

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326647922>

Art and Artifice of Shakespearean Tragedy: A Critical Approach

Article · July 2018

DOI: 10.15640/ijll.v6n1a7

CITATIONS

0

READS

859

1 author:



Jamal Nafi

Al-Quds University

23 PUBLICATIONS 6 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



Educational research [View project](#)

Art and Artifice of Shakespearean Tragedy: A Critical Approach

Jamal Subhi Ismail Nafi¹

Abstract

The dramatists of ancient Greece fixed the character and features of tragedy, and the Greek philosopher Aristotle analyzed and defined its nature. But Shakespeare, as a romantic playwright in Elizabethan England, violated the rules set and propagated by the classics for the sake of being truer to nature. Shakespeare's concept of tragedy may be illustrated from three main points of views, which distinguish him as a dramatist, they are: Tragic Hero, Tragic Action (Tragic Plot) and Tragic Appeal (Tragic Catharsis), aspects which this paper attempts to stress and analyze. Through critical analysis of Shakespeare's four major tragedies, this paper attempts also to highlight the features that constitute a Shakespearean tragedy. The paper also tries to show how a Shakespearean tragedy is different from the classical tragedy of ancient Greece. The researcher concluded that a Shakespearean tragedy moves on several plans all at once. It reflects the contradictions of social life during the Renaissance culture; it anticipates the development of realism and romanticism in the nineteenth century, and it reveals the hidden depths of the human mind unknown to literature before. Thus it is of universal appeal. Above all, it is the finest evidence of Shakespeare's humanism which shows such a profound understanding of the human soul in pain.

Keywords: Artifice, Art, William Shakespeare, Tragedy, Greek, Hero, Catharsis, Action

1. Introduction

Before any attempt is made to distinguish Shakespeare from other Greek Tragedians, it is worthy to define tragedy and highlight its features. Tragedy, meaning 'goat song' in Greek, is considered to be the noblest form of drama. It tells a moving story in a dignified language and usually ends in death, and if not in death, it ends with the great suffering of its hero. Its purpose is to give pleasure to the audience, not by delighting them as in comedy, but by moving them to deep spiritual experience by releasing in them a storm of pity and terror that will expend itself and be succeeded by a "calm of mind, all passion spent" (Milton, *Samson Agonistes*, 1900, 14).

The dramatists of ancient Greece fixed the character and features of tragedy, and the Greek philosopher Aristotle (1907) analyzed and defined its nature. Tragedy, he said "is essentially an imitation not of persons, but of action and life, of happiness and misery" (p. 11). Its elements are plot, character, thought, diction, melody, and spectacle; plot being the most important of these. The drama should have unity of action –that is, there should be a single plot, without side-plots with a beginning, middle, and end; and it should have "magnitude" Indeed, everything should match the plot in this quality of grandeur.

Tragedy is an exploration of man's relation to the forces of evil in the world. It seeks for answers to cosmic problems, much as religion seeks them, for it is a product of man's desire to believe in a purposive ordered universe. When Shakespeare writes tragedies, "he is an artist imposing an order and form upon the raw materials of experience" Knight (1972, p. 16). Each of his characters is carefully molded to fit an intellectual conception which the play in its totality is designed to embody. Every one of the tragedies is a separate attempt, if not finally to answer the great problem of man's relation to the forces of evil in the world, at least to pose it in such a way that new facets may be freely illuminated in terms of human experience.

¹ English Department, Faculty of Arts, Al-Quds University, P.O. Box: 20002, East Jerusalem, Palestinian Occupied Territory.
E-mail: nafi@staff.alquds.edu

He approaches the great issues of human life from many angles, with different hypotheses, and we have a resulting diversity in his plays. Shakespearean tragedy translates a moral vision into dramatic form, and thus it is a way of knowing. That this way is different from that of science is obvious, for tragedy deals with things of the imagination, and its kind of truth must be emotionally experienced. In Ribner's (2013) point of view, "the experience of tragedy may bear a closer relation to that of religion that usually has been recognized" (p. 12). Different as the method of tragedy may be from that of religion, both pursue the same kind of knowledge. Tragedy and religion seek by different means the same affirmation of order, and in each there is a large emotional component which can never be in science. A vision which comprehended no order or meaning in the universe could not be tragedy at all. It would be mere calamity such as we read about in the newspapers every day, without dramatic significance. Tragedy must impose upon the raw material of human experience a pattern in which the relations of human suffering to human joy becomes apparent, and out of this must come the feeling of reconciliation with which every one of Shakespeare's tragedies ends. And which critics of the most divergent views have recognized.

