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The Collision of Christian and Pagan Values in Shakespearean Tragedies (*Othello*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*)

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This study examines the interplay and conflict between pagan and Christian value systems in three Shakespearean tragedies: Othello, Hamlet, and Macbeth. Drawing on classical Greek and Roman traditions, Christian moral philosophy, and literary criticism, the analysis explores how competing ethical frameworks shape the protagonists' actions, psychological conflicts, and tragic destinies. Particular attention is given to the tension between pagan ideals of heroism, honour, and immediate action and Christian principles of conscience, introspection, self-sacrifice, and moral responsibility. Through close readings of selected characters and dramatic situations, the study considers how these conflicting values influence representations of power, revenge, love, gender, and punishment. It further examines the symbolic significance of light and darkness and geographical boundaries in expressing moral and psychological conflict. The analysis suggests that Shakespearean tragedy can be interpreted as a space in which classical and Christian traditions coexist, interact, and generate internal contradictions rather than simply replacing one another. By approaching these tensions as one possible interpretive framework, the study contributes to understanding the complex relationship between religious values, cultural inheritance, and the representation of human consciousness in Shakespearean drama.

Keywords: *Shakespearean Tragedy, Christian Values, Pagan Values, Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, Moral Conflict.*

The social, religious, and aesthetic paradigms of Shakespeare's age profoundly shaped the dramatic vision of his works, informing his representation of reality through historical, social, and theological perspectives. The present study focuses primarily on the religious dimension of Shakespearean drama, examining the interplay, and at times the conflict, between pagan and Christian values. More specifically, it examines how tensions between classical pagan traditions and Christian moral values can be identified and interpreted in three selected tragedies, *Othello*, *Hamlet*, and *Macbeth*.

Pagan ethos inherited from classical antiquity and the ascendant Judeo-Christian moral order of early modern England intertwined into the special psychological and social interface. The tension between these frameworks marks a period in which the dichotomy of moral value systems and the divergent ways each could be interpreted generated conflict between external circumstances and the protagonist's inner world. As Hegel's conception of tragedy is often

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summarised, "Genuine tragedies in the world are not conflicts between right and wrong. They are conflicts between two rights."[1]

The analysis revolves around the process of value transition and change throughout the period when European literature marked its renaissance, together with all the humanities.

Pagan and Judeo-Christian values have fundamentally shaped the trajectory of European and subsequent American literature. The evolution of these value systems, marked by periods of confrontation and assimilation, has consequently fostered an understanding and development of literary tradition.

While the concept of "pagan values" is inherently broad, for the purposes of the investigation, the research will primarily focus on those reflected in European literary tradition, drawing on ancient Greek and Roman traditions. This includes their foundational mythology, drama, epic poetry, and the intertwined nature of these influences, where the Roman tradition often serves as a successor to the Greek. Therefore, in this context, "pagan values" will refer specifically to the Greek and Roman cultural and literary legacy.

Firstly, the Greek set of values is considered the bedrock of ancient European values. The research examines their development and how Roman culture subsequently refurbished and crystallized these values, often omitting elements less conducive to imperialism and imbuing them with their own interpretations and objectives.

In ancient Roman cultural ideology, valor was considered the paramount virtue, prominently exemplified in Virgil's *Aeneid*. The epic centers on Aeneas, a hero characterized by his divine lineage and inherent heroic qualities, a heroic nature that persists throughout the narrative. This focus on the individual protagonist, in contrast to the *Iliad*'s designation by geographical locale, adheres to the Roman value system's emphasis on personal destiny and heroic agency.

> *Alas, great Caesar! And thy race so great!*
> *When shall this man arise, this man of might,*
> *This heaven-born hero, whose bright virtues shine*
> *To guide the world, whose conquest shall be peace,*
> *Whose name shall be the solace of our age?*[2]

The principal Greek value system emphasized perfection, conceptualized as the superlative degree of a quality within its class, evidenced, for instance, in the "fastest horse among horses" or the "most beautiful flower among flowers" as mentioned by Aristotle.[3] This Greek ideal of perfection sometimes stands in contrast to Roman valor, particularly in epic narratives where Roman heroes are characterized by their drive for conquest, whereas Greek heroes often engage in

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[1]Hegel, G. W. F. *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. Translated by T. M. Knox. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975. Vol. II, pp. 1192-1196. The formulation quoted is a widely used summary of Hegel's account of tragic collision.

