

FROM ORIGIN TO HABIT  
SHAKESPEARE'S USE OF ALCOHOL AND MORALITY IN TRAGEDY

HONORS THESIS

Presented to the Honors College  
of Texas State University  
in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements

for Graduation in the Honors College

by

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San Marcos, Texas  
December 2018

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## Abstract

This research looks at the tragic plays of William Shakespeare and the influence of both the medieval morality plays and alcohol. The embodiment of this work draws upon primary sources (the plays themselves), the works of his contemporaries, and classic Greek philosophers and physicians, namely Galen and Aristotle. To round out this out, contemporary critics have been consulted. Some prior research has noted the prevalence of alcohol in Shakespeare's plays, but there has been little attention paid to the location of its occurrence and its relevance to the entire structure of the plays. This oversight undermines the importance of the vice and morality themes that are embedded into Shakespeare's great tragedies. One problematic area was defining what Renaissance era individuals thought of alcohol and its influence on human nature. The medical texts of both Galen and Robert Burton, author of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, proved excellent resources. By comparing philosophical texts and the structure of the morality plays to the selected passages, one can extrapolate a trend in Shakespeare's writing. He recreates the characters of Vice and Folly from the morality plays in order to depict a rising action and change in nature, using alcohol as a crutch. This occurs most often in Act II Scene III. However, in the instances that it does not, it always happens before the climax of the play. The findings in this research suggest that Shakespeare is using alcohol and its transformative effects to further the plot of these tragic tales. In addition, while studying the plays there were instances of this device found in the same location (Act II Scene III) in some of his comedic plays. These additional findings suggest that further research should be conducted to discover the scope of Shakespeare's use of alcohol and morality.

*From Origin to Habit: Shakespeare's Use of Alcohol and Morality in Tragedy*

As a creator and caretaker of words, Shakespeare's modern-day influence is profound. The effect of his works can be found throughout modern day movies, television, and other character driven media. This is no surprise, for as Plato said, "All the arts are imitative, but the objects which they represent are not the deceptive phenomena of sense, but essential truths apprehended by the mind and dimly described in phenomena," (Fyfe x). Any great artist can give a mountainous stack of references for what has influenced them the most, but what and who were the bard's greatest influences? Unfortunately, since not much is known about him, it is difficult to assess with entire clarity as to what he would have read beyond the shadow of a doubt. Access to his thinking and creative process is also akin to historical mind reading. "Thought can never be mere object. To know someone else's activity of thinking is possible only on the assumption that this same activity can be re-enacted in one's own mind. In that sense, to know 'what someone is thinking' (or 'has thought') involves thinking it for oneself," (Sanders 6).

However, even in knowing all of this, the process of unearthing his influences is a fascinating one which reveals various patterns in his texts, and most specifically in the alignment of some of his tragedies. In the following scenes to be studied (from *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *King Lear*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *Hamlet*), Shakespeare has employed the use of a vice, specifically alcohol, to further the plot. These instances come during the rising action of the play, as an attempt to initiate the audiences' reception to

the more violent themes to follow. He uses this substance as a way to mimic the slow destruction of human virtue from within, rather than from without.

As a young child, Shakespeare was sent to the New King's School, where he learned to read and write (Greenblatt 47). It is here that he encountered and, more than likely, became familiar with classic Greek tragedies and philosophy. He was able to study their form, read critiques from Aristotle and Plato, delve into classical thought, and even study fledgling medical texts by Galen. He also would have had the opportunity to witness traveling theatre acts who performed the 'Morality Interludes' and other forms of pre-Elizabethan plays. The marks of their influence can be found in the reoccurrence of Vice (both as character and in metaphor) as an agent of catalyst, as well as the general form of many of his plays, especially *Othello* (Kahrl 114). Because of this, it is imperative to start out with a brief description of both the structure of the Aristotelian Tragedy and the Medieval Morality Plays, as they play a major role in the findings to follow.

