not succumb to the two most flagrant abuses of truth; that of rape and that of stasis. First, we must methodically and reverently approach the altar earning our right to a glimpse by preparing our own private picture of what we expect to see. Patience here is of the utmost importance, for truth has never taken kindly to rape. Those who commit such sacrilege usually end up taking baths in their own blood or, at the very least, being condemned to confusion.

Second, we must realize that what we have seen may
be only momentarily valid, dressed in the garment of our present vision. It is what we have not seen that is eternal. Yet this vision and others like it are what will eventually bring us closer and closer to the real meaning behind the pasteboard mask. And so, it is with Aristotle's spirit that we seek to interpret his message and that of some others and relate these visions to that presented in this thesis.
Notes


CHAPTER I
TRAGIC DEFINITIONS

Perhaps there is no better way to identify the gravity of the situation that modern tragedy finds itself in than by a consideration of the title of this chapter; for there is in the very attempt to define tragedy its death blow. We must contend that there is not a definition which can encompass the ultimate meaning of such an elemental subject. Our ancestors, groping and grappling with it in the dark, wrenched a primitive understanding from their stony surroundings which they fashioned into ritual. Ritual, probably man's earliest attempt at expression, is necessarily vague, elusive, mystical; yet, these are the very qualities which give it its strength. It is metaphor without language but capable of expressing what language cannot, realities which words fall short of. Almost from its birth, ritual is accompanied by music and dance; progenies which lend subtleties of their own, elaborations and intensities which enlarge, caresses and measured silences which diminish. And yet, we are still in the world of the subconscious. Consciousness as we know it begins with language and creative language begins with poetry.
Positioned on the border of two opposing worlds, poetry becomes man's bridge between the unconscious and the conscious, presenting words but always in open-ended metaphors of symbol and rhythm to further clarify their meaning. But, in aspiring to clarity, we forge our own fetters; for in the creation of words are the chains of limitation. So it is that this most beautiful of language nevertheless begins to transport man away from the deeper levels of his subjective understanding, where dwells the more complete, pristine knowledge of the unconscious, toward the shallower recesses of objectivity, characteristic of the rational mind. This odyssey demands the sacrifice of depth for detail. Poetry becomes prose and prose becomes more and more specific. One word becomes two; two, four; four, eight. Things become more and more complex, and man, little realizing the complexity of his own making, attempts to understand by rededicating himself to the minute dissection of the world—an attempt which assures the loss of the complete. The process might be comparable to capturing a butterfly, pulling apart the various appendages, cataloguing them, and then declaring that we have now learned how to fly. The secret of flight will not be found by analyzing parts but by observing the organism as a whole. The parts contribute to our comprehension but do not disclose the
secret independently. The only result of such assiduous effort is the death of the butterfly and the irretrievable loss of its secret. Yet there is in man a tendency to persist in the slow dissection of his dreams, his faith, and his art. In this endeavor, criticism has all too often been his willing accomplice; in respect to tragedy, it has literally analyzed its subject to death.

We have been guilty of excessive operation on the concept of tragedy. In our attempts to understand it, we have weakened the idea to fit individual diagnoses. Because the whole is too much for us, we have looked only upon the parts. But herein we have erred. For, as Oscar Mandel has so accurately stated, "The category itself is significant—it is a fact of our civilization; the name is merely expedient."¹ Thus he argues a definition which "rests rather on the unity of the human race and even the essential unity of its expressions."² He is not alone.

There are many who share Mandel's sentiments supporting the natural human tendency toward universal expression—Erich Heller, for example:

In spite of all the unavoidable cleavages, disharmonies, animosities and antagonisms which are the perennial lot of human
beings and human societies, there is a possibility—and this possibility is called culture when it is realized—of a community of men living together... in a state of tacit agreement on what the nature and meaning of human existence really is.3

The word "tacit" is important here. No one has codified or set down these elemental beliefs; they remain unexpressed, possibly because they cannot be expressed literally. Their essence remains in the shadows. But man can express these beliefs creatively.

Tragedy is one of man's ways of "tacitly" illustrating the "nature and meaning of human existence." To take it apart—to define it in terms of only Greek society, Elizabethan society, or Twentieth Century society, for example—is to kill its universal essence. Conversely, tragic literary works which focus on principles or values relevant only to a particular community cannot survive outside the community they were written for. No less a theatrical critic than Hegel has observed this phenomenon in the drama:

Every people in every age has values that are dominant... But of those
only a certain variety can have more than a strictly local contemporary interest. Where drama fails to perceive this, where it too often builds its collisions on conflicts of values that lack universal human interest, no care in explicating or translating them as works of art can make them enjoyable to other nations or periods. 4

The true test of tragedy is its ability to be appreciated in cultures alien to that of its origination, but this appreciation necessarily depends on the work's ability to reflect universal absolutes common to the community of men at large. Understanding this principle is the first step toward formulating any definition of tragedy. It is the only way to avoid mutilating the subject. Instead of trying to formalize individual expressions of the concept into mandatory requirements, we should observe their deeper similarities. Since we are looking at societies of men, we should look for common societal values or principles which might be unifying clues to an awareness of the tragic idea. If such principles and values should be found, we could dispense with the now prevalent belief in cultural relativity, denouncing it as a social fallacy, and could assert a definition of
tragedy based on moral laws common to all men. In doing so, we would be making two very important statements: one, that the tragic idea is continuous and unchanging inasmuch as ethical absolutes are continuous and unchanging, and two, that, in consideration of these characteristics, twentieth century tragedy is not only possible but necessary.

Contrary to the now popular belief that modern tragedy does not exist, that it is irrevocably dead, we would be asserting that as long as there is a community of men, it can never die. To the question "Is tragedy dead?" we could reply "no"—that there lies behind all the travesties of dress woven by the hands of men, the essential tragic concept in all its universality; that this concept is continuous in that it is inseparable from our heritage as men, whether we be kings or salesmen, scholars or idiots, Greeks or barbarians; that this concept presupposes a system of values and principles relevant to all men, a system whose violation guarantees the tragic effect, yet a system whose very life is dependent on the revelation of the tragic effect. We assert that tragedy cannot be divorced from ethical considerations, that their very presence gives it life. Why then is this not so readily apparent to others?

The real problem with the formation of tragic
definitions seems to be one of perspective, for literary tragedies stand like a formidable forest of heterogeneous trees. In natural trepidation, most critics bestow their attention on single specimens, using them to shade the individual assessments of tragic art that they plant alongside their favorites. Such close devotion, however, precludes a visionary glimpse of the forest's existence as a unit and displays an ignorance of the laws of cultivation. But though these definitions planted therein literally block the life-sustaining forces of light and air, they continue to be grown. And Aristotle, though he commands our utmost respect, we must accuse of planting the first one.

Aristotle is the first to attempt a definition of tragedy, but it would probably be to our advantage to investigate his purpose in doing so. Granted we cannot deny the scientist, but we can, at least, assert the dominance of the poet at work here. According to Walter Kaufmann, Aristotle's *Poetics* was in large measure a rebuttal to Plato's attack on tragedy and poetry in general. Plato evidently saw in tragedy a license for chaos, demonstrated by its presentation of irrational suffering and the consequent triumph of injustice. Tragedy, in his opinion, should have been outlawed because it undermined the state's axiom of justice based on reward
for good behavior and punishment for the bad. Plato, re-
ports Kaufmann, asserts that people who author such work
are guilty of the most serious mis-
statements about human life, making
out that wrongdoers are often happy
and the good miserable; . . . and
that being just is one's own loss
though to the advantage of others. 6

It was always Plato's argument, says Kaufmann, "that the
influence of tragedy was evil and that tragic poets
should not be allowed in an exemplary city." 7

Though for different reasons, Plato's observations
about tragedy have been shared by men far removed from
him in culture and time. For example, Schopenhauer
saw tragedy as the

representation of the terrible side
of life. The unspeakable pain, the
wail of humanity, the triumph of
evil, the scornful mastery of chance,
and the irretrievable fall of the
just and innocent. . . . 8

George Steiner, a more modern critic, insists that jus-
tice has no part in tragedy:
The Greek tragic poets assert that the forces which shape or destroy our lives lie outside the governance of reason or justice. 9

"[W]here there is compensation," says Steiner, "there is justice, not tragedy." 10

In any event, Plato refuses to take tragedy seriously and derides the whole tribe of poets as imitators who cannot help but lie:

The tragic poet is an imitator, and therefore, like all other imitators, he is thrice removed from the throne of truth. . . . 11

Aristotle replies, not by denying that poetry imitates, but by giving value to the imitation and by finding tragedy, contrary to Plato's analysis, a great ally of the state. His discussion of it in the Poetics and the wording of his definition seem to be a purposeful negation of Plato's argument, for from the first Aristotle sees tragedy as essentially ethically motivated:

Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious,
complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions.  

Aristotle insists that tragedy be considered an imitation of an action which, when properly portrayed, will far from upsetting the populace, actually bring them relief from the cumulative effects of pity and fear by allowing these emotions full sway. What is interesting here is that, even though Aristotle and Plato disagree, both are concerned with the ethical effect of tragedy and, consequently, are on the same side. Unfortunately, Plato sees it as supportive of disorder; Aristotle, order. It is, as Walter Kaufmann points out, the old question of whether viewing violence causes violence or is a cure for it. This question cannot be answered satisfactorily either way, for there will always be those for whom violence engenders violence just as there will always be those for whom violence brings relief. That doesn't alter what is
being presented—action with moral import.

Tragedy does not seek to take the place of reality or what Plato would wish to be reality but, instead, attempts to present a picture of reality for our viewing. It does so not with the intention of violating societal order but of reinforcing it, specifically by supporting principles without which individual societal codes could not survive. What can Aristotle's insistence on tragedy as imitation mean except that he recognized its role as an interpretative medium for action not tangibly understood and therefore not always supported by literal societal codes? What Plato wrote, he wrote in defense of justice. Perhaps if he could have stepped back a little, he might have seen the triumph of the justice he sought to protect in its affirmation as tragedy's highest ethical principle even though sometimes accomplished at the painful loss of an individual life.

Nevertheless, Aristotle and Plato are important in that we see in their two positions the prophetic beginning of the large majority of future arguments concerning the nature of tragedy—whether it be a presentation of justice or injustice. This question seems to be the hub of the wheel around which the various definitions of tragedy attach themselves, regardless of their individual peculiarities, and it is often the criterion by which
works are added or deleted to the category. Those who favor injustice presuppose tragedy to represent "a deliberate advance to the edge of life, where the mind must look on blackness at the risk of vertigo"—an abyss in which the only rule is that of chaos. On the other hand, those who favor justice presuppose tragedy to affirm a system of order, governed by that principle. The choice is an important one for if tragedy is based on order, then we have a way of determining characteristics appropriate to it; that is, defining it. Otherwise, we can only assess works as tragic or not by emotional effect—how close they bring us to the vertigo point.

But a choice for justice is more than just a choice for order; it is a choice for moral order. Indeed, the conflict inherent in tragedy has been repeatedly characterized as moral. According to Mandel, "The tragic dilemma has often been the means to present and discuss an ethical problem." And, Hegel's well-known theory of conflicting forces is based on the assumption that the conflict is a result of each one's "ethical right" to self-assertion. The key to an understanding of tragedy seems to be in the recognition of its ethical core.

Yet there is still a problem. Many people believe that justice and other principles of value change so that what is "just" for one society is "unjust" for another.
We cannot base a definition of tragedy on such a supposition—it might prove a quicker way to the vertigo point than that provided by the abyss. If there is to be any meaningful definition of tragedy, the system of order must be independent of historical or cultural limitations. Only then can we finally approach a definition of tragedy independent of "costume."

This is where Lawrence Kohlberg can help us. We may be able to apply the findings of his research to tragic characters, for we believe character to be the sine qua non of tragedy. According to Aristotle, though tragic action can exist independent of character, it is character that reveals moral purpose, the essence of the tragic concept. If Kohlberg can suggest a method by which we can evaluate a tragic character's action according to a standard of ethical absolutes, then we may be able to draw conclusions suggesting the nature and cause of tragedy. Therefore, we will proceed to analyze three representative tragic characters, each of whom is individually identified with a major cultural period's art. We do this to confirm the universality of Kohlberg's theory as applicable to all works that would be called tragedies. The characters we will consider in detail are Macbeth, Antigone and Creon, and Willy Loman; represented respectively in Shakespeare's Macbeth.
Sophocles' *Antigone*, and Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*. To emphasize the developmental nature of Kohlberg's theory, we will discuss the characters according to their stage positions, proceeding upward from the lowest stage represented to the highest. An upward evaluation will also illustrate effectively the progressively more differentiated and integrated interpretations of the universal principle of justice as it operates in the successive stages.