Shakespeare wrote a number of tragedies which are different from each other. Despite the apparent differences lurking beneath them, there runs throughout in the Tragic Period a specific key-note which has been characterized as the still sad music of humanity. It is audible in every tragedy of Shakespeare. What is this common thing? What common features are presented by these tragedies? What is the substance of a Shakespearean Tragedy in general? These are the research questions that the researcher is trying to answer in this paper. In other words, it may be dubbed as what is the tragic conception of Shakespeare? Shakespeare's concept of tragedy may be illustrated from three main points of views: First, Tragic Hero. Second, Tragic Action i.e., Tragic Plot, and finally, Tragic Appeal i.e., Tragic Catharsis. The three aforementioned views will be discussed in some details in the next section, through adopting the analytical approach by examining the four major tragedies Shakespeare wrote. They are: *King Lear* (1605), *Hamlet* (1603), *Othello* (1603) and *Macbeth* (1606).

2. Discussion

2.1 Tragic Hero

The following are the key points in the Shakespearean Hero:

a). A Shakespearean tragedy is a tale of woe and suffering of man in high estate, culminating in his death. The hero must be a person of high dignity i.e., a King Lear, or a Prince Hamlet, a General of the Republic like Othello, a leader in the State like Brutus, Antony or Coriolanus. In other words, his fate affects the welfare of a whole nation or empire. When he falls suddenly, from the height of earthly greatness to the dust, his fall a sense of contrast, of the powerlessness of man, and of the omnipotence of Fortune or Fate. Here lie the essential differences between the Greeks and the Shakespearean tragedies. Aristotle (1907) laid down the following definition of Tragedy, according to him:

Tragedy is an imitation of some action that is serious, entire, and of some magnitude-by language embellished and rendered pleasurable, but by different means-in different parts-in the way, not of narration, but of action, affecting through pity and terror the correction, and refinement of such passions. (P. 14)

He further laid down that a tragedy consists of three main things, stated in order of their importance, namely Plot, Character and Thought.

b). *The suffering is generally unexpected, but heavenly visitation. It proceeds from the tragic character namely, i.e., tragic Flaw or Tragic Trait in the Hero's Character.* The nature of suffering and death of the hero in a Shakespearean tragedy is peculiar. Both the suffering and the death are unexpected and "contrasted with previous happiness or glory" Bradley, 1905, p. 8). Bradley further says:

A tale, for example, of a man slowly worn to death by disease, poverty, little cares, sordid vices, petty persecutions, however piteous or dreadful it might be, would not be tragic in the Shakespearean sense. The sufferings and calamities of the hero in a Shakespearean tragedy are not a supernatural visitation. They proceed from some weak traits in the character of the hero, from ruin to ruin and ultimately envelop him in disaster. A tragic hero in Shakespeare is the author of his own woes, who, through some flaw in his own character, brings the hornet nest about his ears. (P. 15).

This presents a striking contrast to the Greek tragedy in which the hero is the scapegoat of a mocking destiny. He is not a free agent in the Shakespearean sense. Take for example Oedipus in Sophocles' tragedy *Oedipus the King* (429 BCE).

No amount of calamity which merely befell a man, descending from the clouds like lightning or stealing from darkness like pestilence, could alone provide the substance of a Shakespearean tragedy. Job was the greatest of all the children of the east, and his afflictions were well-nigh more that he could bear, but even if we imagined them wearing him to death, that would not make his story tragic. Nor yet would it become so, in the Shakespearean sense, if the fire and the great wind from the wilderness, and the torments of his flesh were conceived as sent by a supernatural power, whether just or malignant. The calamities of tragedy do not simply happen, nor are they sent; they proceed mainly from actions, and those the actions of men...This is at least may be said of the principal persons, and, among them, of the hero, who always contributes in some measure to the disaster in which he perishes. (Bradley, 1905, pp. 11-12)

a). *Role of Destiny or Chance or Circumstances*: So far as Character is discussed as the prime cause of tragedy, But character, other critics hold, is not the cause. There are other factors which do count. Destiny is not altogether absent from the Shakespearean tragedy. In the Greek tragedy, we have seen, the noble and virtuous hero comes to grief through the jealousy of the gods: ruin does not overwhelm him because of any sins on his own part: it arises from “a blast of the envy of God” (Swinburne, 2013, p. 39).