Aristotle said in his philosophical treatise, *The Poetics*, that "tragedy is a representation of an action that is heroic and complete and of certain magnitude... it represents men in action and does not use narrative," (23). The arrangement of its incidents is of the utmost importance (29). "A whole is what has a beginning and middle and end... Well-constructed plots must not begin and end at random, but must embody the formula," (31). Similarly, the morality plays relied on a particular mode of action for their structure. Their action, however, was "a double one: a descent out of innocence into sin, and an ascent out of sin to salvation... The life of humanity is seen to begin in a potential state of innocence but to lapse in the course of experience into an actual state of

sin. This state of sin, in turn is seen to lead by its own contradictions toward the possibility of a state of repentance,” (Kahrl 114).

By following these formulas, Shakespeare was able to present big ideas about power, information, and the nature of man. His use of alcohol as a derisive catalyst of immoral behavior brings an element of realism to these lofty ideas. It is a relatable vice that the casual audience would be able to digest and understand. Shakespeare’s creative partnership with his culture enabled him to expose the pulse of Elizabethan life, while also paying homage to all of the greats before him. It is obvious that he believed in the infinite power of knowledge and literature, but moreover, he believed in the transformative acts of human action and interaction. Because of this, the relevance of the recurrent placement of alcohol and the drunkard within the texts becomes all too logical.

Before getting into the discourse about the plays themselves, it is also important to mention that Shakespeare first uses the word addiction in *Othello*. This usage is important because it is one of the first times the word is found in English Literature. The earliest known usage of it is found in 1532, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, and the bard is only the fourth person to pen it. It is impossible to know for sure, but it seems as though knowledge of a predilection to adhere to vices was becoming more en vogue. Though temperance was often practiced, for instance the classical act of adding water to wine to lessen its effects, it does not seem as though there was a common held belief that one’s vices could be a psychological and physiological burden, caused by more than just ill use, as there is now. In the scenes to follow, it is difficult to deny that Shakespeare was presenting a more holistic interpretation as to what is meant to be an alcoholic or to have a penchant for vice.

Returning to *Othello* in just a moment, this topic was first brought to my attention in *Macbeth*. This play presents to the audience the characters of MacDuff, Lennox, and a porter in Act II, Scene III (this particular act and scene numbering will be seen multiple times throughout the course of this work). In it, they are discussing the general effects alcohol has on the body. It is done so in a comic way to break away from the levity of the play, as a whole. Just before this, King Duncan has been murdered. The porter describes alcohol as a provoker of three things:

Marry, sir, nose-painting, sleep, and urine. Lechery, sir, it provokes and unprovokes: it provokes the desire but it takes away the performance. Therefore, much drink may be said to be an equivocator with lechery: it makes him and it mars him; it sets him on and it takes him off: it persuades him and disheartens him, makes him stand to and not stand to; in conclusion, equivocates him in a sleep and, giving him the lie, leaves him (2.3.23-30).

Here the bard is showing how paradoxical this substance can be. When used correctly, this scene leaves the audience in rollicking spirits. Its placement is key. Right after this exchange, the King is discovered to have been assassinated. This play, if one recalls, is one of his more macabre tragedies.

In keeping with the traditions of the ‘morality interludes’, the porter takes on the role of the character Folly. “Virtually every characteristic of the Vice figures is already present in the characterization of Folly, who dominates the scene of Manhood’s second fall. He enters on the standard note of vulgarity common to all medieval stage devils,” (Karhl 111). The porter, who refers to himself as “devil-porter” in line 14, is, without question, the most memorable part of this scene. This is mostly due to the juxtaposition of humor sandwiched between two violent and dark events. The concept of the second fall is important, as well. It could be argued that Macbeth’s first fall was the murdering of

the king, while the second is the rush to power he sets upon once the body is discovered. He promptly gets his desire.