[2]Virgil. *Aeneid*. Translated by H. Rushton Fairclough, revised by G. P. Goold. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999. Book VI, lines 789-807.

[3]Aristotle. *Metaphysics*. Translated by Hugh Tredennick. Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1933. Book V, 1021b.

a pursuit that is more akin to a divine instruction or following the route of destiny.

> *And so, in the intelligible realm, the form of the good is the last to be seen, and it is hardly seen, but when it is seen, it is inferred that this is the cause of all right and beautiful things for all, and that in the visible world it is the cause of light and of the ruler of light, and also is itself ruler in the sphere of the seen.*[4]

Assessment of pagan values encompasses both their mythological and philosophical dimensions. Greek mythology typically depicts gods as whimsical, prone to impulsive actions, sensual gratification, and sudden inclinations. In contrast, the philosophical sphere witnessed the maturation and formalization of a coherent value structure, primarily articulated by the philosophers Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. It could be derived, somewhat ironically, that philosophers in Ancient Greece demonstrated more godly conduct than pagan Gods themselves. While Plato, in *The Republic*, articulated a clear and rigorous moral code that imposed strict restrictions and obligations on both rulers and ordinary citizens, the Greek gods themselves frequently acted according to their own whims. They engaged in acts such as theft (Hermes), rape (most notably Zeus), and the subjugation of mortals, often without moral accountability or consequence.

Both Socrates and his disciple Plato approached concepts resonant with Christian morality, particularly concerning self-reflection. This philosophical inquiry led to Socrates' ostracism, accused of corrupting Athenian youth and deviating from traditional Greek customs and devotion to the Olympian gods, signaling the obsolescence of the prevailing pagan framework. Concurrently, while formulations of morality, the good, and evil began to mature with Socrates and Plato, Aristotle later provided substantial empirical evidence for human existence and psychological development within the material world.

Several indicative details suggest the nascent emergence of Christian ideals within ancient Greek philosophy. The symbolic resonance of Socrates walking barefoot, mirroring accounts of Christ's life, alongside Plato's emphasis on the primacy of the world of Ideas over material existence, collectively illustrates how philosophical inquiry was fundamentally preparing the conceptual landscape for a profound shift in ethical and value paradigms.

The differentiation between social and personal goodness is underscored by Socrates' emphasis on the prevalence and authority of law, contrasted with Plato's focus on societal structures dedicated to the common good. Plato argued that such collective well-being inherently provides the essential foundation upon which individual goodness can be securely built.

> *Unless philosophers rule as kings or those who are now called kings and leading men genuinely and adequately philosophize, and political power and philosophy completely coincide, and unless those same persons, who now pursue either aim*

[4]Plato. *The Republic*. Translated by Benjamin Jowett. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894. Book VII, 517b-c.

> *exclusively, are compelled to do so, cities will have no respite from evil, my dear Glaucon, nor, I think, will the human race.*[5]

Christianity heralded a paradigm shift in virtue and morality, foregrounding self-sacrifice and the primacy of the soul's strength above bodily perfection. Although Plato considered the soul immortal, subsequent medieval and Renaissance understandings merged this immortality with notions of voluntary suffering, martyrdom, and the practical pursuit of the common good, a concept seeded by Plato and Aristotle, paving the way for a redefined understanding of individual virtue and its role in augmenting universal spiritual values. As the famous Shakespearean scholar A. C. Bradley stated, "...the tragic suffering and death arise from collision, not with a fate or blank power, but with a moral power, a power akin to all that we admire and revere in the characters themselves."[6]

The locus of morality and ideology shifted from abstract, supra-individual influences to an internalized system. Christian commandments and theological exegeses of biblical texts subsequently served as the basis for internal censorship and the derivation of ideals, marking a departure from previous modes of ethical regulation.

During Shakespeare's era, England experienced profound, albeit often invisible, ideological conflicts between burgeoning Christian morality and enduring pagan values. The common populace sometimes struggled with the adoption of Christian tenets, perceiving them as meek and submissive in contrast to the valor and perfection characteristic of the secular, classical tradition. Meanwhile, a segment of English society actively promoted these new Christian morals. Shakespeare's works, including tragedies like *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *Othello*, and comedies such as *The Merchant of Venice*, vividly represent these internal battles and contradictions.

