CHAPTER I
THE MARTYR AS TRAGIC HERO
The Martyr as Tragic Hero

Drama in the Middle Ages was mainly religious. Religion and ritual served as drama's content and background. Religious drama is characterized as a form of drama in which the real focus is not the tragic hero but the divine background. Divine activity is a controlling element in religious tragedy, precisely because it represents the framework of inexorable law.

To most readers the Morality play is nothing more than a curiosity, but they are likely to find an exception in Everyman. The effect of the play does not depend on any special knowledge of the medieval world. Its presentation of human life transcends contemporary interests. The audience had some knowledge of the doctrine regarding the nature of God and of man's relation to Him. The final outcome of man's conduct came to be regarded as one of the main considerations. Behind the brief and simple statements in Everyman lie the complexities of medieval theology. God is presented as the supreme designer of all things. The repeated references to God and to divine qualities build up a religious atmosphere and the central theme of man's relation and responsibility to a higher power. The medieval religion shows a promptness to meet the force of evil in man. The victory over evil is achieved not merely by human endeavour or will but through a forceful divine intervention.
Everyman fails at first to secure any help from good deeds. But, when he repents, there is a change. And as P.C. Ghosh rightly observes, "remorse followed by redemption is what we find in Everyman - the typical medieval psychosis."\(^1\)

Every religious play, in the final impression, gives us a sense of the eternal. This is usually done by producing a certain rhythm of sacrifice. The rhythm of tragedy, it is said, is a rhythm of sacrifice. A man is disintegrated by suffering, and is led to his death but the action is more than personal, and others are made whole as he is broken. It is for this reason that suffering which is a subtle form of sacrifice is given importance in religious plays. This suffering or sacrifice becomes the central ritual for a renewal of faith.

The Christian religious drama is akin to Greek tragedy although there is some difference. The difference lies mainly in the religious spirit between Paganism and Christianity. The Greek tragedy had its origin in religion. After all, the dithyramb had as its function religious ritual which was created for the purpose of doing honour to the God and was a part of His worship. We must not forget that even in the fifth century the dramatic performances in the Greater Dionysia was still an integral part of a very elaborate religious service. The Theatre

---

of Dionysus in Athens lay within the sacred precinct of the God. The very altar in the centre of the **Orchestra** was not primarily a stage property, though the dramatists sometimes took advantage of its presence there, but it was a real religious altar. Behind the scene were temples dedicated to the God. Hence it is no wonder that the Greek drama tends to be more religious than secular. In certain respects it seems even to resemble the medieval mystery play. On the basis, then, of its prior history we can easily see why Greek tragedy in its inner essence is serious, solemn and poetic, and why it characteristically is preoccupied with fundamental religious problems - the nature of God or the Gods, the relationship of the human and the divine, or the nature of God's ways to men.

The assumption which tragedy seems consistently to make is that over and above man there exists some superhuman power or force. This force appears under various names and in different forms. In the essentially religious Greek tragedy it is represented by the Gods or the vaguer personifications of super-natural powers. Elsewhere, it may be the Christian God or Fate or Destiny. In Bradley's interpretation of Shakespeare's essentially secular tragedy, it is the mysterious "moral order." Whatever may be the name we give to denote the superhuman power, tragedy always presents man as living under something divine or superhuman which partially determines his actions.
Aeschylus extended the bounds of tragedy to deal with the great moral and religious problems of life and the relation of man to man and to God. He developed the plot, made tragedy a dignified instructor in ethics and religion, and laid down the principles followed by all succeeding Greek tragedians with few changes. One of the great features of Aeschylean theology is the predominance of Zeus, to whom even Destiny is coadjutor. This is, perhaps, best seen in the Supplices, which has been pronounced one of the most truly religious poems in ancient literature. Sin is insolence, and must be expiated by suffering; and punishment is for the most part retributory. He protests against the doctrine of the envy of the Gods, and emphatically affirms that the world is governed by Justice. As is well expressed in Abbott's Hellenice, "the undertone of Divine Vengeance running through the dramas of Aeschylus seems in Sophocles to pass away into an echo of Divine compassion, and we move from the gloom of sin and sorrow towards the dawning of a brighter day in which strength is made perfect in weakness."\(^2\)