Shakespeare uses alcohol to advance the plot and to caricature the violent, oxymoronic inner nature of Macbeth. He both desires power and knows that it is morally wrong. It is entirely plausible that Shakespeare intended to highlight both detriments, that of immoderate alcohol use and immoderate desire of power. He would have also been familiar with the texts of Galen of Pergamon, who was “the renowned physician of the ancient world,” (Kilgour 105). He wrote treatises on the effects of food and wine on the body. The following is a passage he penned about the mixing of alcohol with one’s already present substances:

One is bound to admit, even if one wishes to posit a separate substance for the soul, at least that it is slave to the mixtures of the body: these (vices) have the power to separate it, to make it lose its wits, to destroy its memory and understanding, to make it more timid, lacking in confidence and energy, as happens in cases of melancholy—or the opposite of these qualities, as in the of the moderate drinker of wine (Galen 155).

During the time of Galen, around 150 A.D., and well through the Renaissance, people believed that the nature of people depended on various humors held inside the body. If they were not in balance, people were apt to become either evil or ill. A vice, like alcohol, could expedite this process. “For our body is like a clock; if one wheel be amiss, all the rest are disordered, the whole fabric suffers,” (Burton 150). It would not be a far stretch to say that Shakespeare believed this himself. Worth noting here is how the porter addresses the effect that alcohol has on provoking urine. This was also known as yellow bile. It was believed that in cases in which a person had an increased amount of this substance, it could cause an excess in black bile, as well. This was the substance known to



cause melancholy, more modernly known as depression. Though the porter is meant to be seen in a humorous light, he is touching upon a topic which is well known throughout human history. It is an ill-begotten way of being that ‘provokes’ bad behaviors.

Returning now to *Othello*, Act 2.3 is perhaps the longest discourse concerning the nature of alcohol. One of the sources of this play is Richard Knolles’s *General History of the Turks* (Bate 273). In this historical text, “his (Othello) wife took over the running of Cyprus while he devoted himself to vain pleasures,” (Bate 280). However, Shakespeare changes history. He instead sees off the Turk and implies instead that the real danger to the isle comes from the internal collapse of civil society, Othello is not the one afflicted by the acquisition of vain pleasures, but his confidante is. In fact, Othello reacts harshly to Cassio’s drunkenness (Bate 280).

Before getting into the discourse of Act 2.3, it is important to point out that the aforementioned use of the word addiction takes place in Act 2.2. In this scene, Othello’s herald enters with a proclamation, stating that “it is Othello’s pleasure... that every man put himself / into triumph: some to dance, some to make bonfires, each / man to what sport and revels his addiction leads him,” (2.2.1-5). This term, however, is not present in the Quarto editions of Shakespeare’s plays. It is first seen in Edward Blount and William Jaggard’s *Mr. William Shakespeare’s Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies* published in 1623. This change comes after the 1621 publication of *The Anatomy of Melancholy* by Richard Burton, which altered the way the early modern period thought of medicine and physiological and psychological ailments. It is possible that this influence is what caused the publishers to change the original wording.

At the beginning of 2.3, the malevolent Iago has convinced Cassio to imbibe, even though it is against his better judgement. Violence ensues, and Cassio is left licking his wounds and lamenting the loss of his reputation. This was certainly Iago's intention. He honed-in on Cassio's weakness, which is his love for alcohol, and used it to break the man down. What happens in lines 248-305 is not an unfamiliar scene to anyone who has woken up after a particularly nasty bout of drinking. It is a great representation of how one's vice can dismantle a person's true course of action.

Cassio begins his exploration into alcohol's nature with the repetition of the word "reputation." Ironically or not, the word reputation is derived from the Latin *reputare*, which means to think over, which is exactly what Cassio is doing. He is thinking over his actions. He claims that the use of this substance has caused him to lose "the immortal part" of himself, and that what is left of him is bestial (lines 241-3). He has become uncivilized. Iago attempts to quell the over-thinking Cassio by assuring him that reputation is a fickle thing and ought not be worried about. He calls his mood "a punishment more in policy than in malice," (lines 250-1). Cassio retorts by explaining that he would rather be hated than to bring shame to his good commander (Othello).