In the preceding pages, we have possibly confused the reader. While seeming to argue against definition, we have, nevertheless, formulated one, specifically by suggesting a new interpretation based on a system of ethical order. In light of such obvious discrepancy, we would be foolish to plead innocent. But our quest was undertaken to free an outraged aesthetic integrity, wasting away in an imprisoned state, certainly not to add still another link to his chain. Whether or not the results of this thesis establish a new definition of tragedy is not of primary importance. What has been attempted is an argument for flexibility that may allow a more accurate definition of the tragic concept to emerge.

Being men, we must define; it is an inevitable characteristic of our nature. But there are some things
that men cannot define ultimately—some things which we
must be content to leave partially in the shadows in
order for them to remain useful to us. Clarification is
necessary, but too much light will distort and destroy
just as much as too little. Indeed, if we must choose,
we believe more knowledge is achieved by tolerance than
limitation. Tragedy is and must be defined, but, in the
defining, we recommend following an Aristotelian philo-
sophy of moderation. Excesses occur because of the
emphasis on details reflecting historicity and cultural
relativity. Any definition of tragedy we create must
depend on universal characteristics of the society of
man as a whole. Where individual cultural characteris-
tics predominate as criteria, we have something less than
tragedy. Therefore, we argue for a definition based on
those universal characteristics hinted at over the years
by prominent philosophers and men of literature but now
specifically and scientifically presented to us by Law-
rence Kohlberg—ethical principles and values held in
common by all mankind.
Notes

2 Mandel, p. 9.
7 Kaufmann, p. 10.
9 Steiner, p. 7.
10 Steiner, p. 4.
11 Kaufmann, p. 18.
13 Kaufmann, p. 50.
15 Steiner, p. 168.
16 Mandel, p. 143.
17 Hegel, p. 179.
19 Aristotle's Poetics, p. 64.
When Lawrence Kohlberg delivered the 1968 essay that constitutes his classic theory of moralization at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, it is doubtful whether the term "tragedy" even crossed his mind except in possible apprehension of poor reception or rejection of his carefully researched and documented findings concerning the development of moral judgment. Kohlberg's work was primarily done for the insight it would give into the acquirement of moral values in an educational setting. The nature of the subject matter itself, the inculcation of moral ethics, has long been under investigation by several disciplines. But, since Kohlberg, in formulating his theory, used a multidisciplinary approach, his findings have become "a catalyst for interdisciplinary exchanges about morality and moral development," particularly in the four major fields of philosophy, psychology, education, and religion. It would not be too far amiss to compare the effect of Kohlberg's theory on the cumulative and diverse theoretical constructs concerning moral development of these various disciplines to that of the Copernican system on the Ptolemaic priesthood. In a world that
has too easily accepted the precept of cultural relativity and taken an almost masochistic pride in mocking absolutes, Lawrence Kohlberg is a refreshing change.

That does not necessarily mean Kohlberg's theory has been overwhelmingly accepted as some great meta-ethical canon law. Far from it. There are important critics. Even some of his more devoted followers would suggest a change or two in a less heretical direction. Kohlberg himself has made some important adjustments in his original theory as more empirical findings from research begun years earlier have culminated. Yet, Kohlberg's original conception of a cognitive-developmental based theory of moral maturation consisting of six well-defined stages has essentially remained intact and withstood admirably the assaults launched against it.

Probably the most significant assertion that Kohlberg makes in the presentation of his theory is that there are universal human values or principles. He rejects the almost a priori assumptions of moral cultural relativity in vogue with many moral theorists. His cross-cultural experiments with different groups of children and an especially important longitudinal study involving seventy-five boys over a period of twelve years beginning with early adolescence (ten to sixteen years) and continuing through young manhood (twenty-two to twenty-
eight years) have enabled him to isolate a significant number of values common to these cultures even though expressions of these values might be varied and their achievement restricted by social and environmental conditions. These basic human values were consistently seen to develop as a result of increasing differentiation and integration in the cognitive development of the subjects he studied—not as has been proposed, by societal sanctions, emotional experiences, or direct internalization of societal preferences. Consequently, Kohlberg was able to conclude that the basic values or principles of the society of man as a whole are the end result of "natural processes of development."

These natural processes of development are essentially the six stages defined by Kohlberg in his famous essay. They are not stages which define correct or incorrect, good or bad moral thinking. Kohlberg does not define them based on content but rather on form. In his view, they are structural ways of thinking, the result of cognitive developmental maturation. Consequently, they have certain characteristics common to such processes.

First and most importantly, Kohlberg's stages have a cognitive core. Development is necessarily dependent on normal biological maturation of cognitive processes.
Second, stage order is invariant. An individual must begin at Stage 1 and progress through the stages in order. There is no skipping around or over stages. Developmental skills at a lower stage must be mastered before movement to the next higher level. Third, the rate or terminus of development is independent of stage definition. Progression can be either fast or slow or can stop entirely, and this movement can vary from stage to stage. The interaction between the individual and his environment determines the speed and end point of development. Finally, "movement to the next higher stage involves internal cognitive reorganization or upward movement," which by definition requires the individual's active participation (role-taking) in what Kohlberg calls "conflict-induced reorganization." In other words, an individual's thinking pattern must change before he can move to the next higher stage. It cannot change, however, if conditions surrounding him do not promote a higher level thinking pattern than his own, one that comes into direct opposition and challenges the validity of his present pattern of evaluation, or if the individual cannot empathize with the higher level view, that is, take the role of the other. The capacity for role-taking is necessary for stage movement and Kohlberg explicitly argues that there can be no moral
conflict without it.\textsuperscript{13}

We might back track a little at this point and recall Kohlberg's assertion about universal human values or principles. Kohlberg and his colleagues were able to find twenty-eight values held in common by each of the diverse cultures involved in his experiments—a finding, Kohlberg reasons, that is not unusual since all societies have the same basic institutions of family, economy, social stratification, law, and government and will, consequently, develop values that promote or give life to these institutions.\textsuperscript{14} He cites certain core structures, usually assessed as rules, sympathy or concern for consequences to others, and justice, which give birth to societal values and determine the hierarchal choices of one value over the other. Yet, he points out that developmental theory takes all three core structures into account under the one heading of role-taking, in that "all morally relevant rules and institutions are conceived of as interpreted through processes of role-taking directed by concerns about welfare and justice."\textsuperscript{15} In other words, moral role-taking is the individual's ability to empathize with others in combination with his assessment of the fairness or justness of a situation. This ability, states Kohlberg, is present from the very start of moral experience, though
it becomes increasingly differentiated and integrated as the individual passes from Stage 1 to higher levels. This process of differentiation and integration is based on reasons chosen for role-taking that Kohlberg defines in terms of principles devised by certain moral philosophers. He refers to those of Sidgwick, one such philosopher, who lists three: prudence (welfare-consequences to the self), benevolence (welfare-consequences to others), and justice (distributive equality and commutative reciprocity). To these three basic principles, Kohlberg adds a fourth, respect for authority. These then are the four basic principles Kohlberg sees as operating in the different stages in various combinations.

It would probably be profitable at this point to reprint Kohlberg's stages with his identifying remarks.

DEFINITION OF MORAL STAGES

1. Preconventional Level

At this level the child is responsive to cultural rules and labels of good and bad, right or wrong, but interprets these labels in terms of either the physical or the hedonistic consequences of action (punishment, reward, exchange of favors) or in terms of the physical power of those who enunciate the rules and
labels. The level comprises the following two stages:

Stage 1, **punishment and obedience orientation**. The physical consequences of action determine its goodness or badness regardless of the human meaning or value of these consequences. Avoidance of punishment and unquestioning deference to power are valued in their own right, not in terms of respect for an underlying moral order supported by punishment and authority (the latter being Stage 4).

Stage 2, **instrumental relativist orientation**. Right action consists of that which instrumentally satisfies one's own needs and occasionally the needs of others. Human relations are viewed in terms similar to those of the market place. Elements of fairness, of reciprocity, and equal sharing are present, but they are always interpreted in a physical, pragmatic way. Reciprocity is a matter of "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours," not of loyalty, gratitude, or justice.
II. Conventional Level

At this level, maintaining the expectations of the individual's family, group, or nation is perceived as valuable in its own right, regardless of immediate and obvious consequences. The attitude is one not only of conformity to personal expectations and social order, but of loyalty to it, of actively maintaining, supporting, and justifying the order and of identifying with the persons or group involved in it. This level comprises the following two stages:

Stage 3, interpersonal concordance or "good boy--nice girl" orientation. Good behavior is that which pleases or helps others and is approved by them. There is much conformity to stereotypical images of what is majority or "natural" behavior. Behavior is frequently judged by intention: "He means well" becomes important for the first time. One earns approval by being "nice."

Stage 4, "law and order" orientation. There is orientation toward authority, fixed rules, and the maintenance of the social
order. Right behavior consists of doing one's duty, showing respect for authority, and maintaining the given social order for its own sake.

III. Postconventional, Autonomous, Or Principled Level

At this level there is a clear effort to define moral values and principles that have validity and application apart from the authority of the groups or persons holding these principles and apart from the individual's own identification with these groups. This level again has two stages:

Stage 5, social-contract legalistic orientation. Generally, this stage has utilitarian overtones. Right action tends to be defined in terms of general individual rights and in terms of standards that have been critically examined and agreed upon by the whole society. There is a clear awareness of the relativism of personal values and opinions and a corresponding emphasis on procedural rules for reaching consensus. Aside from what is constitutionally and democratically agreed upon,
the right is a matter of personal "values" and "opinion." The result is an emphasis upon the "legal point of view," but with an emphasis upon the possibility of changing law in terms of rational considerations of social utility (rather than freezing it in terms of stage-4 "law and order"). Outside the legal realm, free agreement, and contract is the binding element of obligation. This is the "official" morality of the United States government and constitution.

Stage 6, universal ethical-principle orientation. Right is defined by the decision of conscience in accord with self-chosen ethical principles appealing to logical comprehensiveness, universality, and consistency. These principles are abstract and ethical (the Golden Rule, the categorical imperative); they are not concrete moral rules like the Ten Commandments. At heart, these are universal principles of justice, of the reciprocity and equality of human rights, and of respect for the dignity of human beings as individual persons.
Kohlberg emphasizes that all four of his basic principles are present from the beginning stages onward; however, the predominance of one principle over the other provides the means for stage identification. Prudence, or self-good, for example, is the main choice of Stages 1 and 2, while respect for authority is the main consideration of Stages 3 and 4. Welfare and justice, Kohlberg notes, are considerations at all levels but do not become true moral principles until Stages 5 and 6. Likewise, prudence and respect for authority, he points out, have been discarded by Stage 6, and, though welfare considerations are present, it is justice only that "emerges as the only 'true' moral principle" at the Stage 6 level.

The primacy of justice in Kohlberg's stage theory is, as he admits, probably the most controversial point in his argument. Here he differs from most moral theorists in giving justice the ascendancy over welfare consequences to others as the most differentiated and integrated moral principle possible in stage development. The determining distinction between Stage 5 and Stage 6 is, as Kohlberg indicates, primarily one of "social contract." The primary consideration of Stage 5 is benevolence (welfare consequences to others), but it is considered in terms of an adherence to social
laws and institutions. Evidently, some deviation is allowed an individual from societal rules provided this deviation doesn't undermine the system. Still, Kohlberg says, there is no justification at this level for civil disobedience. Civil disobedience, he insists, can only be allowed at the Stage 6 level because it is the only level that uses the principle of justice exclusively as the deciding factor in the resolution of morally conflicting claims. In Kohlberg's view, the principle of benevolence or welfare consequences to others would be inadequate to resolve a conflict of this nature, for the most that this principle can do is make a quantitative decision—that is, a decision based on what is determined to be the greatest good for the greatest number. The principle of benevolence seen from this perspective is the acknowledged moral imperative of not a few moral theorists.