Everyman, the most artistically successful of the Moralties, is also the most imaginative and philosophical in dramatizing repentance in human terms. Here the consciousness

of approaching death, which plays a part in the repentance scenes of Perseverance, Wisdom and other Moralities, is expanded into a controlling metaphor for the human situation. Within this metaphor domination and salvation are present possibilities; behind the grim aspect of death (as in other treatises on the 'art of dying') lies the exemplary atoning death of Christ.

The problem Everyman presents with such daring and subtlety is the effort of dying mankind to find a solution for death. The solution, as is systematically discovered in the action of the play, is not to be found in either external relationships or internal attributes. Nevertheless, substantiated by external good deeds and informed by internal knowledge, it is possible for mankind to discover the theological answer to the dilemma. The solution leads, by way of repentance, toward putting the sequence of one's life and death in consonance with the redeeming life and death of Christ, and hence with the pattern of salvation.

The crucial transformation of Everyman is from a state of sin to a state of grace. This transformation is accomplished, in the central sequence of the play, by a closely detailed act of repentance. Everyman's repentance begins with contrition as a result of his estrangement from the external attributes upon which he had always depended. With their departure he feels remorse. Because of this remorse he is able to recognize the perilous weakness of his Good Deeds and to be directed thereby
to seek knowledge. Everyman completes the penance by scourging his body, in satisfaction of the sacrament. In doing so he makes the transition from a state of sin to a state of grace.

By contrast, the author of Mankind is less concerned with human repentance than with the divine mercy which makes it possible. There is relatively little emphasis given to the specific mechanism of the sacrament of penance - the sequence of contrition, confession and satisfaction. "Instead, the author of Mankind sees repentance as a kind of natural regeneration, in a world which is abundant with divine mercy."³

The vulnerability of the man of high estate is the central theme of Elizabethan tragedy as of medieval. In the Middle Ages tragedy was a matter for narrative verse and prose, and the definitions had not yet confined it to drama. Two of the most famous are Dante's and Chaucer's. The two best English biographies of the sixteenth century, Roper's More and Cavendish's Wolsey, are both tragedies which narrate the fall of a man 'out of high degree.' "In Roper, Fortune plays no part at all. She has no hold upon a man so indifferent to wealth and to honour; and no blind chance, only the integrity of a saint, leads More to martyrdom."⁴

It has been said that tragedy took its origin in Greek culture, from an active ritual of sacrifice. But this is, at best, an hypothesis, and has been vigorously disputed. Sacrifice, even if it is a single kind of action, can have many meanings in particular contexts. In our own culture, the idea of sacrifice is profoundly ambiguous. The simplest form of sacrifice, in which a man is killed so that the body of men may live or live more fully, we have almost wholly abandoned. We know the idea from other cultures and periods, but it retains emotional significance at the Centre of Christian belief.

II

In a continuing religious tradition, the martyr can be seen in the rhythm of sacrifice. He dies in order that the faith may live, or the result of his death is a general renewal of faith. "The martyr is formally described as a hero but he is more often mourned as a victim."5

But we must distinguish between a martyr and a victim. The right rhythm of sacrifice disappears if pity is unduly emphasized in the emotional commitments of the play. The sense of sacrifice is the centre of the play, and is closely related to the 'eternal design' which is both 'eternal action' and 'eternal patience'.