Christian values inherently foster introspection, guiding the hero toward simultaneous self-identification, self-condemnation, and self-atonement. This process establishes the very rules by which worldviews are constructed, leading to distinct perceptual boundaries and a clear demarcation between differing categories of understanding as this watershed moment is actively established.

Shakespearean protagonists often embody a Christian hero whose introspective nature and unique inner world are juxtaposed against pagan or secular scenarios demanding immediate, unhesitating action devoid of moral scruples. In contrast, Christian contexts generally necessitate self-absorption, arduous contemplation, and a profound internal trial, sometimes leading to a perceived inaction that transcends into spiritual deliberation. For instance, Hamlet, embedded within a traditional revenge narrative (recorded in the legend that served as a source for *Hamlet*) that typically calls for swift, remorseless action, hesitates due to the influence of nascent Christian ideals that preclude such precipitate responses.

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[5]Plato. *Republic*. Translated by G. M. A. Grube, revised by C. D. C. Reeve. Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1992. Book V, 473c-e.

[6]Bradley, A. C. *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth*. 2nd ed. London: Macmillan, 1905. Lecture I, "The Substance of Shakespearean Tragedy," p. 36.

The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to: 'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wish'd. To die, to sleep;
To sleep, perchance to dream, ay, there's the rub:
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come,
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause, there's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life.[7]

Shakespeare masterfully illustrates the tension between Christian and pagan ideals through the exchange between Hamlet and Horatio. Horatio's stoic skepticism reflects a broader societal unease with the rapid imposition of Christian tenets, an unease that Hamlet appears to share. When Hamlet ponders the skull of Yorick, he asks Horatio, a paragon of stoicism, "Dost thou think Alexander looked o' this fashion i' th' earth?", to which Horatio replies, "E'en so."[8]

The foundational pagan values of Greece and Rome, while influencing Christian ethics, led to a distinct difference in the hero's internal landscape. The Christian hero's journey was largely characterized by self-reflection and critical self-assessment, in contrast to the pagan hero's imperative to navigate and fulfill external conditions and assigned objectives.

Shakespeare's works, as examined by Bloom, can be viewed through the lens of the "invention of the human," which could be further refined to the "invention of the Christian human." For Bloom, "the representation of human character and personality remains always the supreme literary value, whether in drama, lyric or narrative."[9] Macbeth's early portrayal as a triumphant pagan warrior, dedicated to his king and country with unparalleled perfection, powerfully sets the stage for the subsequent construction of a new, Christian-influenced human identity in the play.

The pagan value system sanctions a direct pursuit of power and a drive for preeminence stemming from individual strengths and virtues. Conversely, Christian values delineate a hierarchical structure wherein power is bestowed by God, advocating for the obedience of "vessels" to their "suzerains" and rigorously condemning homicide due to its grave repercussions.

Bloom argues that Shakespeare's unique achievement lay in creating characters of such psychological complexity that they seem to possess an inner life independent of their dramatic situations, their capacity for self-examination being what makes them feel profoundly human.[10]

Othello illustrates a Christian framework where individuals are accountable for their actions and choices, rather than attributing outcomes solely to fate. The

[7]Shakespeare, William. Hamlet. Edited by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor. 3rd ed. London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2016. Act 3, Scene 1, lines 61-68.
[8]Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Edited by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor. 3rd ed. London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2016. Act 5, Scene 1, lines 201-218.
[9]Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1998. p.4
[10]Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1998. p. 16.

play underscores the importance of individual will and the consequent responsibility to remain committed to one's chosen path, especially in matters of love. Othello's assertion that Desdemona "had eyes, and chose me"[11] serves as a powerful testament to this principle, implying that a chosen commitment, according to Christian tenets, necessitates enduring faithfulness.

Shakespeare's *Othello* vividly illustrates the clash between classical traditions and the emerging Christian values, particularly concerning the nature of love and commitment. The classical ethos, encompassing both antiquity and later classicism, prioritized faithfulness to duty and merit, dictating behavioral norms such as marriage within congruent social strata, upbringing, and age. In stark contrast, the union of Othello and Desdemona defies these conventions, transcending disparities in age, social standing, and, crucially, race, a significant determinant in the era. Despite these profound controversies, their love prevails, demonstrating the ascendance of genuine affection over societal strictures.