What follows is his naming of the "invisible spirit of wine" as "devil." What is interesting here is that he addresses the inanimate substance in the second person. He says, "O thou invisible spirit of wine, if thou hast no name to be known by, let us call thee "devil"," (lines 257-9). Since he is speaking directly to Iago, who is the catalyst to his derisive behavior, it is possible that Shakespeare is using this epithet to simultaneously name Iago as a spirit of evil. The definition of devil, according to the

Oxford English Dictionary is, “a very wicked or cruel person, or, in a weakened sense, a person who is very difficult to deal with; also as a general term of abuse,” (OED). While Cassio is using the weakened definition to name his vice, Shakespeare is alluding to the nature of Iago. Iago is a man of ambition and vengeance, and these qualities make him a very dangerous person with which to engage. He is a devil, in this sense.

Cassio continues his characterization and personification of alcohol by pointing to the idea that “it hath pleased the devil drunkenness to give place to the devil wrath; one unperfectness shows me another to make me frankly despise myself,” (lines 271-3). Here, in fact, is a direct mirror of what Iago did to Cassio. By pressuring him into imbibing, he knew that Cassio would become violent and cause a scene. It was his intention to dismantle Cassio, both in station and of mind. To charge Shakespeare with intention of this parallel is no longer a stretch. In fact, the interconnectivity of these can be tied back to the “morality plays.” Since Vice itself is personified in these plays, it would come as no surprise that Iago could fit snugly into this role. By utilizing the likeness of alcohol and vice to Iago, Shakespeare is attempting to forward the progression of the play into the next stage.

In addition, Cassio is filling the role of the Folly character in the “morality interludes.” As was mentioned before, Folly was consistently present in the scenes depicting the second age of man. He is often donning the clothing of Shame, which transforms him into something unrecognizable (Kahr 112). This is similar to Cassio’s actions in this scene. He makes the perfect substitute because “one cannot boast of despising and combating sensual desires if one does not see them, if one does not know

them, their charms, their power, and their most alluring beauty,” (Montaigne 249). Cassio cries out:

Oh, that men should put  
an enemy in their mouths to steal away their brains! That  
we should with joy, pleasance, revel, and applause transform  
ourselves into beasts! (2.3.265-8).

His actions of stupidity led him to feelings of shame. This was an inherent function of Folly; he was to hammer home the moral lesson of this portion of the play (Kahrl 113).

The final play to be examined that has Scene 2.3 as its focal point is *Romeo and Juliet*. In this scene, Friar Lawrence, the man who is to wed the ill-fated lovers, enters with a short soliloquy about the nature of vice and virtue. In line five, he describes the sky as having “fleckled darkness like a drunkard reels,” (*Romeo and Juliet* 1068). While this is the only outright allusion to drunkenness, it is important to mention. The soliloquy continues:

The earth that nature’s mother is her tomb;  
What is her burying grave, that is her womb,  
And from her womb children of divers kind  
We sucking on her natural bosom find:  
Many for virtues excellent,  
None but for some, and yet all different,  
Oh, mickle is the powerful grace that lies  
In plants, herbs, stones, and their true qualities;  
For naught so vile that on earth doth live  
But to the earth some special good doth give;  
Nor aught so good but, strained from that fair use,  
Revolts from true birth, stumbling on abuse.  
Virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied,  
And vice sometime by action dignified (2.3.10-22).

Shakespeare here is attempting to show that all vice and virtue are present in nature itself. Because men are wont to err, it is nearly impossible to separate the two. Shakespeare could have chosen a different metaphor to describe the erratic reeling of the sky’s

darkness, but he does not. He ties them together. Drunkenness is, in a sense, connected to the very nature of the night.

The scene prior to this is one of the most well-known in all of theatre. It is, of course, the balcony scene, where Romeo compares his lover to the sun, and pledges to wed her. Following the friar's homage to nature's way, Romeo enlists his help to marry her. Friar Lawrence, being a practical man, supposes that this will be a means to ending the feud between the two families. Romeo, however, is full of lust and is often controlled by his vices. Just before he meets Juliet, he is blinded by the love for another woman. Therefore, it makes perfect sense for the Friar to expound the essence of vice and virtue. He is, in a sense, describing the very nature of the person about to enter the scene. This device is often used in Shakespeare's plays, and more than likely was utilized as a cue for the other players.