A martyr even in his or her own life time comes to stand apart from the common run of humanity by the unique quality of his or her commitment. In spite of antagonism the hero’s higher stature is recognized. The martyr establishes his superiority among contemporaries and gives to his commitment a larger moral dimension - to achieve the first no conscious effort is made by the individual but there is recognition of this around him; in this second case, there might be either comprehension or lack of comprehension of the moral and spiritual implications among the uninitiated. The reason is that the special moral vision that determines the choice of action or path of life is beyond common understanding.

While the Christian Church uses the term 'martyr' for one who suffers death in testifying to his faith, with’n it too, St. Cyprian gives a broader application to the term to include those who suffer grievous torment for their faith. Besides this, a threefold classification of martyrs is accepted - (1) The martyr in will and deed, (2) the martyr in will but not in deed and (3) the martyr in deed but not in will.6

In the face of persecution and suffering the martyr manifests extraordinary qualities that inspire awe among the onlookers. The heroism might be in some instances physical valour sublimated to patience and an inner fortitude. The stages

by which one may arrive at it may differ; from the murky depths of doubt or despair, the illusory heights of vanity or a sense of isolation and helplessness the martyr emerges to self-realization which might take the form of elimination of negation of the self or individual will.

The various stages through which the martyrs pass might be in different ways an affliction or an enhancement of their sufferings. The sufferings of the martyrs, therefore, differ as do the reason for the suffering or sometimes the punishment inflicted on them. Another aspect is that the knowledge of the meaning of affliction may be limited, there could be ignorance of the end to which the suffering may lead but their fortitude or patience is of a higher order than active heroism.

However, the ultimate willingness to accept suffering is common to all. The course of the martyr's life might be predetermined, but whether the predetermination is Destiny, an inscrutable God or Fate, there is free acceptance of call.

The difference between the suffering of the martyr and that inflicted as punishment for sin is aptly made by St. Augustine, "For even in the likeness of the sufferings there remains an unlikeness in the sufferers, and though exposed to the same anguish virtue and vice are not the same thing. For as the same fire causes gold to glow brightly, and chaff to smoke, and under the same flail the straw is beaten small, while the grain is cleaned, and as the lees are not mixed with the oil, though squeezed out of the vat by the same pressure, so
the same violence of affliction proves, purges, clarifies the good but damns, ruins, exterminates the wicked."  

Though the emphasis on suffering is not misplaced, it should not lead to the idea that this alone makes a martyr. It is not endurance of suffering, acceptance of death or the moral or spiritual commitment which alone or together are significant in this context. It is when all these are dynamic in their effect that the role of the individual gains significance as a martyr. Thus in its effect lies the essence of martyrdom. The onlooker is regenerated himself by the realization of the goodness, love, mercy and justice or the working of the Divine Grace in the death of the martyr. The martyr's sacrifice is, thus, on a lower scale, like the sacrifice of Christ in Christian terms. It is beyond time and place, and the martyr is an apotheosis of heroism and an epitome of good.  

Men have suffered and sacrificed their lives for religion and causes other than religion and while many have looked to religion for fortification of their strength in times of crisis, there have been others who have derived their strength from their own convictions. Sainthood happens to be a purely religious concept while martyrdom is more inclusive and comprehensive. But both sainthood and martyrdom have one thing in common, they are expressive of retrospective realization and respect. To their contemporaries, saints and martyrs are often merely rebels and heretics. Nonetheless, as Jasbir Jain

rightly observes, "they are men either of extraordinary courage or strongheadedness who have preferred death or excommunication to submission or recantation." 8

III

In myth, history and literature we meet four kinds of heroes generally known as the sacrificial victim, the epic hero, the tragic hero and the martyr whose deaths are the most significant events in their lives. As regards the sacrificial victim, in societies that offer human sacrifices a man is chosen by a social group to die to promote its spiritual and material welfare. His blood must be shed in order that crops may grow or the wrath of the Gods may be appeased. However the victim is selected, whether he is the consort of the mother priestess or a prisoner of war, and whether he consents to his death or not, his role is decided by others, not by himself. In some cultures, in the interval between his being designated as a sacrificial victim, and the act of sacrifice itself, he is treated as a sacred person to whom honour is paid and special licence given, but, once he has been sacrificed, his role is over and he is forgotten.