This has led certain critics to find a striking likeness between the Greek and the Shakespearean tragedy and to call the latter “Tragedy of Destiny.” There are thus two extreme views on the relation between character and destiny. On the one hand, Novalis (n.d.) holds that “Character is destiny” (n.p.), while others believe that Destiny overwhelms the character. The question arises, *Is the Shakespearean tragedy a tragedy of Character or a Tragedy of Destiny?*

Shakespeare seems to have been impressed by the powerful and irresistible forces which dominate the life of man. This is voiced by Gloucester in *King Lear*: “As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods, / They kill us for their sport” (4.1. 37-38). And Hamlet also tells us that: “There’s a divinity that shapes our ends / Rough hew them as we will” (5.2. 10-11). Although in each case, it will appear that these sentiments are the views of the characters and not of Shakespeare, for he presents Hamlet and Gloucester alike as throwing upon Destiny the blame which should properly be given to their own bad judgment and indecision.

So we may consider the fact that Shakespeare intended to depict his tragic heroes as men in the grip of a remorseless fate over which they had no control. Is Hamlet thrust on by a destiny outside himself, which is too strong for him? If so, then we must place the play in the same category as the Greek tragedies, in which the great characters are seen as victims of implacable and powerful gods who scheme against men. The victims of the Greek tragedies are slaves of Destiny; they have no choice. According to Adade-Yeboah, Ahenkora and Amankwah (2012), “through prophecies man sees the power of the gods who only inform, leaving him in a wide scope of his thought and plans” (p. 13). We think it is not difficult to show that such is not the case with Shakespeare’s characters, and that they are given a choice. Macbeth hesitates for long before deciding on the murder of Duncan; it is only after he has made the wrong choice that “a sense of inevitable Destiny pervades the play with ever-increasing intensity” Hawkes (1977, p. 13). Brutus gives himself up to much examination of motives of reflection before he agrees to the death of Caesar, and finally decides wrongly. From that point onward, he is swept along on a stream of circumstances against which he cannot struggle, and there is no possibility of turning back. No further choice is given and thus it is better if we regard the plays as tragedies of “Character and Destiny.” It is necessary to modify the view that Shakespeare tried to show the inevitableness of Fate, for this inevitableness only commences after the hero has made deliberate choice of the road which leads to his own particular Destiny. In their case, it was the choice of the wrong course of action: in Hamlet’s case it is deliberate choice of a course of inaction which brings about the disasters of the play. The tragedies spring when the hero realizes that he is under circumstances that require qualities which he does not have. Fate, in this case works against man to bring about his ruin and downfall.

2.2 Tragic Action

As a Shakespearean tragedy represents a conflict which terminates in a catastrophe, any such tragedy may be divided into three parts: The first of these sets forth or expounds the situation, or state of affairs, out of which the conflict arises; and it may therefore be called the Exposition. The second deals with the definite beginning, the growth and the vicissitudes of the conflict. While the final section of a tragedy show the issue of the conflict in a catastrophe. It is again repeated here that a Shakespearean tragedy, character is much more important than action. This makes us think of Elizabethan drama in general as a drama of human greatness because the focus is on man and shows how man behaves in distress and faces difficulties heroically. According to Bradley (1905):

The Centre of the tragedy may be said with equal truth to lie in action...What we do feel strongly, as a tragedy advances to its close, is that the calamities and catastrophe follow inevitably from the deeds of man, and that the main source of these deeds is character. The dictum that, with Shakespeare, 'Character is destiny' is no doubt an exaggeration, and one that may mislead, but it is the exaggeration of a vital truth. (P. 33)

Thus we have tackled two interesting problems (i) What is the relation between the 'tragic action' and the "tragic character?" (ii) Which is of greater importance, the tragic character or destiny? And what is the relation between the two?

These actions are of two kinds. Firstly, the action of the play is the outcome of the character of the hero. The calamities of tragedy do not simply happen, nor are they sent by a supernatural power; they proceed mainly from the actions of men. A number of human beings are placed at discord with circumstances. It leads to actions, and actions beget other actions with a series of interconnected deeds led by an apparently inevitable sequence to a catastrophe. Thus the men bring the sufferings upon themselves by their own actions; the hero always contributes in some measure to the disaster in which he perished. Men, from this point of view, appear to us primarily as agents, themselves the authors of their proper woe". Secondly, there are non-voluntary actions in the tragedy which are also introduced by Shakespeare in his respective tragedy. We elaborate the following non-voluntary actions which are noted in Shakespeare's tragedies: First, Abnormal conditions of the mind such as insanity (*Lear*), hallucination (when Macbeth sees a dagger in the air), and somnambulism (as Lady Macbeth walking in her sleep). Second, the supernatural element. Shakespeare introduces ghosts and witches who have supernatural knowledge. And it is always placed in the closest relation with character. Third and finally, Chance or accident which plays a major role in characters' downfall. Shakespeare recognizes chance to be an important factor in human life. Therefore, he allows due space to chance or accident in his tragedy. To exclude wholly from tragedy would be to fall in truth Lerner (1970). It may be called an accident that Edgar arrived at the prison just too late to save Cordelia's life in *King Lear*; an accident that Desdemona dropped her handkerchief at the most fatal of moments in *Othello*; an accident that the pirate ship attacked Hamlet's ship in *Hamlet* so that he was able to return forthwith to Denmark.