As emphasized above, Kohlberg's main reason for elevating justice to the highest place is that he sees it as the only moral principle capable of resolving conflicting claims of benevolence. In so doing, however, he acknowledges that the core principle inherent in the moral stage system is the concern for human welfare. He realizes that in order to further the cause of human welfare, the characteristic of equality inherent in the
principle of justice, provides the necessary leveling for the most advanced form of moral evaluation. The moral principle of justice thus becomes, in Kohlberg's view, the only completely autonomous operating principle, the only principle capable of assessing values independent of the selfish concerns characteristic of the pre-conventional, conventional, and social-contract stages. It is precisely because Kohlberg gives the moral principle of justice the highest position that he is able to propose universal values and that we can then conclude that moral absolutes exist. And, though cautioning against evaluating an individual's worth or value in terms of his level, Kohlberg, nevertheless, realizes that an individual's stage of moral development itself inherently evaluates that individual's moral behavior:

Insofar as they (universal value-concepts) are developmental, they are not morally neutral or arbitrary. . . . There is a sense in which we can characterize moral differences between groups and individuals as being more or less adequate morally. 27

Perhaps now we are ready to relate Kohlberg's
theory to tragedy. If we can believe in the existence of moral absolutes, then we should be able to evaluate a tragic character's behavior as being "more or less adequate morally." And, we may even go so far as to speculate on whether or not an individual is in fact tragic, if we define tragedy in terms of Kohlberg's stage theory characteristics.

"Good" for most of us is often equated with justice, which we remember is the only operating principle at Stage 6 level, the highest of Kohlberg's stages and the most advanced in principled moral judgment. If good and evil imply antithetical elements, we should be able to equate the worst evil with the lowest stage on Kohlberg's scale, that is, Stage 1. By defining good and evil in such a way we are not saying that Stage 6 thinking is good in that all judgments made at this level will be "right" or that Stage 1 level judgments will always be "wrong" according to some conventional ethical standard. Unfortunately, we cannot label the stages so easily; Kohlberg repeatedly emphasizes that it is not the stages themselves that define right and wrong.28 For example, if a man makes a choice at Stage 4 level, he may choose what convention considers right or wrong and still be morally placed at the Stage 4 level provided that he makes his choice according to the moral
principles appropriate for Stage 4. At any stage on Kohlberg's scale, the decision made is not the source for stage identification; rather, it is the considerations used that determine the stage level. Therefore, for each stage, the decision could be either positive or negative. Kohlberg stresses that the "stages define 'structured wholes': total ways of thinking, not attitudes towards particular situations. . . . [They] may be used to support either side of an action choice." 29

We can conclude, however, that judgments at Stage 6 level are made according to the principles of justice and that this, in itself, leads to actions considered ethically "good." Likewise, judgments made at Stage 1 level are "evil" only in the sense that their major modus operandi for decision making is prudence (self-good) which quite overshadows other considerations such as welfare of others, respect for authority, and, especially, justice. Stage 1 thinking is, consequently, evil in that it represents the most selfish stage and the least concerned with others.

Of course, the immediate objection to this line of thinking and a very valid one will be the question of responsibility. Since Kohlberg's theory is cognitive-developmental, the ability to practice principled moral judgment is a maturation process. This means that anyone
at the Stage 1 level cannot make other than Stage 1
decisions and therefore cannot be held responsible for
making the more integrated and differentiated princi-
pled moral judgments of a higher stage. The greatest
good for him is to act according to the precepts of his
stage thinking.

The situation is different, however, for a person
at a transitional point in his development—one which
occurs during the maturation process as an individual is
gradually exposed to a higher level stage thinking than
his own. It is this exposure that demands a "moral"
choice from the individual. We must recall that prin-
cipled moral judgment comes about only as an individual
gradually comes to choose justice over all other stage
considerations, which happens naturally as the indivi-
dual comes into conflict with the next higher stage to
his own. Progress from one stage to the next one above
it necessarily requires that the individual be in an
atmosphere where a higher level thinking predominates
and with which his own thinking must come into conflict.
Conflict, therefore, becomes necessary for the matura-
tion process to occur—conflict which Kohlberg has told
us is self-induced by the individual's own capacity for
role-taking.
Role-taking, we remember, demands a cognitive reorganization for stage advancement. An individual in a conflict situation, therefore, has a decision to make based on a choice for one or another stage level. But because he is capable of understanding the higher stage's values, he is morally responsible for choosing the higher stage over the lower one.

It would be in our interest to consider another Kohlberg finding at this point; that is, an individual will usually prefer the stage thinking that is one level above his own and that he will disapprove or rank low stages below his own.\textsuperscript{30} For an individual to be acting "right" or "wrong" in terms of being "more or less adequate morally," he must be either acting in accord with or against principles that he has accepted as valid. If his moral conduct is in line with decisions made according to considerations of his particular level, then he is doing what is best for him. If, however, he makes decisions according to lower stage level considerations, then he is violating his own integrity, for he has made decisions which he understands are made for the wrong reasons.

"Good" we will define as a choice to act according to one's own understanding. "Evil" we will designate as a choice to act according to a lower level stage
interpretation which is inconsistent with the moral stage development of the individual involved. Since a conflict situation involves a "cognitive restructuring" of an individual's thinking, we might conclude that this is an especially trying, unbalanced, and dangerous time for an individual. We might therefore expect him to be tempted to seek refuge in lower level stage thinking if he cannot make the transition to the higher stage, particularly if the ego gratification represented looks ostensibly better in the lower level. A tragic character may therefore be defined as acting against himself--against his better understanding. He makes a moral choice according to principles or considerations that are at a lower stage of development than he has reached developmentally and in full knowledge that these principles are no longer valid for him. Tragedy represents for us the destruction of an individual's integrity; it is the annihilation of character--of self. This accounts for the powerful and awesome effect that it produces on us, the observers; for we are that person, caught between stages and, under that pressure, destroyed.
Notes


2 Munsey, p. 1.

3 Munsey, p. 4.


5 Kohlberg, pp. 31-34.


7 Kohlberg, p. 45.

8 Kohlberg, p. 31.

9 Kohlberg, p. 38.

10 Kohlberg, p. 30.

11 Kohlberg, p. 46.

12 Kohlberg, pp. 46-47.

13 Kohlberg, p. 49.

14 Kohlberg, p. 48.

15 Kohlberg, p. 48.

16 Kohlberg, p. 50.

17 Kohlberg, p. 58.

18 Kohlberg, pp. 91-93.

19 Kohlberg, p. 59.
20 Kohlberg, p. 63.
22 Kohlberg, p. 62.
23 Kohlberg, p. 63.
24 Kohlberg, p. 63.
25 Kohlberg, p. 63.
26 Kohlberg, pp. 53-57.
27 Kohlberg, pp. 36-37.
28 Kohlberg, pp. 52-53.
29 Kohlberg, p. 31.
CHAPTER III
MACBETH

Now that we have a preliminary understanding of Kohlberg's theory of moral development, our next step will be to see whether or not it might be profitably used as a diagnostic instrument to determine tragic eligibility. Perhaps by such application, we will find some similarity of experience that tragic characters share entitling each of them to critical recognition. First on our list will be Shakespeare's Macbeth.

"Macbeth is the last of the four 'great tragedies,' and perhaps the darkest," states Frank Kermode. His view would probably be shared by most of us. "In no other play," he continues, "does Shakespeare show a nation so cruelly occupied by the powers of darkness; and Macbeth is, for all its brevity, his most intensive study of evil at work in the individual and in the world at large."¹ By such definition, Macbeth suits our immediate purpose, for if we have learned anything from Kohlberg, it is that moral judgment is inextricably bound up with the question of good and evil, though not necessarily with conventional interpretations of right and wrong.

At the beginning of Macbeth, Shakespeare paints a
picture of a character held in high esteem by his fellow countrymen and by his King. He is a hero, and, as such, has fought a terrible battle against the evil force that would seek to destroy Duncan's kingdom, and he has won. He is equated with all that is thought good; specifically, he is the embodiment of "justice"—though it is a justice conventionalized to fit a sixteenth century Elizabethan audience's understanding of it. He is just in that he is giving traitors their due. For the Elizabethan audience, justice was all that did not go against the natural order of things—an order held together by the Great Chain of Being, every link of which represented each organic and inorganic substance of the cosmos in a preordained hierarchy. Concerning that section of the chain devoted to mankind, the King represented the highest and most perfect form of man on earth, divinely chosen and divinely inspired. All men, if they were "just," served their King and willingly placed their lives at hazard if his were threatened. Fortunately for English society, many kings took their divine calling seriously and attempted to live up to the Christian responsibilities accompanying it; that is, humility, generosity, integrity, and compassion. There were, however, a few exceptions: Henry VIII, Richard III, Henry IV, Richard II, Edward III, Henry II—maybe even more
than a few. Be that as it may, it was not their combined weight that pulled down the Great Chain of Being. That task was left for such men as Galileo and Sir Francis Bacon in combination with the strong arm of Science.

Shakespeare's Snotland might as well be sixteenth century England in its adherence to the sanctity of kingship and the enforcement of society's regard for it to a man. This is what Kohlberg would define as Stage 4 society. In such a society "[t]here is orientation toward authority, fixed rules, and the maintenance of the social order. Right behavior consists of doing one's duty, showing respect for authority, and maintaining the given social order for its own sake." Supposedly, the members of this society realize their responsibilities to put the good of society as a whole above their own preconventional (Stage 1 and Stage 2) needs, and they understand that the preservation of societal rules is good in itself irrespective of any social benefits they themselves might get from it (Stage 3 thinking). This is the environment surrounding Macbeth, and it would appear that he exemplifies the perfect societal member. Macbeth himself pays lip service to this belief, showing that he is very much aware of his responsibilities to Duncan in the eyes of society:
The service and the loyalty I owe,  
In doing it, pays itself. Your Highness' part  
Is to receive our duties; and our duties  
Are to your throne and state children and servants;  
Which do but what they should by doing every thing  
Safe toward your love and honor. (Mac. I.iv. 22-27)

Indeed, Macbeth's actions on the field of battle seem to speak the same message, for they are written in the blood of Duncan's foes:

For brave Macbeth (well he deserves that name),  
Disdaining Fortune, with his brandish'd steel,  
Which smok'd with bloody execution,  
(Like Valor's minion) carv'd out his passage  
Till he fac'd the slave;  
Which nev'rr shook hands, nor bade farewell to him,  
Till he unseam'd him from the nave to th' chops,  
And fix'd his head upon our battlements. (Mac. I.ii.16-23)

And, even when the tide of battle seems to turn against
them, Macbeth and Banquo are described "as cannons over- 
charg'd with double cracks, so they / Doubly redoubled 
strokes upon the foe" (Mac. I.i.37-38).

Certainly, the "noble" Macbeth's efforts are not 
wasted on Duncan, who immediately rewards him with the 
title and all that goes with it of the traitorous Thane 
of Cawdor. But is it not a little strange that Macbeth 
enters into the presence of the King while Duncan is still 
musing over the treachery of the former Thane? "He was,"

as Duncan recalls, "a gentleman on whom I built / An abso-
lute trust" (Mac. I.iv.13-14). Almost immediately he 
hails Macbeth his "worthiest cousin," irony in its dead-
liest disguise since Duncan is about to make the same 

mistake all over again (Mac. I.iv.14). He judges Mac-
beth's loyalty by his bravery on the field of battle and 
the verbal flattery that issues from his mouth. As Mac-
beth takes his leave, Duncan's words to Banquo reveal his 
high regard for Macbeth:

he is full so valiant,
And in his commendations I am fed;
It is a banquet to me. . .
It is a peerless kinsman. (Mac. I.iv.54-56,58)

Perhaps we should not blame Duncan too much for, if 
Macbeth had not been interrupted so abruptly in his moral
maturation process, he might have become just what Dun-
can thought him to be. But we can see, by pointing out
some significant passages from the play, that Macbeth
has not completely made a transition into the Stage 4
level thinking of Duncan and his countrymen. True, he
acts the part, but for different reasons—reasons iden-
tified with level 2 and 3 thinking, selfish reasons.