Like the sacrificial victim, the epic hero dies for the sake of a social group by falling while battling against its

enemies. But in his case, it is not the social group that chooses him. He becomes a hero, partly by fate and partly by his own choice. Secondly, though it is usually his fate to fall in battle, death is not his goal. His goal is to slay the enemies of his people, and by his valiant deeds to win immortal glory to be remembered by generation after generation.

The tragic hero is an individual who, in some way or other, becomes guilty, either, like Oedipus, in the eyes of the Gods, or, like Macbeth, in the eyes of men. He suffers and dies, not for the sake of others, but as a punishment and in expiation of his guilt. His story is remembered by others precisely because it is an exceptional and spectacular fall from fortune to disaster, glory to misery, which could not happen to the average audience. The chorus are not in any way involved with his fate; they are pure spectators.

The martyr is a sacrificial victim, but, in his case, it is he who chooses to be sacrificed. He also resembles the epic hero in that it is his destiny to be sacrificed and he accepts his destiny. Those for whose sake he sacrifices himself do not choose him as an atoning sacrifice. On the contrary, they deny that any sacrifice has been made. To them he is a criminal, blasphemer, disturber of the social order, and though, like the epic hero, his death is a spectacle, it is not for the spectators a tragic or a sacred but a profane event, the execution of a common criminal.
The martyr does not sacrifice himself for the sake of any particular individual or social group, but for all mankind. In the special case of Christ, the God-Man, he dies to redeem sinful mankind; the ordinarily human martyr dies to bear witness to what he believes to be saving truth, to be shared by all men, not reserved as an esoteric secret for a few. It was Christianity and the cultures influenced by it that first recognized the martyr as a classifiable type. All the so-called Higher Religious regard one person as their founder and head, but only in the case of Christianity did this person suffer a violent and degrading death. If the world now knows that, at all times in history and in all places, there have been martyrs, it is largely Christianity which is responsible. The standard of martyrdom should be based, consciously or unconsciously, upon the story of the Crucifixion.

For martyrdom in its purest form, one condition is that the martyr dies absolutely alone and forsaken, surrounded only by official executioners, enemies and sadistic or idly curious spectators. So it was with Christ. The Fourth Gospel records that Mary, His mother, Mary Magdalene and John, His closest friends as human beings, stood by His Cross during His Crucifixion, but they stood there, surely, out of loyal affection to the Manhood, not in recognition of His Godhead. And before the end, He must endure, not only desertion by men, but the withdrawal of His Father's presence, total isolation. The second condition is that the martyr's death must be one of extreme
agony and physical humiliation in which all self-respect is lost. As Charles Williams rightly points out "Our crucifixes exhibit the pain, but they veil, perhaps necessarily, the obscenity; but the death of the God-Man was both."  

Socrates, a pre-Christian martyr, dies to bear witness to the Examined Life. Though this is a less particular cause than blood-kinship, it is still far from being a universal. The Examined Life is for the select intelligent few, not for the uneducated or barbarian masses, who neither desire it nor are capable of practising it.

The "martyr" gained currency and a special meaning in the Christian context came to be attached to it with the persecution of the early Christians at the hands of the Romans. However, as is borne out in earlier writings of the pre-Christian era and civilizations, the word had a wider application. As these plays have protagonists with a background of different cultures, an attempt has been made to work out a possible synthesis considering the various uses of the term.

In the commonly accepted Christian sense, the martyr is one who testifies to the teaching and divinity of Christ by laying down his life. He may suffer persecution and great physical torture and agony, but through his suffering and death is brought about a spiritual awakening. He merits Heaven.

in the other world, and in this, veneration among men. The martyrs are honoured as "the athletes of the Lord." The reason for calling him an 'athlete' is that the concept of spiritual struggle was often figuratively expressed in medieval Christian literature.