As an avid student and reader of literature, Shakespeare would have been familiar with the works of Montaigne. Montaigne was a contemporary writer of Shakespeare who wrote essays regarding the nature of man. The final lines of this soliloquy mirror an essay of his entitled "On Repentance." In it he says, "The true reproach, the one which applies to the common run of men, is that their very retraction is full of filth and corruption; their idea of reformation is blurred; their penitence is almost as faulty and diseased as their sin," (243). These words are incredibly similar to what Friar Laurence says in lines 21-22: "Virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied, / and vice sometime by action dignified." Here, both authors are supposing that it is a slippery slope from an honorable life to one of a sinner. Once caught up in vice it becomes hard to separate oneself from it. Montaigne continues that "it might perhaps be possible to imagine such a disposition

between the pleasure and the sin that the first might justly be said to excuse the second, as we say utility does,” (243). The friar knows well of Romeo’s disposition, and he believes that it can be utilized in a positive way. Romeo is, in a sense, “so wedded to vice by a natural bond, or from long habit, that (he) can no longer see its ugliness” (Montaigne 243). His particular affliction of lust isn’t one that has, up until this point, done any harm, but the potential is there. The friar’s attempt to transform Romeo’s vice into virtue is a noble one, but is futile nonetheless.

However, as Romeo compared Juliet to a summer’s day, it is quite possible that Shakespeare is using the term night as a “reeling drunkard” as an allusion to Romeo’s true nature. Because Juliet is as bright as a summer afternoon, it would not be a stretch to believe that Romeo would be her opposite, like the night. Following in the tradition of the Greeks’ idea of soul mates, the two would encompass a whole once united. As it follows so closely behind his comparison of her, it seems likely that Romeo is the night, and a drunken, unstable one at that; one full of vices. It was not uncommon in Shakespeare’s time, as much as is true of today, for the vices of lust and wine to go hand in hand (Burton 252). While there is no evidence of Romeo’s intemperance within the lines of the play, it would be unfortunate to miss this, especially with it placed so close to the discussion of vice and virtue.

Moving along to some of his earlier plays, in Scene 1.4 of *Hamlet*, Hamlet is discussing the nature of his Uncle Claudius with Horatio. His uncle is known for his drunkenness, and is concurrently engaged in a party to celebrate his marriage to Hamlet’s mother, the newly widowed Gertrude. This union has left Hamlet distraught. He is furious with his uncle for attempting to take his father’s place, but even more angry

with his mother for her betrayal. In this scene, he is attempting to understand why his uncle behaves in such a manner though it is known to be morally wrong. Following his depiction of his uncle, the ghost of his father enters, revealing to his son that it was his uncle who murdered him.

This passage is incredibly important because it is an almost modern take on what it is to be an addict or an alcoholic. Here he is describing that the overuse of alcohol is a custom in his native Denmark. However, he is also claiming that custom is not commonly practiced. He continues:

They clepe us drunkards and with swinish phrase  
Soil our addiction, and indeed it takes  
From our achievements, though performed at height,  
The pith and marrow of our attribute (1.4.19-22)

He is discussing how the perceived custom of revelry and heavy-drinking has marred the reputation of the country as a whole. “He argues that things often regarded as the “natural order” are in fact “custom,”” (Bate 363). Alcohol culture wasn’t seen as a problem within the culture itself, but was rather looked down upon by outsiders. Shakespeare’s influence here seems to be Montaigne, and his essay *An Apology of Raymond Sebond*, in which he says, “any custom abhorred or outlawed by one nation is sure to be praised or practiced by another,” (Bate 363).