Macbeth would seem to be mainly operating at a
Stage 3 level, a stage in which "[t]here is much confor-
mity to stereotypical images of what is majority or
'natural' behavior. . . . Good behavior is that which
pleases or helps others and is approved by them."5 He
is, however, in an environment whose predominant orien-
tation is Stage 4. Macbeth's personal needs for approval
and honor have led him to abide by the societal conven-
tions upheld by Stage 3 and Stage 4 levels. He has, how-
ever, begun to make the transition to the Stage 4 level—
a transition which, if made, will require the surrender
of personal desires and needs and a commitment to the
personal desires and needs of the societal order and its
laws. It will mean a redefining or restructuring of the
meaning of justice in terms of authority and the welfare
of others rather than of prudence (self-good). He is
ripe for the time of testing, a sort of initiation into
manhood. Enter the three witches.
The three sisters know exactly where to strike, Macbeth's weakest spot—his ambition. This most commanding attribute is revealed to us before Macbeth ever meets Duncan, demonstrated by his reaction to the prophecy of the three witches in Act I scene iii. Macbeth seems "rapt withal" and he wants to know more. "Would they had stay'd!" he says emphatically (Mac. I.iii.57, 82). Obviously the idea of being King is completely to his liking. And, after being saluted as the new Thane of Cawdor by Rosse, Macbeth, in an aside to the audience, reveals his taste for the dish offered him: "two truths are told, / As happy prologues to the swelling act / Of the imperial theme" (Mac. i.iii.127-129).

But if Macbeth were entirely operating upon a Stage 1 and 2 level as these words would seem to indicate, he would be of little interest as a tragic character; for by definition there must be conflict, else would Macbeth be dismissed as a mere synonym for evil. Almost as soon as the pleasant thought of being King comes to him, it is immediately followed by the thought of murdering Duncan, who obviously has to be done away with if Macbeth is to ascend to the throne. In this important passage from Act I, Macbeth reveals his knowledge and acceptance of Stage 4 supremacy. The fear that the thought of murdering Duncan raises in him is the fear of doing
something that he knows is wrong, not just for his society, but for himself; and he questions the ambivalent character of the prophecy that would lead him to such lengths:

This supernatural soliciting
Cannot be ill; cannot be good. If ill,
Why hath it given me earnest of success,
Commencing in a truth? I am Thane of Cawdor.
If good, why do I yield to that suggestion
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
Against the use of nature? Present fears
Are less than horrible imaginings:
My thought, whose murther yet is but fantastical,
Shakes so my single state of man that function
Is smother'd in surmise, and nothing is
But what is not. (Mac. I.iii.130-142)

We have here the real dilemma spelled out. In Macbeth's society, the greatest and most spiritual position is held by the King. Adherence to Stage 4 precepts means the elevation of the societal system and promotes an almost worshipful attitude towards it. It is only natural that the promise of the throne would be appealing to Macbeth. It is Lucifer's problem in a different guise:
Macbeth simply wants to be God. He doesn't want to be a tyrant; he simply wants what has been held up to him to acknowledge as the best he can be. He wants to be, like Duncan, honored, respected, loved and powerful. After all, isn't it meant to be?

Confused, Macbeth seeks the counsel of others. His immediate thought after the witches deliver the prophecy is to talk it over with Banquo, a man who likewise has a vested interest in the prophecy, at a later date: "think upon what hath chanc'd; and at more time, / The interim having weigh'd it, let us speak / Our free hearts each to other (Mac. I.iii.153-155). But unfortunately for Macbeth and for Banquo, this conversation never occurs. Instead, in his eagerness to have counsel, Macbeth writes a hurried letter to his wife, Lady Macbeth, informing her of the present state of affairs, a letter which barely has time to arrive before Macbeth himself.

Macbeth's eagerness to share his news, however, should not be interpreted as a commitment to murder. There is a real struggle in him to overcome his desires, which would not be present if he did not acknowledge and prefer Stage 4 level thinking. He knows a decision made against the Stage 4 system is wrong, for he has accepted it at least intellectually and spiritually. His idea of what constitutes a "man" is completely tied up with the
Stage 4 interpretations of duty, allegiance, and loyalty to authority and to the societal convention of the host/guest relationship. Killing Duncan means killing the "man" in himself and it is this very objection that he counters with in his heated conversation with Lady Macbeth in Act I scene vii:

Lady M.: Art thou afeard
To be the same in thine own art and valor
As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that
Which thou esteem' st the ornament of life,
And live a coward in thine own esteem,
Letting "I dare not" wait upon "I would,"
Like the poor cat i' th' adage?

Macb.: Prai ree peace!
I dare do all that may become a man;
Who dares do more is none.
(Mac. I.vii.39-47)

Such an answer might silence a weaker opponent, but Lady Macbeth has the ability to turn Macbeth's argument around so that it screams back at him, accusing him of
cowardice—one born of shrinking from destiny and refusing to make the most of opportunities to rise higher in life:

What beast was't then
That made you break this enterprise to me?
When you durst do it, then you were a man;
And to be more than what you were, you would
Be so much more the man. Nor time, nor place,
Did then adhere, and yet you would make both:
They have made themselves, and that their fitness now
Does unmake you. (Mac. I.vii.47-54)

She, in effect, whips him back into line like some fiendish drill sergeant would a recalcitrant trooper and then resolutely begins rebuilding his confidence by assuring him of success:

Macb.: If we should fail?
Lady M.: We fail?
But screw your courage to the sticking place,
And we'll not fail. When Duncan is asleep
(Whereto the rather shall his day's hard journey
Soundly invite him), his two chamberlains
Will I with wine and wassail so convince,
That memory, the warden of the brain,
Shall be a fume, and the receipt of reason
A limbeck only. When in swinish sleep
Their drenched natures lies as in a death,
What cannot you and I perform upon Th' unguarded Duncan? What not put upon
His spungy officers, who shall bear the guilt
Of our great quell? (Mac. I.vii.59-72)

What we have just overheard is only one of many examples of a major thematic element in Macbeth—equivocation, an art whose only purpose is to distort and confuse so that true perception is clouded. Words in this play are merely tools to be used by those who have been grounded in the finer points of deception. Usually,
the equivocators will be on the side of evil--Lady Macbeth, the witches, Macbeth--but, in Macbeth, equivocation extends beyond all such moral boundaries so that we wonder about Malcolm's pretense to Macduff or, for that matter, about Macduff himself. Is Macduff's flight from his family completely justified? There are a lot of such questions raised in the play. Moral ambiguity hovers over all, except perhaps Duncan, whose character has to be a sort of reference point for those striving toward the good in the play.

The prominence of ambiguity in Macbeth serves to emphasize the conflict that Macbeth experiences before Duncan's murder and the mental anguish he suffers afterwards. More than anything else, it underlines the importance of our ability to perceive good from evil in making life choices. It is a theme repeated often in literature. In Goethe's Faust, Mephistopheles' only hope to destroy Faust lies in his ability to confuse or distort his moral perception so that he can no longer tell the difference between good and evil. When this is accomplished, reason becomes a helpless accessory to evil.

Macbeth's reason is satisfied by Lady Macbeth's answer. His Stage 2 and 3 desires have been, for the time being, elevated over Stage 4 duties and loyalties
but at a terrible cost—Macbeth has lied to himself. Underneath his comfortable robe of reason lies his deeper understanding of moral right and wrong—one that immediately makes its appearance after he murders Duncan:

Macb. : This is a sorry sight.
Lady M.: A foolish thought, to say a sorry sight.
Macb. : There's one did laugh in 's sleep, and one cried, "Murther!"
That they did wake each other. I stood and heard them;
But they did say their prayers, and address'd them
Again to sleep.
Lady M.: There are two lodg'd together.
Macb. : One cried, "God bless us!" and "Amen!" the other,
As they had seen me with these hangman's hands.
List'ning their fear, I could not say "Amen."
When they did say "God bless us!"
Lady M.: Consider it not so deeply.
Macb. : But wherefore could not I pronounce "Amen"?
I had most need of blessing, and "Amen"
Stuck in my throat.

Lady M.: These deeds must not be thought
After these ways; so, it will make
us mad. (Mac. II.ii.18-31)

What troubles Macbeth here is obviously the realization that he is a murderer, reason or no reason. Unknowingly, Macbeth's crime has precipitated him toward a moral maturational principle which Kohlberg analyzes as characteristic of Stage 6 thinking—the sacred value of all human life. But this principle is too far removed from Macbeth's actual stage placement to be relevant to him in any other than a limited way. He can only understand this principle as it relates to those lives he deems valuable, specifically Duncan and his retainers. There is no universal application here, but Macbeth's moral responsibility to these men is enough to work upon his conscience so that guilt soon manifests into fear. Though he can accept equivocation for awhile, Macbeth rapidly discovers the consequences of a distorted moral view, not the least of which will be his inability to interpret other characters' motivations.

Macbeth's faulty moral perception encourages his false assessment of others. He assumes others have the same desires and motivations that he himself has. Lady Macbeth will soon be Queen. Part of his reason for
writing the letter is so that she should "not lose
the dues of rejoicing" (Mac. I.v.12). Here he has not
missed the mark, for Lady Macbeth does have the ambition
that Macbeth suspects in her. However, he cannot accu-
rately apply his motivations indiscriminately to others
-Banquo, for example.

Banquo is an important character in that he serves
as a foil to Macbeth. He has also been included in the
prophecy and, to Macbeth's way of thinking, should also
be entertaining the very thoughts he himself is consi-
dering. But he is wrong. Banquo does have fleeting
thoughts of ambition, but he does not allow them to grow.
Instead, he calls upon the powers that be to protect him
from such forbidden considerations: "merciful powers, /
Restrain in me the cursed thoughts that nature / Gives
way to in repose!" (Mac. II.i.7-9). Even when Macbeth
hints at possible reward (honor) for his allegiance,
Banquo agrees to comply provided that he not lose any:

So I lose none
In seeking to augment it, but still keep
My bosom franchis'd and allegiance clear,
I shall be counsell'd. (Mac. II.i.26-29)

Banquo's consistent Stage 4 thinking is demonstrated most
effectively in his reaction to the news of Duncan's
murmur:

In the great hand of God I stand, and thence
Against undivulg'd pretense I fight
Of treasonous malice. (Mac. II.iii.130-132)

In any event, Macbeth continues to misjudge Banquo's character. It is not Banquo's knowledge of the witches' promise or any thought he may have had regarding Macbeth's involvement in the murder that seems to worry Macbeth. It is, rather, Banquo's ambition that he fears:

To be thus is nothing,
But to be safely thus. Our fears in Banquo
Stick deep, and in his royalty of nature
Reigns that which would be fear'd. 'Tis much
he dares,
And to that dauntless temper of his mind,
He hath a wisdom that doth guide his valor
To act in safety. There is none but he
Whose being I do fear; (Mac. III.i.47-54)

Banquo's murder is demanded because, like Caesar, he was "ambitious" though not yet guilty of the crime. Macbeth must, like Brutus,

therefore think him as a serpent's egg,
Which, hatch'd, would as his kind grow mischievous,
And kill him in the shell (JQ II.i.32-34). 6

Who better than Macbeth should understand the power of ambition upon the reasoning faculties of a man? And, can we the audience, in all confidence, defend Banquo against this accusation? Haven't we been witness to the debilitating effects of equivocation upon the moral perception of one man already?

We cannot, however, continue for long rationalizing Macbeth's crimes. Indeed, he himself realizes the futility of such endeavor. Fears of retribution, which must inevitably come, begin to take over his mind. And, though we are prepared somewhat by the earlier scene with the "invisible" bloody dagger, we are a little startled at how rapidly Macbeth's madness is set on. It is the madness which Lady Macbeth warned him against earlier--the madness of thinking too much upon his bloody deeds in light of Stage 4 principles. No amount of equivocation can justify his crimes to himself. Consequently, after Banquo's murder, Macbeth no longer tries to ally reason with atrocity. From that point on, his deeds have only one purpose--to outrun his thought: "strange things I have in head, that will to hand, / Which must be acted ere they may be scann'd" (Mac. III.iv.138-139).