This idea developed from the narratives of the Christ's subduing of evil, in heroic terms. It was not only the overcoming of temptations in the wilderness, but also the descent into Hell that received similar treatment. From this there emerged the concept of the Christ as a hero and victor. It is also reflected in the commonly used terms 'the Church Militant' and 'the Church Triumphant.' This imagery extended to individuals—holy Christians and saints—led to their being described as 'athletes' of God, and the diverging pulls of the flesh and the spirit, as a dramatic conflict or an agon. This came to be known as the classical idea of atonement. It is an idea still found in the Catholic Church.

The secular meaning of the Greek word 'martyr' is 'witness', one who bears testimony. When before the conversion of Constantine, Christians endured severe persecution, the word in Christian usage came to be used only of those who had

11. Atonement is viewed in this light by St. Paul, Tertullian, Cyprian, Lactantius, Prudentius, Augustine and other Christian writers.
"witnessed to their faith by having died for it." In death the martyr is glorified.13

Though it was the Roman Catholic Church that initially made a distinction between a saint and a martyr, prior to this in the New Testament too, there are "indications of a tendency to use the term as a label, even if not yet exactly to limit it to those who sealed their testimony with their blood."14 To quote some instances, "...and ye shall be witnesses unto me" (Acts 1:8); and attributed to A.D. 96 are the lines, "... I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held" (Rev. 6:9); and again, "... and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God" (Rev. 20:6).

The martyrs or saints are not merely sanctified in death. They stand apart from common men in their holy way of life. Their life is exemplary as a constant struggle to overcome the temptations of the flesh. The ideal of self-sacrifice in Christianity is related to that of endeavour. The noblest


endeavour of man is self-conquest, devotion and imitation of the
divine pattern of life. The ideal is Christ and the stakes are
set high. "What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole
world but suffer the loss of his soul" (Matt. 16:26). To carry
the point through with another biblical metaphor—it is enjoined
upon the Christian to shun the broad path and choose the narrow
steep way of virtue. In short, for the holy man there is
self-denial and the ascetic way of life. Catholicism, in fact,
always retained an earnestness in its tone.

As the Christian understands it, the martyr is one of
the 'elect'—elevated to this stature, spiritually higher than
that of other men, by the Will and Grace of the Almighty. Why
one is preferred above another is beyond the comprehension of
man. It is not inexplicable that of all men, Saul, the
persecutor, is regenerated by the Grace of God.15 A simple
fisherman is chosen to be 'the Rock' on which Christ would
build His Church.16 And so this is not a fate or a vocation
that one chooses but one for which he is chosen. Not only is
this tenet of faith—one of the important ones is Christianity—
borne out in the books of the New Testament, but it also finds
a place in the Old Testament where it is clearly brought out
that 'election' implies discrimination, e.g. the choice of Jacob
over Esau,17 and carries the assurance of the love of the Father

that would lead to elevation among men and salvation;\(^{18}\) while after the arrival of the Messiah, 'election' implies saving grace bestowed on the believer.\(^{19}\)

The idea of being God's chosen leads on to consideration of what choice man can then exercise; his freedom to act. According to Christian tradition 'election' does not detract from an individual's choice or deny freedom of will i.e., it does not detract from individual choice to act and free will. Strands of seemingly desperate assumptions and beliefs are welded together in the common drift of Christian tradition. St. Augustine's elucidation of the idea may, by and large, be taken as the commonly accepted one, though St. Thomas does make slight variations in it. God's foreknowledge does not mean predetermination. Man is endowed with the divine attribute of rationality which means for Augustine faith and love of God. When man exercises his freedom of choice rationally he makes the right choice, while in the absence of rationality he falls into sin. The aptitude for understanding and loving God may be natural but all men do not always live on this plane. To love God or not is a matter of individual will. A few who attain a state of grace habitually know and love God, and fewer still are the blessed who know and love God perfectly.

