

## ELIZABETHAN TRAGIC CONVENTIONS

1) **DISCOVERY**: a process of bringing the hidden to light, usually through violence or with violent consequences; analogous to **ANATOMY**

2) **INCONSTANCY/BONDS**: breaking of oaths; Machiavellian expediency; the Machiavellian will present him/herself as an "apostle of unity," but is really **DUPLICITOUS** (split, doubled, ironic)

3) **REASON VS. APPETITE** passion overcomes will, reason, and better judgement; degradation of character; linked to the Fall which weakened humanity's ability to control unruly physicality through reason → life is a constant struggle between these opposing forces

4) **SELF-LOSS**: the villain or tragic hero is a potentially good person who, through hasty decisions, bad judgement, Machiavellian self-interest, or overwhelming passion, loses a sense of true identity (a falling-off from better nature), often turning into his/her **OPPOSITE**

5) **DISINTEGRATION & TRANSCENDENCE**: movement through disintegration of the social world and of the personal identity to some kind of transcendence or hope for the future; often involves **ANAGNORISIS** in which the hero/villain comes to understand and to repent his/her actions → **RIGHT REASON**=awareness of personal responsibility in downfall, and of the inescapable operations of universal law; self-discovery signals a return true self and a **RECONCILIATION** with the social world

6) **NOBLE DEATH**: tragic hero controls and defines the manner of his/her death so that it becomes an expression of their true self/selves; self-division → unity; expression of **RATIONALITY**, not brute-like passion or rage; suicide redefined as act of truth rather than despair; **UNRECONCILED DEATH**=fallen angel paradigm of tragic lost potential

7) VIOLATION OF LAW: part of the quest to understand life's harshness and sudden reversals; RETRIBUTION appeals to a larger principle of DIVINE or POETIC JUSTICE where temporal justice is denied; balance between LAW without JUSTICE (tyranny) and JUSTICE without LAW (revenge)

8) TIME: "the readiness is all"=DECORUM; hasty judgement→instability, deviation from the proper movements of an ordered universe; Truth is the Daughter of Time

9) CORRUPTION: patience spurned, crime rewarded; MALCONTENT= one disillusioned with the gap between his worth and his position, misanthropist, misogynist; universal law of justice and balance OR exploration of essential corruption and falseness of society

10) LOVE & MARRIAGE: bonds of mutual assurance, loyalty, duty, affection; represents HARMONY; DOMESTIC TYRANT=blocks true love or has remorseless lust (rape); bonds→bondage, love→self-love or passion, law→violence, marriage→adultery

11) "TREACHEROUS ENTERTAINMENT" (McAlindon): "a ritual affirmation of love and union which turns out to be a monstrous negation of everything it affirms" (41); play-within-play; rituals of marriage, gaming, dancing; subverted rituals; role playing (self-loss, strategy of discovery)

12) INDIVIDUAL/SOCIAL: EARLY TRAGEDY (Elizabethan): individual battle with conscience (*psychomachia*) as representative of human struggle; LATER TRAGEDY (Jacobean, Carolinian): individual as a vehicle for the exploration of an essentially corrupt society

With thanks to Thomas McAlindon's introduction to *Shakespeare's Tragic Cosmos*