Whereas before Macbeth has been an allegory of ambition, he now becomes an allegory of fear--fear of punishment and fear of dishonor (lower stage fears associated
with Stage 1 and Stage 2). Fear propels him into crimes against those who cannot possibly hurt him, typified in the play by his murder of Lady Macduff and her babes. But the quickness of the deed proves as ineffectual as reason in keeping from Macbeth the awareness of his crimes and their results. Even his enemies understand this:

Angus: Now does he feel
His secret murthers sticking on
his hands;
Now minutely revolts upbraid his
faith-breach;
Those he commands move only in
command,
Nothing in love. Now does he
feel his title
Hang loose about him, like a giant's
robe
Upon a dwarfish thief.

Menteth: Who then shall blame
His pester'd senses to recoil and
start,
When all that is within him does
condemn
Itself for being there? (Mac. V.i.i.16-25)
The lesson is finally learned but at enormous cost. In Act V scene iii, we find Macbeth alone, hated, tired, and bitter, realizing much too late that murders committed to gain honor, loyalty, obedience, friends, and respect, have instead given him just the opposite:

I am sick at heart. . . .
I have liv'd long enough: my way of life
Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf,
And that which should accompany old age,
As honor, love, obedience, troops of friends,
I must not look to have; but in their stead,
Curses, not loud but deep, mouth-honor, breath,
Which the poor heart would fain deny, and dare not.
(Mac. V.iii.19,22-28)

These lines are significant because, in them, Macbeth reveals what principles he thinks important. There is no lust for money or for power for its own sake. There is simply a desire for honor, love, obedience, respect, friends—legitimate goals for all of us. What is tragic about Macbeth's situation is that he chose the wrong way to acquire them. All of these values would have been his if he had acted in accord with what he already accepted as honorable, obedient, and loving—his responsibility to his King and society (Stage 4 assertions).
Unfortunately, Macbeth's needs for honor, obedience and love could not resist what seemed to him the greatest portion of such laurels. The conflict that Macbeth experiences is due to his belief in societal standards and his own deviation from them. Since his interpretation of honor is necessarily at the Stage 4 level, it is folly for him to think to experience it by ignoring Stage 4 level requirements. His tragedy is that his actions to gain these honors destroy his chance to ever have them. What we witness is a moral lesson: you cannot expect to have honor, obedience and love if you murder them. These are the rewards for leaving selfish purposes behind.

Macbeth has tried a lie on for size and found that it does not fit. Yet, even if he were to escape earthly retribution, his spiritual destruction is inevitable, for he has violated his own moral code. He is his own worst enemy and is ultimately responsible for his own destruction regardless of how mitigating the circumstances. Like all tragic characters from Adam to the present, he has deceived himself, and, even though some of these tragic participants have their Eves, their Lady Macbeths, their Iagos, their Cassiuses, their Mephistopheleses, and even their ghosts, they still must finally admit, "I knew better."
Responsibility, however, does not necessitate surrender. Often a tragic character will persist in full knowledge of his error and die fighting in the face of overwhelming odds. This is true of Macbeth. In Act V, scene v, he surely knows by now that he can no longer depend on the witches' verities, though his biggest surprise is yet to come—the knowledge of Macduff's extraordinary birth. Nevertheless, he is determined to fight—his honor as he understands it depends on it:

I pull in resolution, and begin
To doubt th' equivocation of the fiend
That lies like truth. "Fear not, till Birnan wood
Do come to Dunsinane" and now a wood
Comes toward Dunsinane. Arm, arm, and out!
If this which he avouches doth appear,
There is nor flying hence, nor tarrying here,
I gin to be a-weary of the sun,
And wish th' estate o' th' world were now undone.
Ring the alarum-bell! Blow wind, come wrack,
At least we'll die with harness on our back.
(Mac. V.v.41-51)

Whether we want to admit it or not, we cannot help but admire Macbeth's nerve as he sees his world crashing around him. He has our sympathy as he clings to his
kingly office even as all desert him. The only honor left to him is to die as a "man" would in his society—
with harness on his back. What better tribute to his character than that his final choice is a spiritual victory: honor over personal safety. We have seen Macbeth fail, but we have also seen a kind of triumph in the way he meets failure. But what has impressed us most is our own identification with the conflict Macbeth has experienced. We have shared his conflict and his guilt, his ambition and his fear. This vicarious association reminds us once more of the delicate balance between good and evil and the ease with which our moral perception is swayed. There is a profound metaphysical truth in the Doctor's reflective prayer, "God, God forgive us all!" (Mac. V.i.17). Macbeth's guilt is our guilt. His tragedy reminds us of it,
Notes


2 William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed., G. Blakemore Evans, p. 1313. All further references to *Macbeth* will be taken from this source. The appropriate Act, scene, and line numbers will be given within the text.


5 Kohlberg, p. 92.

For our next application of Kohlberg's stage theory, we travel backwards in time about two thousand years, to a period when serious Greek theatre was in the process of becoming the paradigm of tragic art and to a play often considered the most sublime dramatic work ever written—Sophocles' *Antigone*.  

The play itself revolves around the conflict between two characters, Antigone and Creon. Antigone, Theban princess and daughter of the ill-fated Oedipus is the heroine who rebels against an insensitive edict promulgated by the inexperienced but determined new ruler of Thebes, Creon. These two are the principal participants in a dramatic argument depicting the conflict of two important moral responsibilities: responsibility to authority and responsibility to the family. As usual in Greek drama, the characters will totally identify with one position only. Antigone will represent responsibility to the family and Creon will represent responsibility to authority. But the problem is one not usually undertaken by a Greek dramatist, and the questions that the play raises certainly must have upset Plato. For in the *Antigone*, we are approaching the higher end of the
moral spectrum, Stage 6; and, therefore, the question being asked can be answered only by the application of the highest moral standard, that of justice. In Stage 6, Right is defined by the decision of conscience in accord with self-chosen ethical principles appealing to logical comprehensiveness, universality, and consistency. . . . At heart, these are universal principles of justice, of the reciprocity and equality of human rights, and of respect for the dignity of human beings as individual persons. 2

In our discussion of justice in Chapter Two, we said that, in Kohlberg's system, Stage 6 is the only stage that uses the principle of justice exclusively in moral decision making. Stage 5 attempts to elevate justice, but its use is always qualified by consideration of what is the greatest good for the greatest number. The rules and standards have been agreed upon by the whole society:

Right action tends to be defined in terms of general individual rights and in terms of standards that have
been critically examined and agreed upon by the whole society. ... Aside from what is constitutionally and democratically agreed upon, the right is a matter of personal "values" and "opinions." The result is an emphasis upon the "legal point of view," but with an emphasis upon the possibility of changing law in terms of rational considerations of social utility (rather than freezing it in terms of Stage 4 "law and order."

Stage 5 is a "social contract" between the members of society and the laws and standards they have themselves provided for their own welfare. Individuals are permitted personal latitude in their beliefs, opinions, values, so long as these do not undermine the system. Justice, however, is a principle which often comes into conflict with societal institutions, particularly that of government, even a democratic government whose life's blood comes from that very source. All societal institutions, Kohlberg states, cannot rise higher than this stage simply because they are inherently dedicated to the needs of the many. Stage 6 is the only stage that
recognizes a greater good in the rights of the individual when he is in conflict with the rights of the many.

In *Antigone*, however, the conflict does not manifest itself in the opposition of the Stage 5 and Stage 6 levels but between the rigidity of a Stage 4 "law and order" consciousness and an equally rigid Stage 6 "individual right" consciousness, represented by Creon and Antigone respectively.

Having just considered sixteenth century English drama and its attendant cosmic philosophy, we are perhaps perplexed to learn that now we must look upon the Stage 4 level as something less than reverent and right. For in *Antigone*, we see that Stage 4 is subject to the abuse of those who make and enforce its laws. In this play, the Stage 4 system is the real villain. Its uncompromising philosophy is on trial regardless of how "divinely" represented. We have reached a higher level of moral maturity; we are now guests of the Greeks from whom we acquired the basic tenets of the democratic process. Such culture should be particularly sensitive to the rights of the individual. And, though *Antigone* is a play where we meet rulers and princesses; we must, nevertheless, not forget that Sophocles did not live under them. Athens, like all Greek cities of that time, was a city state and probably more of a democracy than
that now regulating the United States. But the Greeks had certain formats they followed when writing tragedies; one was certainly the tendency to use the characters and the subject matter of ancient myth for their plays. In any event, monarchial rule is mitigated somewhat in Antigone by the obvious position of the chorus as advisors to Creon and his desire to gain their support. This is particularly evident in his opening speech to them:

Gentlemen, the gods have graciously
Steadied again our ship of state, which storms
Have terribly tossed. And now I've called you here
Privately, because of course I know your loyalty to all the House of Laius.
How again, when Oedipus was king,
Your duty never faltered. When he fell
You still upheld his sons.
But now that they
Have gone . . . I, nearest in line,
Enjoy the sceptor and the throne.
Now, of course, there is no way to tell
The character and mettle of a man
Until you see him govern. Nevertheless,
I am the kind of man who can't and
never could
Abide the tongue-tied ruler who
through fear
Is shy of sound advice.  

Though Creon obviously has been given absolute power, there seems to be in everyone's consciousness a pervading sense that he, as ruler, is merely carrying out necessary procedures for the common welfare and that he is permitted this autonomy only as long as he does not abuse it.

Creon's personal values cannot be mistaken. He is the epitome of Stage 4 thinking. He tells the chorus that there is no sacrifice too great to make in support of the State's authority:

I find
Intolerable the man who puts his country
Second to his friend. . . . I could Not bear to make my country's enemy My private friend. For, knowing as I do Our country is the ship that bears us safe,
There are no friends aboard who sabotage.

You'll not Catch me putting traitors upon pedestals
Beside the loyal man. I'll honor him
Alone, alive or dead, who honors Thebes.

(Antigone, 171)

Antigone, on the other hand, is exceptional in her total identification with the rights of the individual. She believes that the State has no authority to tamper with the sacred duties of kinship. In her conversation with Ismene, she bluntly rejects Creon's authority in the matter of her brother's burial:

Antigone: Are you willing To share danger and suffering and--
Ismene: Danger? What are you scheming at?
Antigone: --Take this hand of mine to bury the dead?
Ismene: What! Bury him and flout the interdict?
Antigone: He is my brother still, and yours--though you Would have it otherwise. But I
shall not
Abandon him.

Ismene: What! Challenge Creon to his face?
Antigone: He has no right to tamper with what's mine. *(Antigone, 166)*

And later, she unequivocally states her position to Creon's face during his interrogation of her:

Creon: Now, tell me, Antigone, as briefly as you can,
Did you know an edict had forbidden this?
Antigone: Of course I knew. Was it not publically proclaimed?
Creon: So you chose flagrantly to disobey my law?
Antigone: Naturally! Since Zeus never promulgated such a law. Nor will you find that Justice publishes such laws to man below.
I never thought your edicts had such force.
They nullified the laws of heaven, which,
Unwritten, not proclaimed, can boast
A currency that everlastingly is valid;
An origin beyond the birth of man.
And I, whom no man's frown can frighten,
Am far from risking Heaven's frown by flouting these. (Antigone, 179)

Both characters champion the values associated with their stage identification; both have equally good points to make in arguments connected with their positions. Creon asserts that discipline must be maintained if the State is to survive; therefore, exceptions cannot be made. Antigone asserts that the State has no authority over the sacred bonds of family and the gods' burial laws; therefore, its interdict is meaningless. What we have presented is a moral question. Sophocles asks, "Who is right?" but then tips the scales by making Antigone a victim of might. The answer to their problem would lie in a Stage 5 compromise—one that would not deny the authority of the State but allow exception in matters relating to the sacred duties required of
family members. The tragedy that occurs in *Antigone* need not have happened but does simply because neither character can free himself from his "one-sided" nature. 6

These two characters so completely identify with the values of their stage that their uniqueness as individuals is all but lost. But, according to Hegel, this is entirely proper for tragic characters:

For, however, individualized they may be as living beings in their own right, each of them nevertheless identifies himself completely with only one of these substantive values . . . and assumes responsibility for all that such identification entails. 7

Such complete identification with one value or "ethical right" to the exclusion of all others is, in his opinion, the cause of tragedy. In Hegel's theory, all values are equally right by virtue of their existence in what he terms the Absolute. Tragedy, he insists, occurs when men attach themselves to values in a one-sided fashion so that these values come into conflict; resolution is achieved only when the elevated value has once again merged into the anonymity of the Absolute either by the
death of the character or by his reconciliation to the other values. In *Antigone*, Hegel has it both ways.