---

God's foreknowledge, thus, does not determine who would be the blessed, but their election is a matter of God's grace and their suffering foreordained. It is only with faith in God that this suffering can be borne. It is thus a cooperative act including both God's calling them to sainthood and their own free acceptance of the call and thereby of a responsibility. Reacting to Cicero's argument that if there is God's foreknowledge, there could be no individual freedom of will, Augustine says that "the religious mind chooses both and maintains both by the faith of piety." The necessity of martyrdom is that Adam's sin perpetuated in his seed, but the recompense for the guilt of man offered through the atonement of Christ is beyond time. Christ is the central figure and both time before and after Him gain meaning through Him: "By incarnation God has not immersed in time. Scholastic thought is that God knows and experiences all points of time simultaneously." The piacular (expiatory) sufficiency of the sacrifice of Christ is undoubted. But, just as the Eucharist

20. "Neither the O.T. nor the N.T. conceives of Election as foreordination to a privileged status. It involves, rather, choice to accept moral responsibility and serve God in special ways (Amos 3:2). The Christian must therefore work to make his election sure (II Peter 1:10). Nevertheless, God's elect live with a consciousness of God's special love and favour (Mark 13:20; Rom 8:33)." Madeline S. Miller and J. Lane Miller, "Election? Black's Bible Dictionary (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1952), p. 156.


whether considered by believers as symbolic or a re-enactment, "is a propitiatory and impetratory sacrifice," deriving its meaning from Christ, so too, in the case of the saints who were champions of Christianity, their lives are centred on Christ, and derive from Christ their meaning and purpose.

Whereas the Old Testament heroes were types of Christ in that they embodied God's promise of the Redeemer, the later saints embody the fulfilment of the promise re-enacting Christ's miracles, teaching and passions. In this post-pentecost age, performing the essential work of keeping Christendom alive after Christ's ascension into heaven. For Catholic believers the suffering Christian was re-enacting the Passion and Atonement. For the Protestant, this is a medieval accretion — Christ's suffering is once for all; it needs no more sin-offering. For the Protestant, the martyr would be guided by the inner light Catholicism looked upon him as being not only an imitator of Christ in his life and action, but also a defender of the Church; and in the eyes of the Hebrews he was a champion of Jehovah.

As Partrides rightly points out "the Old Testament views history theocentrically, the New Testament Christocentrically." To the Hebrews the Old Testament prescribed a way of life —


one that was later imbibed by the early Christians. There is emphasis on avoidance of sin through unquestioning obedience of the Divine Commandments. Again and again the prophets called upon their people to reaffirm their faith in the true and one and only 'jealous God,' to repent and pray and prepare themselves for the next world. There is the consciousness of sin and the necessity of suffering. The consciousness of being God's chosen people in the best of time led to high endeavour and zealous faith.

IV

In Chapter XIII of the Poetics, Aristotle refers to some qualifications of the tragic hero. He says:

"A perfect tragedy should be arranged not on the simple but on the complex plane. It should moreover, imitate actions which excite pity and fear, this being the distinctive mark of the tragic imitation. 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, (2) that of a bad man passing from adversity to prosperity: for nothing can be alien to the spirit of tragedy; it possesses no single tragic quality; it neither satisfies the moral sense, nor calls forth pity or fear. (3) Nor, again, should the downfall of the utter villain be exhibited. A plot of this kind would, doubtlessly, 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."

Thus, the hero always turns upon himself in tragedy. His conscience pricks him and he realises his own mistake. He is remorseful and penitent. Lear was penitent and remorseful and begged forgiveness of Cordelia. Othello had the same fate. Macbeth realised fully well that he had committed a moral wrong. The death of such a character fills the spectators and the readers with pity and fear and always provides them with a moral lesson, to live in the moral world and not to defy and challenge it.