His next move is to describe what effect it has on the single person:

So oft it chances in particular men  
That for some vicious mole of nature in them,  
An in their birth wherein they are not guilty—  
Since nature cannot choose his origin—  
By their o’er-growth of some complexion  
Oft breaking down the pales and forts of reason,  
Or by some habit that too much o-er-leavens  
The form of plausible manners—that these men,  
Carrying, I say, the stamp of one defect—  
Being nature’s livery or fortune’s star—

His virtues else, be they pure as grace,  
As infinite as man may undergo,  
Shall in the general censure take corruption  
From that particular fault: the dram of ale  
Doth all the noble substance of a doubt  
To his own scandal— (1.4.23-37).

It is here that Hamlet challenges the idea that it is merely a person's actions that cause a defect in their morality. He gives many reasons for a person's downfall: their birth (nature), humoral make-up, and habit. This is not far off from the current model of addiction and its causes (Wood). As it is, there are many risk factors that can cause this ugly and disabling disease of the mind and body.

In addition to this modern analysis of the passage, there are classical pieces to which he may have referred while writing. Galen had written that, "there is in fact a seed of evil within us... this part accounts for bad habit accruing in the irrational part of the soul, and false opinions in the rational," (Galen 175). So, it is likely that Shakespeare was aware of this view that the "seed of evil," which can be attributed to nature, was a starting point to addiction and addictive behaviors. It was also common to place weight in the power of celestial bodies on human nature. "The principle and primary cause of it proceed from the heaven, ascribing more to the stars than humours," (Burton 180). Though he touches on both of these when he says, "these men, / Carrying I say, the stamp of one defect-- / Being nature's livery or fortune's star," (lines 30-33), he also places a high importance on the substance itself: "the dram of ale / doth all the noble substance of a doubt / to his own scandal," (lines 36-38).

As Hamlet tries to define the causes of his uncle's, and his country's, particular fault, it is important to remember that Hamlet still does not know that his uncle has



murdered in father in cold blood. His has, in a sense, exonerated his uncle's bad behavior, and may even take pity on his affliction. Just after this gracious contemplation, the ghost of his father enters and reveals to Hamlet the true nature of his death, setting him off on a mission for revenge. It is in this play that Shakespeare was able to put both morality and thought into action. He has successfully duped his audience into believing that Claudius may be redeemable by virtue of his affliction, before pulling the proverbial rug out from under them. The placement of this marks the second fall of the young prince. As was mentioned before, this was a common set-up for the 'morality plays.'

While not actually present in this scene, Claudius is the representation of Folly and what is to err. He is engaged, though not on stage, in a feast of fools, as Hamlet performs his seemingly gratuitous depiction of Vice and its causes. This is important because he is representing the practice of verisimilitude, which is the appearance of being true or real (OED). Since the nature of his uncle is yet to be revealed, what Hamlet is saying he believes to be true. The contiguous placement of what he believes to be true and the exposure of reality creates a double tone, one in which the audience must deconstruct to understand what the bard intends. This practice of dual meaning can be seen throughout medieval literature and plays. Though the offstage feast has no religious implications, it has very political ones. Claudius is taking part in sins of the flesh and of excess. These actions are abhorrent given the potential for complete political collapse. Shakespeare seems to be following in the traditions of the morality plays here. As noted before, they relied on a particular mode of action for their structure. Hamlet is in a state of innocence before he discovers the truth. Embarking on a path of revenge, he

slips into an actual state of sin in hopes that he will achieve vengeance for the death of his father.

Additionally, in 2.1 of this play, a second use of the term addiction has been found. Unlike its use in *Othello*, which is found in only the Folio version, this term is found in the earlier Quarto versions of the text. In this scene, it is obvious that the word addiction is being tied into debaucherous acts, such as “drinking, fencing, swearing, quarreling,” (2.1.25) and sexual excess. This is incredibly important because it is the first time the term has been used in conjunction with the abuse of substances. Often times, as in *Othello*, it implied a mere penchant or predilection towards an action. It did not necessarily need to be one of ill-repute. His choice to marry the two is highly telling of what the bard believed to be true of substance abusers or alcoholics.