Classical ideals emphasizing sacrifice for the collective, motherland, king, or shared worldview are supplanted by a model of personal sacrifice, particularly pronounced in Christian contexts and mirrored in *Othello*. Othello's account that "She loved me for the dangers I had passed"[12] encapsulates this shift, drawing a parallel with Christian theology's appreciation of suffering for mankind. Othello, a warrior demonstrating profound loyalty to Venice, undergoes personal tribulations that align with this Christian emphasis on enduring hardship for a chosen cause, even when it transcends his own national identity. Bloom, however, cautions against reading the play as a doctrinal work: "though Shakespeare's Moor has been baptized, *Othello* is no more a Christian drama than *Hamlet* was a doctrinal tragedy of guilt, sin, and pride."[13] The present reading accepts this caution, treating Christian values as a moral horizon within which the characters act rather than as the play's religious message.

> *O thou foul thief, where hast thou stowed my daughter?*
> *[…]*
> *Bond-slaves and pagans shall our statesmen be.*[14]

The hero's rage is all the more terrible for being inextricably bound up with his love, and his love all the more fragile for being always on the verge of collapsing into murderous hatred.

Christian and pagan values find a tangible representation in geographical divides. The perceived "barbarity" and "belligerence" of the Norwegian territories bordering Denmark, associated with paganism, establish a distinct cultural frontier. Likewise, the Venetian military engagement in Cyprus against the

[11]Shakespeare, William. *Othello*. Edited by E. A. J. Honigmann. 3rd ed. London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2016. Act 3, Scene 3, line 192.
[12]Shakespeare, William. *Othello*. Edited by E. A. J. Honigmann. 3rd ed. London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2016. Act 1, Scene 3, line 168.
[13]Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. New York: Riverhead Books, 1998. p.434
[14]Shakespeare, William. *Othello*. Edited by E. A. J. Honigmann. 3rd ed. London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2016. Act 1, Scene 2, lines 62 and 99. The lines are spoken by Brabantio.

Turks, with Othello embodying a "pagan" outsider, illustrates how geopolitical contexts reinforce religious and cultural dichotomies. Individuals residing at these transitional geographical margins consequently endure fragmentation and internal conflict, caught between disparate value systems.

Desdemona's resolve to join Othello in Cyprus actively challenges the patriarchal norms of her time, demonstrating a willingness to abandon traditional boundaries and exemplifying a more assertive feminine ideal.

> *She wished she had not heard it, yet she wished*
> *That heaven had made her such a man.*[15]

These words of Othello showcase Desdemona's character. The feminine ideal accepted by society runs like a thread through many Shakespearean plays. In contrast to Desdemona, who demonstrates an adventurous nature along with the desire and capacity to break the rules by which society abides, Ophelia is instructed to act as a real woman ready to please.

> *Tender yourself more dearly;*
> *Or, not to crack the wind of the poor phrase,*
> *Running it thus, you'll tender me a fool.*[16]

Shakespeare frequently employs character dichotomies to illustrate the pervasive tension between Christian and pagan value systems, as in the famous pairing of Duncan and Macbeth. Shakespeare presents Duncan as a true Christian king, although his meekness and gentleness do not correspond with the imperatives of the time, whereas Macbeth profoundly matches the criteria of the pagan exemplary king who can defeat any foe, taking no account of the nature of the measures exercised. Blood does not perplex his character; meanwhile, Duncan responds with compassion to the bleeding captain who reports the battle and orders that he be given surgeons. So the value systems start to clash at the point where the fate of the kingdom is at stake. Whom to choose? An adamant warrior with no sense of remorse, or the Christian king who adheres to Christian tenets but could endanger the future of his subjects.

The divergence between Christian and pagan values is profoundly evident in their respective approaches to human nature, distinguishing between Christian attributes like rationality, empathy, self-reflection, and conscientiousness, and pagan tendencies such as intense rage, envy, immediate emotional breakthroughs, and simplistic moral codes centered on duty and heroic impulse. This creates a tension between subconscious drives and conscious control, manifesting as Christian reserve versus pagan unbridled emotion. Consequently, while pagan valor relies on swift, unthinking action, Christian morality, embodied by

[15]Shakespeare, William. *Othello*. Edited by E. A. J. Honigmann. 3rd ed. London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2016. Act 1, Scene 3, lines 163-164.
[16]Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Edited by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor. 3rd ed. London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2016. Act 1, Scene 3, lines 107-109.

characters like Hamlet and Duncan, emphasizes measured deliberation and the potential for self-sacrifice as the highest form of valor, mirroring Christ's actions.