Aristotle felt that the misfortune or the misery portrayed in a tragic hero should not be entirely undeserved. The hero should deserve the misfortune that comes to him. For example, in the moral world a host should not murder a guest. If he does so, he must be punished in the moral world. His conscience must corrode him, his nature and his soul. The weakness or the frailty of his character must bring upon him the suffering that he actually deserves. The tragedy of a faultless person will not bring such a feeling in us as the disaster of a person who consciously or unconsciously comes to it because of his own fault. The rebound of his own act must bring his down. The theory of hamartia, thus, was expounded
by Aristotle to show the rationality of things in the world.

However, Aristotle's view of tragedy is challenged by modern critics. For instance, J.S. Smart says:

A very great part of Christian literature is filled with the stories of saints and martyrs who were destitute, afflicted and tormented, and of whom the world was not worthy. Aristotle's theory is that such stories are merely unreadable, that they can cause no feeling but instinctive aversion. Yet they have been read, and the fact is a sufficient criticism of Aristotle.

But the point to keep in mind is that Aristotle never thought of religious tragedies when he was writing his Poetics.

Tragedy and religion are not irreconcilable. They have existed together from the beginning of civilization, in spite of the objection that 'goodness is apt to be immobile and uncombative' and that 'in refusing to strike back it brings the action to a standstill.' It was I.A. Richards who observed that 'the least touch of any theology which has a compensating Heaven to offer the tragic hero, is fatal' to the tragic effect, as the sense of suffering is completely lost in the moral triumph of the individual. The tragic hero ultimately succeeds, because he has not become the object of pity or fear. He has his own moral grounds, stands for them, comes to misery, loses them and dies for them. Thus, the tragic hero becomes a martyr.

All these objections of the critics arise because they fail to distinguish between the two main aspects of tragedy - (1) Tragic sense and (2) Tragic vision. Tragic vision belongs
to the school of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, but tragic sense is common to Christianity and tragedy. The tragic sense confronts suffering as a mystery, and mystery is an element essential to all tragedies worth the name. The idea of suffering itself has to be changed with regard to a religious tragedy.

Today, the Aristotelian conception of a tragic hero has undergone much change. Aristotle has rejected the bad man as his hero. Of course, a tragic villain cannot be a tragic hero. The hero simply becomes the victim of his own circumstances. In the modern tragedies the tragic hero is not a great man. He is not a King or a Prince, or a person with whom the fortunes of a state are connected. He is an ordinary man like us. In the Twentieth century, the conception of tragic hero has undergone a considerable change. Now a saint, and eminently good person, or a bad person, or an utter villain, or a common man can become the hero of a tragedy.

Writers of the present century, particularly in the field of drama, seem to be attracted by the theme of martyrdom. These writers are engaged in the task of not merely presenting history but of reinterpreting history and they are looking for some indefinable quality of courage which these men had expressed in their attitude towards life and death.

The attitude of a religious believer towards both life and death is considerably different from that of a non-believer. Life for the orthodox believer, may be looked upon as a period
of trial in which rewards may be won for the next life, death being merely a stage in the continuing process of eternal life. It is possible for the religious believer to pray "we may so pass through things temporal, that we finally lose not the things eternal" and view peacefully his reunion with God. The belief in the immortality of the soul makes it possible to treat the physical reality as distinct from the spiritual reality for the soul can still hope to be saved even if the body perishes. When everything is geared to heavenly life, martyrdom is an occasion for both rejoicing and mourning: "we mourn for the sins of the world, that has martyred them; we rejoice, that another soul is numbered among the saints in Heaven."

Though suffering and pain can drive a man to submission and to a denial of truth, there are men who prefer suffering to surrender. Death is welcome not as a release from life but as a point where man's humanity and God's divinity meet.