We differ from Hegel in that we believe in a hierarchy of values and, therefore, in a right and wrong value choice for the individual involved. A character is tragic for us when he aligns himself with a value that he knows is wrong but which, for the moment, appears good to him. The alignment is precipitated by the conflict felt within the character because of his stage position: he must be at a transitional point in his development. The character experiences conflict because he prefers the higher stage and has accepted its precepts but has not been able to relinquish his lower stage position. The choice of the lower stage is made in full awareness of the superiority of the higher stage's values, even though they are masked by lower stage needs that distort the character's moral perception momentarily. The next question, of course, is how do our characters fit into this schema?

We have already identified *Antigone* with Stage 6, and there appears to be no evidence for any other stage placement. Right away, there is a problem. If we judge her by the above definition, we have to eliminate her as a tragic character--she has no conflict with a higher stage. She has attained the highest stage
possible. She makes no choice; she does what she must do in accordance with her beliefs, albeit with a "fierce pride." Her role is not tragic. She dies, but her death is the affirmation of her values. And, though weakening somewhat before entering her tomb, Antigone still welcomes death, much as a saint might:

I go to bury him.
How sweet to die in such pursuit!
to rest
Loved by him whom I have loved,
Sinner of a holy sin, with longer time
To charm the dead than those who live. For I
Shall abide forever there.
(Antigone, 167)

Say that I'm mad, and madly let me risk
The worst that I can suffer and the best,
A death which martyrdom can render blest. (Antigone, 168)
I need no trumpeter from you to tell me
I must die. We all die anyway.
And if this hurries me to death before my time--
Why, such a death is gain. Yes, surely gain
To one so overwhelmed with trouble.
\textit{(Antigone, 180)}

We admire her, and we take pleasure in her unalterable heroism. No, Antigone may be the heroine of Sophocles' drama, but Creon is the tragic character.

We are not the first to have observed Creon's possibilities. Commenting on \textit{Antigone}, Oscar Mandel has this to say:

Frequently, too, a work contains two or more distinct tragic figures. A good case in point is \textit{Antigone}. For even if we disagree with Hegel's view that Antigone and Creon are equally right, we still have to admit the latter as a fully tragic character . . . . Indeed, it is not impossible to read the play as particularly
concerned with him rather than with Antigone.  

In our opinion, Antigone is particularly concerned with Creon. He certainly meets our qualifications for a tragic character. First of all, Creon is in a conflict situation: he is a Stage 4 ruler in a Stage 5 society, both of which we illustrated earlier. He is expected to govern with the assistance of others, shown by his dependence on the chorus and Tiresias, and he is aware of this position. In his interview with Tiresias, he defends himself by reminding the blind seer that he has always faithfully consulted him:

Creon: What news, old Tiresias?
Tiresias: I shall tell you. Listen to the prophet's words.
Creon: Have I ever failed to listen to your words?
Tiresias: Therefore have you safely piloted the State.
Creon: And gladly do I own my debt to you. (Antigone, 198)

But underneath Creon's conformity is a rigid commitment to the superiority of authority and a belief in
the power of the State to operate efficiently and effectively without the advice of old men and prophets. When Tiresias' advice counters his edict, he immediately responds by insulting him:

Old man, you pot away at me like all
The rest, as if I were a bull's-eye.

Now
You aim your seer-craft at me. Well,
I'm sick
Of being bought and sold by all your soothsaying tribe.
Bargain away! The silver-gilt of Sardis,
All the gold of India, is not enough
To buy this man a grave. (Antigone, 199)

Yet, the justness of the Stage 5 argument is apparently manifest to Creon. This he shows by attempting to wash his hands in Pilate-like fashion of the responsibility for Antigone's death:

I'll take her down a path untrod
by man
I'll hide her living in rock-hewn vault,
With ritual food enough to clear
the taint
Of murder from the City's name.
(Antigone, 190-191)

Creon is unable to accept Stage 5 philosophy for several reasons, but all are essentially related to his pride. Creon's inexperience, coupled with his desire to be an effective ruler, makes him especially sensitive to challenging situations. This we pointed out earlier in his first address to the chorus. In his speech, he is particularly solicitous for their advice and guidance, yet he lets them know that they can count on him to uphold the law:

You'll not
Catch me putting traitors up on pedestals
Beside the loyal man. I'll honor him
Alone, alive or dead, who honors Thebes. (Antigone, 171)

Creon the ruler, however, cannot escape Creon the man, whose confidence in himself is less than adequate, beset by the fear of being wrong and not only wrong but proven wrong by one deemed an inferior--a woman:
And yet,
This girl, already versed in
disrespect
When first she disobeyed my law,
now adds
A second insult—vaunts it to my
face,
O, she's the man, not I, if she
can walk
Away unscathed! (Antigone, 180)

Also:

No woman while I live shall govern me.
(Antigone, 182)

And, finally:

Let us then defend authority
And not be ousted by a girl. If
yield
We must, then better yield to man, than
have
It said that we were worsted by a
woman. (Antigone, 187)

Creon's fear of being less the man even extends
to his son, Haemon. He cannot take Haemon's advice seriously because older men do not profit from advice from those younger. In disbelief, he asks the leader of the chorus, "You mean that men of years have to learn / To think by taking notes from men of his?" (Antigone, 189). And, Creon reminds his son that the dutiful son does not embarrass his father by making him look ridiculous to the world:

A son's first study is
Unremitting deference to his father's will.
Such is a parent's prayer: to see grow up
A race of filial sons to deck his home,
Who hate those he hates, give his friends
The selfsame honor that the father gives.
But he who rears a brood of worthless sons,
What can one say to him but that he breeds
Troubles for himself and gossip for The ill-disposed. (Antigone, 186)

Creon does not realize that his fears have affected
his reason. His concern for his own self-good, which is always dominant in lower stages, keeps him from objectively viewing the situation. Our first indication that he can quickly come to irrational conclusions occurs early in the play when the Sentry reports the violation of his edict. It is obvious as far as he is concerned that the Sentry has been paid off, and he rejects vehemently the leader's strong suggestion that the edict was unnatural:

Enough! You make me furious with such senile Doddering remarks. Insufferable! You really think they care "two hoots," the gods, About this corpse?

No, far from this, the culprits are A group of grumblers in the town, who from The first opposed my edict, and in secret Wagged their stiffnecked heads against my yoke. These have led astray my guards with bribes. (Antigone, 174)
Even though Creon appears omniscient, not too many of his listeners are convinced by his conclusions, least of all the Sentry. Voicing his thoughts aloud as he hurries away, the Sentry sententiously asks, "Oh! What can one do when even right reason reason's wrong?" (Antigone, 175). But he is not the only critic. Creon's erroneous reasoning is pointed out by others. Antigone herself, in response to his opinion of her, defends her actions by simply saying, "You think I am a fool, perhaps it is / Because a fool is judge" (Antigone, 180). Likewise, Ismene's remark is certainly meant to reflect Creon's own folly: "Yes, my lord, for when misfortune comes / He sends our reason packing out of doors" (Antigone, 183).

His own son, Haemon, recognizing his father's error, gives him the best advice possible. In his argument, he challenges the dominance of a reason that is blind to circumstances that refute its validity; and, acutely aware of his father's sensitivity, he makes it plain that sometimes there is greater wisdom in the admission of mistakes:

Reason is God's greatest gift to man.
I would not dream of criticizing yours.
But other men can reason rightly too.
Then don't entrench yourself in your opinion
As if everyone else were wrong. "The kind of man
Who always thinks that he is right, that his
Opinions, his pronouncements, are the final word,
When once exposed shows nothing there.
But a wise man has much to learn without
A loss of dignity. *(Antigone, 187-188)*

This same message is given Creon by Tiresias:

Think, son, think! To err is human, true,
And only he is cursed who having sinned
Will not repent, will not repair.
He is
A fool, a proved and stubborn fool.
*(Antigone, 199)*

And, when Creon still stubbornly resists, Tiresias cries out in exasperation:
Creon! Creon!
Is no one left who takes to heart
that--

--That prudence is the best of all
our wealth. (Antigone, 199)

It would appear that all the characters in the
play are aware of the inevitable consequences of Creon's
foolish "right reason" except himself. But this is
always the case with the tragic character; evil must
seem good to him in order for his tragedy to occur.
Creon's reason delegates powers to the State that it
does not have. Too late, he learns that institutions
are not infallible. "La justice n'est pas une vertu
d'Etat," says Pompee in Corneille's Photin; and, in
Antigone, it certainly proves to be true.10 The cor-
rect move for Creon would have been upward to a Stage
5 understanding of justice but this he did too late.
Moral instruction is often painful and costly when evil
wears the guise of good. This moral maxim explicitly
appears in the words of the chorus. Perhaps there is no
better way to summarize the results of inaccurate moral
perception than in their epigrammatic words:
For Wisdom and a sage said long ago:
"If evil good appear
To any, fate is near.
Unscathed he'll blithely go
Then pride will bring him low."

(Antigone, 185)
Notes


3 Kohlberg, p. 92.

4 Kohlberg, pp. 88-89.

5 The Oedipus Plays of Sophocles, trans. Paul Roche (New York: Mentor-New American Library, 1958), pp. 170-171. All further references to Antigone will be taken from this source, and the appropriate page numbers will be given within the text.

6 Hegel, p. 174.

7 Hegel, p. 179.

8 Hegel, p. 174.


CHAPTER V

DEATH OF A SALESMAN

For our final consideration, we must once again travel in time, but now forward to the twentieth century and to a society far removed from conflicts between Theban kings and princesses or even to the understanding of such conflicts. We arrive in modern America, land of opportunities, and "rags-to-riches" dreams; where a man need only jump high enough to grab fruits once preserved for kings; where paradise is waiting around the corner; where a smile and an undaunted personality can break through social and economic barriers faster than twenty or thirty years of persistent chiseling; where a man only has to get "noticed" to be invited to a silver-coated future; and where being "well-liked" is the greatest insurance against old age, poverty, and other such monsters of defeat. But if we can take our eyes off the billboards long enough, we can't help but notice another America, a land of dirty tenements and tightly-packed apartment houses; a land where it is sometimes hard to find trees, let alone ones with fruit on them; a land where the sound of industry and production contrasts significantly with the silent voices of workers; a land where the rags of illusion sit on streetcars, park benches, or in subway terminals; a land where a spontaneous smile is more often
than not quickly followed by the frown of fear; a land where a man may chisel for twenty or thirty years and then have after all only a broken chisel, and a land where being "well-liked" is no guarantee against old age, poverty, and other such monsters of defeat.

It is a society built with blocks of ambiguity but mortared with the sweat and blood of real people. Possibly, this is the reason why it survives and why it is so dangerous—because there is some substance to it. Though nothing in itself, it exists in the minds of those who support it; and for these people, who have put so much of themselves into the building, its destruction must inevitably mean their own. So it continues, a blood-thirsty god, worshipped not only in America but in many countries peopled by modern man, but at what price! As the building climbs higher, so does the toll of lives that are lost. People are sacrificed, but many go to their graves in blind obedience to the dictates of a false reality, thinking that in their deaths their dreams are affirmed.

But, the evils of the modern world have their enemies, mainly among the artists, the theologians, and the philosophers—those who have rejected its false promises because, somewhere along the way, they realized its worship demanded a sacrifice of values. These
guerillas fight the subtle battle of educating the masses by creatively painting, speaking, performing or writing their values into the consciousness of the builders. *Death of a Salesman* is such an attempt. What better evidence that these values still exist in modern society than the reception that Arthur Miller's play has had from the people for whom it was written?

Here we have touched on the main reason for giving *Death of a Salesman* tragic legitimacy. It is a play which presents a moral dilemma (a question of values), represented in the actions of a character whose moral development necessitates a conflict. In this respect, Willy is just like all the other tragic characters we have considered. His moral perception will be overwhelmed by personal needs and desires characteristic of lower stages so that he chooses what seems to be good but which in fact is only the mask of evil.