> *What a piece of work is a man!*
> *How noble in reason, how infinite in faculty,*
> *In form and moving how express and admirable,*
> *In action how like an angel, in apprehension how like a god!*
> *The beauty of the world, the paragon of animals,*
> *And yet, to me, what is this quintessence of dust?*[17]

Nietzsche's assertion in *On the Genealogy of Morals* that Christianity made human beings more interesting, since it was on the soil of the priestly form of existence that "man first became an interesting animal,"[18] can be applied here, as well as his second formulation that humanity needs "the Roman Caesar with Christ's soul."[19]

> *Education in those ruler's virtues that master even one's benevolence and pity: the great cultivator's virtues [...] the affect of the creator must be elevated [...]. The exceptional situation and powerful position of those beings (compared with any prince hitherto): the Roman Caesar with Christ's soul.*[20]

Both of these indicate that a spiritual realm should be severed from a perceived external world characterized by cruelty and violence.

> *That I did love the Moor to live with him,*
> *My downright violence and storm of fortunes*
> *May trumpet to the world.*[21]

Macbeth's actions illustrate this dichotomy: while his engagement in combat against enemies showcases pagan values of bravery and duty, where pagan and Christian ideals resonate, his violation of hierarchical humility within the king-vassal or father-son dynamic (metaphorically representing the king's role) transgresses a fundamental Christian tenet. Nietzsche's "Roman Caesar with Christ's soul" suggests a potential synthesis of pagan and Christian values, embodying a new morality validated emotionally, spiritually, and intellectually.

The same tendency works with female characters. Gertrude and Desdemona are portrayed as more "paganized". This susceptibility to emotional impulses is attributed to their restricted social roles, limited educational opportunities, and a circumscribed feminine nature, though figures like Desdemona, aspiring for

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[17]Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Edited by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor. 3rd ed. London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2016 lines 269-274.
[18]Nietzsche, Friedrich. *On the Genealogy of Morals*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale. New York: Vintage Books, 1967. First Essay, §6.
[19]Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Will to Power*. Translated by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale. Edited by Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage Books, 1968. §983.
[20]Ibid.
[21]Shakespeare, William. *Othello*. Edited by E. A. J. Honigmann. 3rd ed. London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2016. Act 1, Scene 3, lines 249-251.

agency even in the face of her "inner warrior's spirit," complicate a simple categorization.

Internal suffering emerges as a defining characteristic of Christian conduct in Shakespeare, increasingly overshadowing the pagan expectation of immediate retribution. Hamlet's predicament showcases this transition, where the pagan duty of swift revenge is supplanted by moral hesitations and a contemplation of higher Christian obligations. Also, with regard to the feminine factor, Hamlet demonstrates Christian intolerance towards feminine self-expression, which particularly implies Hamlet's attitude towards sex. He chastises his mother for the possibility of having sex with his uncle, picturing scenes of sexual intercourse, and suspects Ophelia of dirty motives and inclinations.

> *Nay, but to live*
> *In the rank sweat of an enseamèd bed,*
> *Stewed in corruption, honeying and making love*
> *Over the nasty sty!*[22]

Beyond geographical boundaries, Shakespeare employs the symbolism of light and darkness to represent the dichotomy between Christian and pagan consciousness. Pagan traditions are typically depicted in daylight, with direct, overt clashes between individuals. Conversely, actions involving the subconscious, introspection, and self-reflection are often shrouded in the dim, feeble flames of candles or in sheer darkness, symbolizing the complex, often unmotivated or inscrutable movements of the human soul and its hidden desires, frequently concealed even from the actors themselves.