The next passage to be discussed is from *King Lear*. This drama is one that aptly portrays the dangers of the belief in natural order and adherence to familial and political patriarchy. In it, Shakespeare introduces two coinciding instances of primogeniture, social hierarchy, and the importance of recognition of child to father. It also holds one of the bard’s re-imaginings of the Marlovian Machiavel (Bate 363). This character is Edmund, who has been deemed a bastard by his father, Earl of Gloucester. He is planning a course of action which would leave his father dead and himself the inheritor of all of his goods.

In lines 107-114 of Act 1.2, Edmund soliloquizes his view on the nature of man:

This is the excellent foppery of the world, that when  
we are sick in fortune, often the surfeits of our own behavior,  
we make guilty of all of our disasters the sun, the moon, and stars,  
as if we were villains of necessity, fools by heavenly compulsions,  
knaves, thieves, and treacherers by spherical predominance,  
drunkards, liars, and adulterers by an enforced

obedience of planetary influence, and all that we are evil in by divine thrusting-on.

As previously mentioned, it was not an uncommon belief that heavens were a chief influence on the behaviors of man. In addition to this, they believed that “by the will of God and the natural order of things, authority gravitated to the old, particularly to old men, and it contrived to ensure that this proper, sanctified arrangement of society be everywhere respected,” (Greenblatt 1371). Edmund is challenging the very structure of his world, thus creating a new world view. Edmund commits himself to “nature” as a principle of survival and self-seeking” (Bate 363). Though alcohol is only implicitly mentioned here, it is worth noting, because what are drunkards if not self-serving? That is, at least in the eyes of many.

Edmund continues:

An admirable evasion of whore-master to lay his goatish disposition on the charge of a star! My father compounded with my mother under the dragon’s tail, and my nativity was under Ursa Major, so that it follows I am rough and lecherous. I should have been that I am had the maidenliest star in the firmament twinkled on My bastardizing (lines 114-120).

During the early modern period, beliefs about human nature were shifting from the traditional Ptolemaic view that human nature was determined by astrologic forces towards a more holistic views determined by one’s internal constitution and one’s actions. These ideas were carefully chronicled in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*. The lines “an admirable evasion of whore- / master man to lay his goatish disposition on the charge of a / star!” (1.2.114-6) are a direct jab at the Greek satyr, who was notoriously lecherous (Greenblatt 1394). By placing the blame of vice and moral ineptitude on divine forces,

rather than on human action or err, Edmund believes that it removes one's autonomy, or one's right to self-govern one's own behavior. To be a "fool by heavenly compulsions," (3.1.110), is too easy an out for the ambitious Edmund. Shakespeare, here, is attempting to show that there are more pressing influences on one's behavior than the influence of the stars. By having Edmund reject these notions, he is opening the door to a greater discussion about one's predilections and inner nature.

The final play in this study is the dark and twisted *Titus Andronicus*. This is a revenge tragedy and is arguably one of the most macabre in the Shakespeare canon. In Scene 3.1, Titus has just discovered that his daughter Lavinia has been raped, and that his sons are to be wrongly executed for the murder of the King's brother. In a futile attempt to save his sons, Titus had cut off one of his hands as a show of good faith. Unfortunately, the grisly deed of their execution had already been committed. Titus is broken and angry. He had already given up his right to the kingdom, and now has to reconcile with the fact that his children were either dead or severely and reprehensively traumatized.

One of Shakespeare's main resources for this play is "The Story of Tereus, Procne, and Philomela" from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In this telling, Philomel is raped by her brother-in-law, then has her tongue removed to prevent her from revealing her assailant. Shakespeare takes this a step further by having Lavinia's hands removed to take away even her ability to write. Her lack of power and control weigh heavy on her father, as comes to no surprise. Even before he is entreated to remove an extremity as a mode of safeguarding his sons, he feigns to cut off his hands in a state of contrition. He feels that he has failed his daughter.

Toward the end of Scene 3.1, Titus laments his miseries. He compares his woes to the raging winds, and the mad sea. He cannot understand why these atrocities have been brought to his doorstep, and as thus does not feel that he should have to contain his rage.