In fact, Willy's character does double duty in Miller's play. Not only will he illustrate a personal tragedy, but he will also take on some of the responsibilities of the victim in tragedy—that is, to call down retribution upon the violators of moral order. Willy Loman's death will not affirm the values he died for but will, instead, shake the foundations of a society built upon those values. Just as Antigone's death will
call down the Euminides upon Creon and Duncan's murder will divinely demand the head of Macbeth, so will Willy Loman's death prophesy the doom of a society whose ambiguity caused it. Ultimately, the real tragic character in the play will be that communal organization supposedly established for the welfare of all but which has inadvertently become the perpetuator of moral distortion in its members.

How can a play which takes upon itself a burden of such proportions and succeeds so well at it be eliminated from the acceptable list of tragedies by those who propose to see so deeply into the nature of the subject? The reason, of course, lies in their method of analysis, a method which is so beguiled by the illusions of costume and surface discrepancies that it neglects the deeper similarities. For these critics, tragedy does not exist in modern society, primarily because they contend that modern society no longer recognizes the values that were the foundation of ancient cultures like the Greeks or even those of our closer contemporaries, the Elizabethans. According to these pessimists, somewhere on the assembly line or in a traffic jam on Forty-Second Street, we lost all our honor and our nobility; our concern for our fellow man fell before that for our pocketbook; and our vision of justice faded when we put on our glasses. In their
opinion, we live in a world where greatness has fled and, along with it, all motivation for it. Walter Kaufmann, though not condemning twentieth century society, summarizes fairly well the view of those critics who do. He says that it is a world where

[one takes care not to go to heaven, nor to descend to hell. One believes neither in purgatory nor in purification. One can neither face nor forget reality, neither weep nor laugh. One squints, grins, and gradually the heart freezes.]

J. W. Krutch in The Modern Temper goes much further. In his opinion, our society cannot even understand the great literature of the Greeks and Elizabethans; so diminished are we in our moral standards, we cannot respond to works which elicit emotions from us that are no longer there.

Naturally, because of our depravity, we cannot hope to produce heroes that meet Aristotle's description—still another argument for the demise of tragedy in the modern world. Aristotle, after all, explicitly told us who could and who could not be a tragic character:

It follows plainly, in the first place, that the change of fortune
presented must not be the spectacle of a virtuous man brought from prosperity to adversity: for this moves neither pity nor fear; it merely shocks us. Nor, again, that of a bad man passing from adversity to prosperity, for nothing can be more alien to the spirit of Tragedy: it possesses no single tragic quality; it neither satisfies the moral sense nor calls forth pity or fear. Nor, again should the downfall of the utter villain be exhibited. A plot of this kind would, doubtless satisfy the moral sense, but it would inspire neither pity nor fear; for pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune, fear by the misfortune of a man like ourselves. Such an event, therefore, will be neither pitiful nor terrible. There remains, then, the character between these two extremes—that of a man who is not eminently good and just, yet whose misfortune is brought about not by vice or depravity, but by some error or frailty. He
must be one who is highly renowned and prosperous—a personage like Oedipus, Thyestes, or other illustrious men of such families.

In contrast to such demands, our heroes are necessarily diminished so that we can understand them. To quote Kaufmann again:

It is a time when "philosophers prefer small questions, playwrights small men" . . . taking care to make the heroes small enough for our time.

Krutch, as usual, opts for the dimmest view by declaring, "We can no longer tell tales of the fall of noble men because we do not believe that noble men exist." But, even if we could believe in their existence, in George Steiner's eyes, there is still another reason for negating tragedy. In his opinion, ours is no longer a society where the affairs of kings and queens are reverenced; society's polarities have shifted and, because of this, certain characteristics of tragedy have been irreparably altered; He insists that
the natural setting of tragedy is
the palace gate, the public square,
or the court chamber. . . . With the
rise to power of the middle class
the centre of gravity shifted from
the public to the private. 6

Yet, the death of kings and queens is only a part
of a more important argument that Steiner gives for the
lack of tragedy—that is, the loss of a mythology. Ac-
cording to Steiner, without mythology, art loses its
translator:

The work of art can cross the bar-
riers that surround all private
vision—it can make a window of the
poet's mirror—only if there is
some context of belief and convention
which the artist shares with his
audience; in short, only if there is
in live force what I have called
a mythology. 7

Steiner is among those who believe that the advent of
the Industrial Revolution brought about changes not only
in the social climate, but in man's way of thinking, the
result of which banished the unscientific world of myth
from the earth forever. No longer do gods and goddesses exert their powers over the imagination without seeming ridiculous. It would seem that man has outgrown his need for such anthropomorphic representatives and even his taste for them.

Steiner, in particular, ruthlessly cuts off all avenues to successful modern tragedy. He tells us what we don't have and then criticizes us for reaching for it. After lamenting the loss of myth, he abruptly condemns those who try to preserve it. This, to Steiner, is only further proof of the deterioration of greatness in the dramatists of our society:

The modern pursuit of tragedy is marred by a great failure of nerve. The tragic poets of our time are graverobbers and conjurers of ghosts out of ancient glory. . . . The verse tragedies produced by modern European and American poets are exercises in archeology and attempts to blow fire into cold ash. It cannot be done. 8

Yes, modern critics paint a pretty gloomy and uncompromising picture of our literary efforts, and it's certainly depressing to consider ourselves inevitably
doomed to mediocrity, Mandel's thoughts on the subject touch the heart of the matter:

For the contention that we have no tragedy is far more than a semantic quibble; it means, properly translated, that we have lost the glory, that we have become second-rate. 9

We don't have to agree with these "Ancients," but neither do we have to completely deny their arguments. Modern tragedy is possible and almost for the very reasons they give for its impossibility. First of all, no one will deny that modern society itself has placed small value on the virtues and has been a significant contributor to our tendency toward apathy. But, since when have the ethical characteristics of a society interfered with literary quality? In fact, if we look back upon the environments surrounding many great works of literature, we find that they are periods of unrest, upheaval, indecision, change--times when man's values are being called into question.

Whether we want to be this way is another matter, and so is the question of whether we still have it in us to even appreciate greatness when we come into contact
with it. These are observations which by their very utterance should bring into doubt the validity of what they assert: inherently, they are statements of protest against mediocrity by men who must have some knowledge or acquaintance with other values to be able to tell the difference. In any event, if we accept Kohlberg's findings, which assert a universal system of values, we can happily disregard comments by those who see nothing but man's downhill slide to damnation.

Thirdly, saying that we lack a mythology is highly inaccurate. Perhaps we no longer create gods and goddesses, semi-divine kings and princesses or fantastical half-human, half-animal creatures of Nemesis, but we have given their characteristics to modern counterparts. They still populate our environment but in different form. The gods and goddesses have metamorphosed into the twentieth century powers of money, social position, fame, glamour, and popularity; our monsters have changed into the demons of unemployment, poverty, old age, ugliness, lower class position, and anonymity; and our kings and princesses have become those who fight and struggle against the monsters for the favors of society's deities. At base, our mythology, like all others, is just a representation of the struggle of good against evil—a struggle which promises to be around for a long time.
The only difference between modern myth and ancient legend is that our gods can no longer be depended upon to be on the side of good; they reign too close to the earth. In contemporary society, Lucifer has become more sophisticated. To work his darker purpose, he has so refined the art of deception that twentieth century man, in moral confusion, has accepted society's deities as representatives of ultimate realities. Man's moral self-assessment is based on how nearly he approaches the throne of these fallen deities even though doing so brings him into conflict with universal human values temporarily eclipsed by the shadow of neon light. It is only when there is an occasional blackout, that twentieth century man calls into question the substantiality of these gods and their ambiguous natures.

True vision is hard to come by, especially since we have developed an entire myth around the rudiments of the unique American struggle against good and evil. We call it the "American Dream." In it, a young man who begins with nothing challenges the monsters of society, defeats them by overwhelming doses of this or that virtue or, better yet, charms his way past them, and receives delights bestowed on him by the gods. The appeal of such a myth is enormous since its votaries can easily qualify for participation in it. For the hero of the American
Dream must be an ordinary man, without any of the usual trappings of the epic hero—family, money, nobility, divine origin. His is an individual struggle, one that depends totally on inner qualities like fortitude, daring, cleverness. Unfortunately, honesty, compassion, justice, are qualities which more often than not interfere with his progress.

Our myths require ordinary men, not kings or princesses. Knowing this, is it so unusual that our tragic heroes are also ordinary men? Aristotle's definition of tragic character in light of obvious social differences is blatantly ridiculous here. In any event, it is not likely that the Greek critic would have applied it; his well-known definition is only part of his views on the subject. Aristotle made a point of emphasizing that character representation depended on the action presented: "Dramatic action, therefore, is not with a view to the representation of character: character comes in as subsidiary to the action."10 Here and elsewhere, according to Francis Fergusson, Aristotle underlined the primacy of the tragic action:

The poet sees the action of the play-to-be first; then its tragic form (or plot), and then the characters best
fitted to carry it out with variety and depth. 11

If there is any one determinant of character that Aristotle does emphasize, it is that character must represent moral purpose: "Character is that which reveals moral purpose, showing what kind of things a man chooses or avoids." 12

Moral purpose is then what tragedy is all about. Character is important only in how well it presents that moral purpose. For the Greeks, the characters who best represented moral purpose were chosen from the roll call of myth; characters like Oedipus, Antigone, Creon. For the Elizabethans, they were taken from the pages of historical chronicles not too far removed from myth; characters like King Lear, Macbeth, Hamlet, Othello, and Brutus. But, for twentieth century society, these prototypes no longer convey our particular moral purpose. Our tragedies require men like Willy Loman; tragic heroes who are neither noble nor majestic yet whose superiority over other men depends entirely on their moral purpose. In such manner, they achieve a tragic grandeur akin to those representatives of the past. Oscar Mandel has given us a definition which is precisely to our point:

The tragic hero rises above the
common ruck by the very fact of his purpose, even when it is a guilty one. He has stature, in other words; he has climbed and therefore he can fall.\(^{13}\)

Willy's tragedy, like Creon's and Macbeth's, will result from his moral purpose, one requiring his particular character no less than theirs. Perhaps we should now take a closer look at that moral purpose.

Stage placement for Willy is not hard: he is at the Stage 5 level, a stage often referred to as the "social contract," meaning that its essential nature revolves around a tacit agreement between the individual and his society. It is an improvement over the rigidity of Stage 4 "law and order" in that it allows the individual flexibility in his opinions and beliefs as long as they do not threaten the foundations of societal conventions. In Antigone, we learned that Creon's tragedy was his inability to move forward to the Stage 5 level when presented with a conflict situation between Stage 4 and Stage 5. Stage 5 in that tragedy would have been the better choice for Creon. But, in Death of a Salesman, Stage 5 is the lower stage. Willy's conflict will be between his present Stage 5 position and the higher Stage 6 position revealed to him but which he fights
against accepting. His tragedy will be in his choice for the lower stage.

Stage 5 in *Death of a Salesman* is presented as a threat to the individual valuation of justice. The "contract" as presented in Miller's play is nothing more than a travesty written for the preservation of society at the expense of the individual. Essentially, Willy Loman mentally agrees to participate in the American Dream, assured that, in return for his support, society will reward him. But, as we have seen in the beginning paragraphs of this chapter, modern American society is fraught with ambiguity, and, more often than not, men like Willy Loman end up confused, disillusioned, yet still muttering contradictions in order to keep their dreams alive.

The play opens revealing an old and tired Loman who is no longer able to muster the energy to fabricate his existence consistently. He is breaking down, and fast on his heels is the fear that his life has not added up to anything. In his character, you read much of the prize fighter who keeps getting up, punch after punch, until blindly, he falls senseless to the ground. He tells his wife, "I'm tired to the death. I couldn't make it. I just couldn't make it, Linda...I'll start out in the morning. Maybe I'll feel better in
the morning. 

In addition, Willy's mental and physical exhaustion is accelerated by the feeling of being surrounded, closed up, and cut off from nature:

The way they boxed us in here. Bricks and windows, windows and bricks. . . . The street is lined with cars. There's not a breath of fresh air in the neighborhood. The grass don't grow anymore, you can't raise a carrot in the back yard. They should've had a law against apartment houses. (*Death of a Salesman*, 17)

This is a particularly bitter reflection in light of the fact that a love for nature has always been a very important part of Willy's character, though he has kept it in check in order to continue his visionary climb from rags to riches. Statements like this, however, indicate that Willy's frustration is finally being expressed.