The divergence between Christian and pagan values extends to their respective modes of punishment. That is why, while experiencing moral scruples as he watches the scene of his brother's murder staged by Hamlet, Claudius shouts, "Give me some light. Away!"[23]

Pagan traditions typically prescribe direct execution or murder as retribution. In contrast, Christian punishment is notably more complex, often targeting the individual's distorted psyche or compromised self, as seen in Lady Macbeth's descent into madness, Gertrude's ambiguous or "covert" death, or Polonius's demise behind the scenes, a consequence of his cunning and betrayal, illustrating a punishment that affects the very being rather than merely ending it. According to A. C. Bradley:

> *In Shakespearean tragedy the main source of the convulsion which produces suffering and death is never good: good contributes to this convulsion only from its tragic implication with its opposite in one and the same character. The main source, on the contrary, is in every case evil; and, what is more (though this seems to have been little noticed), it is in almost every case evil in the fullest sense, not mere imperfection but plain moral evil. The love of Romeo and Juliet conducts*

[22]Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Edited by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor. 3rd ed. London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2016. Act 3, Scene 4, lines 91-94.
[23]Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. Edited by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor. 3rd ed. London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2016. Act 3, Scene 2, line 256.

> *them to death only because of the senseless hatred of their houses. Guilty ambition, seconded by diabolic malice and issuing in murder, opens the action in Macbeth. Iago is the main source of the convulsion in Othello.*[24]

The differing psychologies surrounding revenge and retribution between Christian and pagan value systems are starkly evident in Shakespeare's characters. Laertes exemplifies pagan immediacy, willing to commit murder even within a sacred space like a church to avenge his father. In contrast, Hamlet, despite his conviction of his uncle's guilt, hesitates to commit murder during prayer, reflecting the Christian hero's characteristic moral scruples, introspection, and the heightened self-awareness that scrutinizes not only actions but also thoughts.

The problem of conscience, arising from the clash between pagan and Christian values, reveals the profound differences between these two moral systems, both in their underlying principles and in their practical implications. In exceptional circumstances and moments of acute moral crisis, these competing systems may become so irreconcilable that they appear to annihilate one another, ultimately precipitating the tragic downfall of the protagonists caught between them. As Jade Standing observes in her study of conscience in *Hamlet*:

> *Depending on which tradition of conscience a person was thinking in, conscience could inhibit action or hasten action, inspire conviction in the truth or suspicion of the truth, invoke an individual authority or a general authority.*[25]

The perspective on suffering diverges significantly between Christian and pagan values. As observed in *Othello*, Christian frameworks elevate suffering, making it a fertile ground for Desdemona's affection towards Othello, a hero valued not for conventional Venetian attractiveness but for his strange and unconventional nature, his darkness and age implicitly linked to his endured hardships. This underscores how, within a Christian context, the soul's capacity to suffer becomes a primary asset, determining a human being's worth and value.

Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, a late work, vividly portrays the conflict between Christian and pagan values alongside themes of governance and power struggles. The archetypal figures of Ariel and Caliban symbolize the division between Eros and Thanatos, spirit versus instinct, which Prospero masterfully governs. While Prospero's authority relies on logos, represented here by magic, a force historically linked to pagan witchcraft, his regal ambitions and conduct align more closely with the Christian model of authoritarian kingship. This creates a paradox where pagan means are employed to maintain a seemingly Christian-derived authority. As E. M. W. Tillyard observed in *The Elizabethan*

[24]Bradley, A. C. *Shakespearean Tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth*. 2nd ed. London: Macmillan, 1905. Lecture I, "The Substance of Shakespearean Tragedy," p. 34.
[25]Standing, Jade. "Conscience-Caught: Historicizing the Religious and Legal Traditions of Conscience in *Hamlet*." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 73, nos. 3-4 (2022): 177-198.

World Picture, "It is not in our power not to be stirred mentally by our appetites, but it is in our power to translate them or not to translate them into actions."[26]

Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is so all-encompassing in its scope that it encompasses the divine, the magical, and the human, intertwining questions of the body and the soul, human agency and divine providence. At the same time, the play explores humanity's aspiration to assert its authority even over the forces of the universe. Ultimately, the creative power of the human spirit emerges as a force capable of transcending bodily instincts and the intrigues of human ambition. It is this complex interplay of metaphysical, theological, and human concerns that has made *The Tempest* an object of not only literary but also theological inquiry.[27]

In essence, the constant oscillation between Christian and pagan values generates an intense internal struggle within the hero, presenting a compelling perspective of conflicting moralities that imbues Shakespearean drama with a new dimension of tension and profound emotional depth.