It is not innocence or strength which matter but the courage which a person brings to his faith - the integrity with which a man faces his hour of crisis. The prototype of all Christian martyrs is the martyrdom of Christ. Redemption is then seen as man's progressive emancipation from the wheel of time and the bondage of the flesh by discipline, detachment and prayer; so that, while still living in the body, he lives

more and more in the spirit, which is the only reality, all else being only 'a muddy vesture of decay.' Or, on the other hand, suffering and calamity can be seen as the consequence of universal sin, and this world can be regarded as something in itself good which has gone terribly wrong, so that the whole creation is 'groaning and travailing.' Suffering is then to be accepted and endured, and even welcomed, as an offering by which we are made one again with God bearing one another's as well as our own burdens in union with a divine Saviour, who shares with us the consequences of sin and its pain.

We see in tragedies, 'the noblest men, after long conflict and suffering, at last renounce the ends they have so keenly followed, and all the pleasures of life forever, or else freely and joyfully surrender life itself.' The elevation of soul that the spectator feels at the close of a tragedy comes from the fact that tragedy releases us from our painful attachment to life and gives us a taste of the bliss of resignation and renunciation. Thus, the summons to turn away the will from life remains the true tendency of tragedy, the ultimate end of the intentional exhibition of the suffering of humanity. For it is not for his own individual sins that the tragic hero atones, but for original sin, that is the 'Crime of existence itself':

For the greatest crime of man
Is that he was born. 26

Even in tragedies that are in the full sense Christian tragedies, written to promulgate Christian truths, such as *Samson Agonistes* or *Murder in the Cathedral*, we are still equally confined to this world. Samson is forgiven and his repentance has won acceptance because he has been given strength to destroy the Philistines, and by so doing has renewed the faith and courage of Israel, not because he is taken up into heaven and rewarded there. Milton has chosen as his subject an exceptional event, a 'sign'. It is something quite outside the usual order of things in a world where 'patience is more oft the exercise of Saints.' In *Murder in the Cathedral* this patience of the martyr is the subject, a victory that is not of this world. Again it is not Thomas' reward in heaven that confirms his victory, but the demonstration that the blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church expressed in the final chorus of praise and thanksgiving by the women of Canterbury.

During the persecutions, the Church discovered that there was an ethical—psychological problem about martyrdom which no one had foreseen, namely, that a man could get himself martyred, not in order to bear witness to the truth on earth, but in order to win for himself immortal glory in Heaven. In other words, his real motive could be the pride of the Epic Hero. The Church found herself having to preach caution, and discourage her converts from insisting on martyrdom when it could possibly be avoided. Only when the choice lay between martyrdom and apostasy was martyrdom to be chosen. Here again,
the story of the Passion is the paradigm. Far from rushing joyfully upon death, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ prays in agony that the cup shall pass from Him.

In the light of this brief survey of religious drama from the Middle Ages to the Elizabethan period with special reference to the concept of martyrdom, it is worthwhile looking at the succeeding English Drama from the point of view of the treatment of the theme of martyrdom. Six plays — Milton's Samson Agonistes; Shelley's Prometheus Unbound; Tennyson's Becket; Shaw's Saint Joan; T.S.Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral and Fry's Curtmantle appear to be very significant in this regard.

It is interesting to note that the concept of martyr as divine instrument is clearly revealed in these six plays. The theme of martyr as tragic hero figures in all the six plays with a certain relevance and immediacy to the world. In presenting the theme, Milton, Shelley, Tennyson, Shaw, T.S. Eliot and Christopher Fry reveal consciously or unconsciously their own attitudes, religious experiences and spiritual knowledge. Each writer seems to have a definite point of view in choosing the theme of martyrdom for dramatization.

Nevertheless, martyrdom as presented in each of these plays is a symbolic reenactment of the Crucifixion. Samson, Prometheus, Becket, Joan, Thomas and Thomas Becket are glorified and ennobled through their deaths. They become martyrs and martyrdom is always the design of God. The following chapters show how this is enunciated and upheld in the six plays chosen for study.