We have other indications, early in the play, that Willy is becoming aware that his dreams have been betrayed; for example, the following:

Willy: Figure it out. Work a lifetime to
pay off a house. You finally own it, and there's nobody to live in it.

Linda: Well, dear, life is a casting off. It's always that way.

Willy: No, no, some people--some people accomplish something. (Death of a Salesman, 15)

But somehow, Willy just can't bring himself to put the blame where it belongs; he will not admit that what he has believed in is wrong. Instead, he vents his anger and disillusionment upon his son Biff. He cannot understand how and why Biff has turned out the way he has, and all his conclusions only end in contradictions:

The trouble is he's lazy, goddammit!

...Biff is a lazy bum! ...Biff

Loman is lost. In the greatest country in the world a young man with such--personal attractiveness, gets lost. And such a hard worker. There's one thing about Biff--he's not lazy.

(Death of a Salesman, 16).

His contradictions are perfect examples of the moral confusion promulgated by his society, but the ability to talk in contradictions is an essential requirement
for Willy's continuation. Still another example reflecting Willy's confusion is in his own self-assessment:

Oh, I'll knock 'em dead next week.
I'll go to Hartford. I'm very well liked in Hartford. You know, the trouble is, Linda, people don't seem to take to me. (Death of a Salesman, 36)

Again and again Willy will avoid the obvious by lowering his own or another's self-esteem. The American Dream never gets accused—at least by Willy. Somehow, he's just not been able to discover the secret. This is the question he desperately asks Bernard in the second half of the play when his world is crumbling all around him:

Willy: (after a pause) I'm--I'm overjoyed to see how you made the grade, Bernard, overjoyed. It's an encouraging thing to see a young man really--really--Looks very good for Biff--very--(He breaks off, then)
Bernard--(He is so full of emotion, he breaks off again.)

Bernard: What is it, Willy?
Willy: (small and alone) What--what's the secret? (Death of a Salesman, 92)

But Willy knows who the responsible party is. The situations build in the play for Willy's moral instruction. When he loses his ability to sell or even the motivation to do so, he recalls his original reason for choosing his profession—one based on seeing the success of an eighty-four year old salesman who died well-liked and wearing green velvet slippers. This is Willy's own dream; Willy's reality is just the opposite. At sixty, within one month of having his house paid for, he loses his job; the sum total of his value, a life insurance policy which still must be paid on and two sons unable to give him any form of security. After all the appointments, all the driving, and all the smiles, Willy has nothing in return; and he knows this is wrong. This is no definition of justice, and Willy says as much in his conversation with Howard:

Willy: (desperation is on him now) Howard, the year Al Smith was nominated, your father came to me and--

Howard: (starting to go off) I've got to see some people, kid.
Willy: (stopping him) I'm talking about your father. There were promises made across this desk! You mustn't tell me you've got people to see—I put thirty-four years into this firm, Howard, and now I can't pay my insurance! You can't eat the orange and throw the peel away—a man is not a piece of fruit! (emphasis added) (Death of a Salesman, 82)

Willy finds out too late the danger of building on dreams and having nothing that you can lay your hands on.

Immediately after his confrontation with Howard, while still in the office, Willy's mind slips back into the past to a conversation between himself and Ben. In this interchange, Willy defends his career choice. The fact that Willy recalls this scene against the background of a bitter reality, shows us his creeping awareness that all his dreams have been based on lies. His words echo hollowly in his present circumstances:

Without a penny to his name, three great universities are begging for him, and from there the sky's the limit, because it's not what you do,
Ben. It's who you know and the smile on your face! It's contacts, Ben, contacts. The whole wealth of Alaska passes over the lunch table at the Commodore Hotel, and that's the wonder, the wonder of this country, that a man can end with diamonds here on the basis of being liked! (*Death of a Salesman*, 86)

What is upsetting Willy the most is not that his dreams have amounted to nothing for himself--that, he can rationalize away as personal shortcomings--but, that they have amounted to nothing for Biff. For Biff, he nurtured for greatness. Biff, well-liked and personally attractive, had that self-confidence that Willy lacked. Why didn't he succeed? That's the question that keeps hammering away in the back of Willy's head, but it is a question that he doesn't really want answered. Biff's failure is proof that his vision is invalid, and this proof Willy resists. In any event, Biff's return in conjunction with the present turn of events, brings about a change in Willy's character. Linda tells Biff as much:

When you write you're coming, he's
all smiles, and talks about the future, and--he's just wonderful. And then the closer you seem to come, the more shaky he gets, and then, by the time you get here, he's arguing, and he seems angry at you. (Death of a Salesman, 54)

We gradually learn through Willy's reveries in the past just how important a part Biff has played in Willy's dreams. Willy's whole life was built around Biff's future. Biff was Willy's biggest sale; he bought everything that Willy told him. Willy was Biff's hero, the man who knew how to sell the world, a rock of self-confidence. Their relationship was built on lies, and when the truth asserted itself, as it will inevitably do, that relationship fell apart. Finding his dad with another woman was too disillusioning for Biff. Gone was the invincible man that laughed at rules, and, in his place, was only a weak, ingratiating man who gave another woman his mother's stockings. What Biff saw finally was the man behind the smile, and he knew then that he had been naively taken in.

What bothers Willy is that he knows he is responsible for Biff's failure, and, even though he can't admit it openly, we know by the scenes from the past that this
too is making its way forward into his consciousness. In his conversation with Bernard, we find Willy very touchy when Bernard's questions seem to point his way:

Bernard: I've often thought of how strange it was that I knew he'd [Biff] given up his life. What happened in Boston, Willy?
(Willy looks at him as at an intruder.)
I just bring it up because you asked me.

Willy: (angrily) Nothing. What do you mean, "What happened?" What's that got to do with anything?

Bernard: Well, don't get sore.

Willy: What are you trying to do, blame it on me? If a boy lays down is that my fault?

Bernard: Now, Willy, don't get--

Willy: Well, don't--don't talk to me that way! What does that mean, "What happened?" (Death of a Salesman, 94)

But Willy's repression is unsuccessful. At the restaurant, when Biff's story begins to seem like just
another example of "spite" towards him, Willy's guilt finally materializes: his subconscious mind plays the entire scene from the past for his own recognition. At this climactic point, Willy has the opportunity to break with Stage 5 illusion. It is at this point he can follow Bernard's advice and "just walk away" (Death of a Salesman, 95). He can choose the individual freedom afforded by Stage 6—a stage promoting moral autonomy from the status quo, though without tangible rewards. He even has other alternatives: he can accept the job Charley has repeatedly offered him, and he can even have the love and understanding of his son, for Biff now has a new and deeper respect for his father. Willy no longer needs to live a lie.

Unfortunately, Willy can't accept Biff's blunt assessment that they're both "a dime a dozen" (Death of a Salesman, 132). No, Willy Loman is something more than an unemployed salesman without a future. This inner agony is revealed in some of his last words. He tells the imaginary Ben, "A man can't go out the way he came in, Ben, a man has got to add up to something" (Death of a Salesman, 125). It is Willy's pride that compels him to validate the American Dream even though it requires his death to do so. Surely, a $20,000 life insurance policy is something substantial, he triumphantly
tells Ben:

Oh, Ben, that's the whole beauty of it! I see it like a diamond, shining in the dark, hard and rough, that I can pick up and touch in my hand. Not like—like an appointment! This would not be another damned-fool appointment, Ben, and it changes all the aspects. (Death of a Salesman, 126).

Somehow, he thinks his death will provide the personal affirmation he could not achieve in his life:

But the funeral—(straightening up)
Ben, that funeral will be massive! They'll come from Maine, Massachusetts, Vermont, New Hampshire! All the old-timers with the strange license plates—that boy will be thunder-struck, Ben, because he never realized—I am known! Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey—I am known, Ben, and he'll see it with his eyes once and for all. He'll see what I am, Ben! He's in for
a shock, that boy! (Death of a Salesman, 126)

Willy's pride (always a lower stage characteristic) along with his genuine concern for the welfare of others distorts his moral perception. Suicide seems the only possible good for him when, in actuality, it is only a choice for evil. Like all the choices of tragic characters, Willy's choice will not pay off. His funeral is poorly attended and there is every reason to suspect that the insurance company believes his death a suicide. Willy dies supporting the very system that has been the cause of his death.

Willy's death, however, does not go unmourned, for there are many in the audience who share his experience and can sympathize with his aspirations and defeat. His death is a definite indictment against the society which caused it—a society which uses the individual and then unceremoniously discards him. What we see in Death of a Salesman is injustice but injustice viewed for the preservation of justice, the ultimate universal moral principle according to Kohlberg.

Perhaps the greatest tribute Willy could have is that his death demands from us a reevaluation of the principle of justice. Willy Loman may not wear a crown but, by the end of Miller's play, we feel the essence of
nobility in his character as he becomes the representative of ourselves in a struggle against the might of an ambiguous environment where justice is often distorted and abused. Any man who can direct our minds toward a consideration of the meaning of justice deserves royal recognition. Like the more mature Biff, we can say unequivocally and without reservations to those who look only upon Willy's aged exhaustion and quiet dress, you've just seen a prince walk by.

A fine, troubled prince. A hardworking, unappreciated prince. A pal, you understand? A good companion. Always for his boys (Death of a Salesman, 114).
Notes

4 Kaufmann, p. xvi.
5 Krutch, p. 123.
7 Steiner, p. 318.
8 Steiner, pp. 304-305.
11 Francis Fergusson, Introd., Aristotle's *Poetics*, p. 22.
12 Aristotle's *Poetics*, p. 64.
13 Mandel, p. 103.
14 Arthur Miller, *Death of a Salesman* (1949; rpt. New York: Penguin Books, 1976), p. 13. All further references to *Death of a Salesman* will be taken from this source, and the appropriate page numbers will be given within the text.
CONCLUSION

In the preceding chapters, we have taken a moral theory and applied it to three representative tragedies but have done so, not only to validate Kohlberg's findings, but to draw some conclusions about the nature of tragedy. Some of these conclusions are concepts that have been in existence for centuries but which have been occasionally debated, ignored, or denied altogether; we have merely hoped to confirm them. Essentially, these conclusions are first, that tragedy is a universal concept and not the possession of any one culture or the phenomenon of any one time period; second, that tragedy's universality depends on its presentation of ethical values and principles held in common by all mankind; and third, that tragedy's representation of ethical values necessitates an affirmation of moral order having justice as its highest principle. In addition, we have questioned the appropriateness of tragic theories reflecting cultural or historical requirements, asserted a continuity of the tragic concept, and argued the present existence of modern tragedy.

In our presentation, Kohlberg's stage theory has acted as a universal constant by which we have looked into the deep and ambiguous nature of tragedy and
formulated a new definition. We have used his theoretical structure to tap the depths of a mystery whose shadowy origin parallels our own. Without such mental assists as Kohlberg's, our understanding of concepts like tragedy would be impossible. These structures serve as interpretive mediums through which some truth of the vast ultimate reality can reach and enrich us. Yet, an interpretive medium can reproduce only an image having characteristics to which it is sensitive. Other mediums, producing their unique images may add additional information or give added interpretations to information already known. Sometimes seemingly discordant images need only another image to be reconciled.

Complete rejection of other possibilities that appear to be inharmonious with accepted truth should always be executed with caution. The application of any one theoretical construct inevitably leads to limitations because theories, once stated, do not grow and expand as do human language, thought, and experience. And, even though Kohlberg's theory is concerned with universal values and principles, it is not inviolate. Nevertheless, Kohlberg's stage theory has allowed us to recognize tragedy as the presentation of conflicting ethical values staged for the purpose of moral edification. If it is so used, however, we charge the user with allowing
flexibility to certain works whose measurements might make for an awkward fit in our particular "costume." Fashion, in any event, is unpredictable, and tragedy certainly has the right to choose the garment best suited for the time. Let us hope that future evaluators allow for these peculiarities and that they develop an eye for the possibilities of dress.


