



SHAKESPEAREAN TRAGEDY

Character is destiny

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To the students of English Literature the word 'tragedy' brings to mind Shakespeare's tragedies like Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth and King Lear. The four tragedies are his greatest creations and rank among the greatest tragedies of the world. At first sight these tragedies seem very different from the classical Greek Tragedy. The differences however are of form rather than of substance. To a great extent Aristotle's idea of tragedy as the downfall of great men is helpful in understanding a Shakespearean Tragedy too; for the heroes and heroines in Shakespeare meet their tragic end because of certain fatal flaws in their characters.

The theme: Struggle between good and evil

The theme of a Shakespearean tragedy is the struggle between good and evil, resulting in serious convulsions and disturbances, sorrows, sufferings and deaths. It depicts men and women struggling with evil, through their struggle, we realize the immense spiritual potentiality of man. It is for this reason that Charlton calls a Shakespearean Tragedy, "the apotheosis of the soul of man". It is also for this reason that it never leaves behind a depressing effect. It soothes, consoles and strengthens.

Tragedy : Shocking or sad event, serious play in which the hero is destroyed by a personal failing in adverse circumstances.

His appeal is universal. Benjohnson was right when he said that he was of not an

age, but of all ages, not of one country but of all countries.

In the words of Dryden he was the man, glorification who of all modern and ancient poets had the largest and the most comprehensive soul. tragedy and mixture of comedy

Shakespeare a student of man and his life. He knew that life is a mingled web of tears and smiles, sorrows and joys and so it is in his play. He hold a mirror to nature in the true sense of the term.

The Melodramatic note:

The themes of all the four great tragedies are sensational. For example Macbeth has its witches, its ghosts and apparitions, its murder in a darkened castle, and sleep walking of Lady Macbeth. In Hamlet, we have the ghost and the grave - diggers, in Othello night alarms and sword fights and in King Lear the celebrated "trio of madness".

In the days of Shakespeare there was almost universal belief in the presence of and power of the unseen.

The tragic Hero :

Shakespeare's heroes are exceptional beings. Hero is a person of high degree or of public importance and that his actions or sufferings are of an unusual kind. His nature also is exceptional and generally raises him in some respect much above the average level of humanity. They are either kings or princes or great military generals indispensable for the state. Thus Hamlet



is a Prince, Lear is a king, Macbeth belongs to the royal family and is a trusted kinsman and general and Othello is a great warrior and brave general. Thus Macbeth after the murder, suffers the tortures of the Hell, Othello is on the rack with Jealousy for the great part of the play, Lear goes mad and raves and Hamlet's soul is torn within. When he falls suddenly from the height of earthly greatness to the dust, his fall produces a sense of the powerlessness of man and the omnipotence of fate. This is one of the ways in which the playwright introduces an element of universality in his tragedies.

The Tragic Flaw:

In all most all heroes we observed a marked one sidedness, a predisposition, in particular direction, a fatal tendency to identify the whole being with one interest, object, passion or habit of mind. Bradley refer to this fundamental tragic trait as the tragic flaw.

Thus Macbeth has 'Vaulting ambition', Hamlet "noble inaction" Othello credulity and rashness in action and Lear the folly and fondness of old age. He is passionate and lacks in self-control. Owing to the fault or flaw of his character, the tragic hero falls from greatness. It is in this sense that "Character is Destiny" is true of a Shakespearean Tragedy.

Tragic Waste :

The tragic hero, no doubt, has this particular flaw which spells his doom, but otherwise he is an admirable character, a genius, a great warrior or an exceptional honest and virtuous person. But all this exceptional human material suffers and is wasted. At the close of the tragedy the Evil does not triumph, it is expelled but at the cost of much that is good and wholly admirable. For example, the fall of Macbeth not only means the death of evil

in him, but also the waste of much that was essentially noble. It is in the fitness of things that Iago be punished but it is also leads to the ruin of good represented by Desdemona and Othello. So also, in Hamlet and King Lear the good is destroyed along with the Evil.

The Tragic Hero :

On 'bad or mixed characters' in drama, and the poet's task to blend faults and attractive qualities.

Who does not esteem and admire Macbeth for his courage and generosity? who does not pity him when beset with all the terrors of a pregnant imagination, superstitious temper and awakened conscience?

As to the probability of these mixed compositions, it admits of no doubt. Nature everywhere presents a similar mixture of tragedy and comedy, of joy and sorrow, of laughter and solemnity in the common affairs of life.

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