He starts:

If there were reason for these miseries,  
Then into limits I could bind my woes.  
When heaven doth weep, doth not the earth o'erflow?  
If the wind rages, doth not the sea wax mad,  
Threatening the welkin with his big-swoll'n face?  
And wilt thou have a reason for this coil? (3.1.218-223).

The wronged patriarch has a wrath that can only be matched by the sea, and his daughter's rape and defilement are the catalyst. As he continues, it is easy to understand how he feels, but also it shows how easily one's natural reaction to violence can slide into the realm of vice and immoral behavior:

I am the sea. Hark how her sighs doth flow!  
She is the weeping welkin, I the earth.  
Then must my sea be moved with her sighs;  
Then must my earth with her continual tears  
Become a deluge, overflowed and drowned,  
For why my bowels cannot hide her woes,  
But like a drunkard must I vomit them.  
Then give me leave, for losers will have leave  
To ease their stomachs with bitter tongues (3.1.224-232).

As he does in many other passages, Shakespeare brings in the metaphor of the drunkard and his lack of self-control. It is common practice for a person who has consumed too much booze to "spill their guts," or divulge too much personal information to those in the neighboring area. The placement of the drunkard image here is also in juxtaposition with the word "loser," which in this sense would mean one who has suffered a loss (OED).

Calling again to Montaigne: "there is no vice that is absolutely a vice which does not offend, and which is not detected by a sound judgement. For its ugliness and

impropriety are so apparent that those who say it arises chiefly from stupidity and ignorance are probably in the right; so hard is it to imagine that a man could recognize it without loathing. Malice sucks up the greater part of the venom, and so poisons itself. Vice leaves in the soul, like an ulcer in the flesh, a remorse which is always scratching itself and drawing blood,” (Montaigne 237). By placing such an obvious metaphor for vice (drinking) within Titus’s grief, it becomes easy to understand how one ill-tempered vice can magnify the greater symptoms of woe and disillusionment. Shakespeare’s knowledge of vice cannot be overlooked, and his dalliance with this word becomes ever more powerful.

In discussing the overall plot of this play, this mention of alcohol comes again at Titus’s second fall. The first of which is his embarrassment at the coronation of the Emperor Saturninus, and the second (and most striking) is the rape of his daughter. In Aristotelian tradition, “the plot should be so constructed that even without seeing the play anyone hearing of the incidents happening thrills with fear and pity as a result of what occurs,” (Aristotle 49). Shakespeare holds nothing back, and thus creates dark and startling images that are impossible to forget. They evoke much rage and pity within the audience. The presence of vice here is again akin to the plot formula of the ‘morality plays’, as well. The fact that this is so common within his tragic works makes it difficult to ignore. It is no small wonder to how much he kept inside as inspiration from childhood.

But why did Shakespeare consistently use alcohol as a catalyst for plot progression? It is possible that it could have been used as a mnemonic device to signal to actors that there is to be a change in tone or a shift in the action. He also uses this

substance as a way to mimic the slow destruction of human virtue from within, as well as from without. What is apparent is that its recurrence was no accident. Within the research, other instances of this device have been found in his other plays, *As You Like It* Act II Scene III, for example. Notice here how it is located in the same place as the first three analyzed passages from *Macbeth*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Othello*. This could further the support of the idea of alcohol as being used as a mnemonic device.

However, as any artist knows, art mimics life. It is possible that people's views of the drunk and his behavior were starting to be questioned. The belief in the power of the celestial bodies on human nature was being challenged, and therefore the crux of one's behavior and nature was no longer dependent on the stars. This left a more open space in which to discuss societal problems. Shakespeare's reliance on the older forms of drama gave him room to play with bigger concepts, and to create greater moral implications and tales of caution within his work. It is impossible to know whether his words made space to discuss more fluid and complex ideas about addiction, but it is worthwhile to mention his influence. As a student of the past, searching for modern implications, it is important to remember that not everything is linear, and that one's influences are not for another to behold. That being said, it has been a fascinating journey delving through the sources of Shakespeare's works. It was like getting to meet a mutual friend of whom you've heard so much about.

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