Firstly, the typology and historical development of the human being should be traced through the lens of emotional and social standards. Subsequently, the growth of the ego and soul is observed, as well as influences on the modes of expression, thereby delineating historical periods and revealing their corresponding moral codes within each observed phase.

Indeed, the clash of values serves as the very engine of tragedy, while the resolution of these collisions ushers in comedy, ultimately reconciling human conflicts and their moral disparities.

This essay has followed the clash of pagan and Judeo-Christian value systems in three tragedies by Shakespeare, showing how it was through such clash that the tragedies of *Hamlet*, *Othello*, and *Macbeth* got their tragic impetus, not in terms of right versus wrong, but in terms of the imperfect absorption of one moral system by another. Four observations are to be drawn from the study.

First, the Greek and Roman pagan inheritance and the rising moral order of Christianity do not succeed each other in the tragic drama of Shakespeare in any simple way; rather, they exist alongside one another as part of the same dramatic consciousness. The evidence for this can be found on the character level: Hamlet's indecisiveness can only be understood through the interaction of the inherited revenge system and the emergent Christian system, and on the level of pairings of characters representing the two opposite poles of such interaction: Christian piety of Duncan against the pagan brutality of Macbeth, pagan immediacy of revenge of Laertes against Christian reluctance of Hamlet in his prayer scene.

Second, the collision is gendered in addition to being general: women, represented in Desdemona, Gertrude, and Ophelia, are seen by their respective dramas as more "paganized" in their emotional disposition, even as the character of Desdemona, expressing her resolve to go to Cyprus with Othello and her

[26]Tillyard, E. M. W. *The Elizabethan World Picture*. London: Chatto & Windus, 1943. p. 44.
[27]See Anonby, David. "From Magic to Prayer: The Interplay Between Disenchantment and Re-enchantment in Shakespeare's *The Tempest*." *Theology* (2026).

fidelity, demonstrates her active resistance to such characterization by means of the same play that imposes it.

Third, the collision is structural as well, as evidenced by imagery of light and darkness, geographical positioning, and punishment.

Fourth, the descriptions provided by Bradley and Tillyard clarify exactly what kind of collision occurs in these works. On the one hand, Bradley's claim that Shakespearean suffering is caused by "collision... with a moral power, a power akin to all that we admire and revere in the characters themselves" and his statement that the main source of "the convulsion which produces suffering and death is never good," good contributing to it "only from its tragic implication with its opposite in one and the same character," show why the tension between the pagan and the Christian values in these plays is felt as tragic and not as merely didactic: these two sets of values do not confront each other externally but reside within one hero. On the other hand, Tillyard's discussion of faculty psychology of the Renaissance times and his claim that "it is not in our power not to be stirred... by our appetites, but it is in our power to translate them or not to translate them into actions" provides us with the terminology which matches precisely the dichotomy described in this paper - that between pagan appetites and Christian self-control.

These findings should be read with several limitations in mind. The analysis draws on a necessarily selective set of scenes and speeches from three tragedies among Shakespeare's much larger corpus, and a fuller account would need to test its claims against the comedies, histories, and romances more systematically, *The Tempest* excepted. Because the argument proceeds through close reading of individual passages rather than sustained act-by-act analysis, it risks foregrounding evidence that fits the pagan-Christian frame at the expense of moments in these same plays that resist or complicate it. The definition of "pagan values" adopted here, restricted to the Greek and Roman literary and philosophical inheritance, necessarily brackets other value systems, Norse, Celtic, and broader Mediterranean, that also inform early modern English culture. The argument also treats "Christian" and "pagan" as relatively stable poles against which individual characters and speeches can be measured; a more granular account would attend further to the doctrinal and denominational specificity of English Christianity in Shakespeare's lifetime, itself a period of unsettled and contested religious identity. Finally, the interpretation of characters through pagan and Christian values offered here represents one possible critical approach rather than an exclusive explanation of their behaviour.

Future research might productively extend this framework into the Romantic and Modern periods, tracing how the pagan-Christian tension identified here is inherited, transformed, or displaced by later literary movements, and offering a broader comparative perspective on the evolution of literary and cultural value systems across historical epochs.

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