The basic factor in the tragic action which is of two kinds. Firstly, conflict may be an outward one which lies either between two persons of whom the hero is one or between two parties or groups in one of which the hero is the leading figure. The conflict generally ends with the defeat of the hero. In *Hamlet* we get the outward conflict where Hamlet struggles against Claudius and Laertes to the final ruin. Secondly, it may be a conflict within the heart of the hero, a conflict of opposing impulses and desires. It is this inward struggle going on in the soul of the hero's soul, which is the primary concern of tragedy. We find an inner conflict in the mind of Hamlet. Johnson (2005) holds the view that "his soliloquies reveal the varying states of mind, of a noble nature facing a task for which his very excellences and abilities rendered him unfit". The character of Hamlet thus becomes typical of human nature in its most tragic ordeals, and finds response from everyone who has ever stood helpless before evil, suffering or ruin.

2.3 Tragic Appeal

What are our feelings towards the characters in the play? And what are the general impressions left by the tragedy on our minds?

(i) Tragedy of Character: A Shakespearean Tragedy is primarily a tragedy of a character. To the tragic hero, our thoughts turn on sympathy. We see that a noble nature generally is called upon to face the very situation where his capability fails him utterly. In the particular circumstances in which he is placed, he is expected to solve the tangle which he is unable to solve. He is otherwise efficient, but in that special situation, his qualities are of no avail, because that situation demands those qualities are of no avail, because that situation demands those qualities in which he is lacking. Hamlet can do anything but act promptly. He is noble, cultured and gentle-hearted, but lacks resolution and decision. And curiously enough, he is called upon to avenge his father's murder, the task which demands extreme quickness and alertness. There lies the cause of the tragedy. In peaceful times he would have succeeded well, but in the troubled situation, when the time is "out of joint" (*Hamlet*, 1.5.188), he falters, has no courage to strike boldly, and perishes dragging others into the ruin. We, therefore, pity him as we see his soul striving against the "disjointed" times, against the weakness in his own character which brings about his ruin, or perhaps against some inscrutable power. But this sentiment of pity and compassion for the hero is followed by a feeling of horror at the sight of horrid ruin that attends the tragedy, at the unmerited death of many other characters who are more or less "mutes or audience to this act" (*Hamlet*, 5.2.365). Such feelings of pity and horror are always evoked by Shakespeare's tragedies in varying degrees.

- (ii) *Lowering the Tension*: Shakespeare has one peculiar device of reducing tragic pain for a short while in the play and this distinguishes his art from the Greek masters. Before the final exit of the hero, the curve of pain tends to lower itself for a short while, giving a kind of relief to the audience, and then it rises again to reach the end. In *Othello* we see the lowering of the curve after the murder of Desdemona, during Emilia's defiant speeches and the discovery of the crime by others. In *King Lear* we have it during the meeting between Cordelia and Lear, and it continues for some time after the battle. Considering the fact that a Shakespearean tragedy has larger dimensions than a Greek one, this device of lowering the tension is extremely important for the success of the play. Unrelieved experience of pain would have been too agonizing.
- (iii) *A Drama of Dissent*: Shakespearean tragedy is essentially a drama of dissent. It expresses dissent not only with conventional morality and the general norms of social behavior but also with traditional faith concerning sin, redemption, damnation and God and the human soul. It is remarkable how little speculation there is in his tragedies about the next world. Lear suffers greatly. Men surrounding him often talk about God and His justice. But what consolation is there for Lear? What answer is there to his question: why should Cordelia die? Othello takes his own life while Iago has promised torments; Macbeth dies fighting recklessly, having realized that his life has been one meaningless tale. Why should Desdemona and Emilia die? Why should Banquo and Macduff's children die? There is too much of a wastage of human lives to justify a belief in a just and benevolent providence.
- (iv) *Theory of Poetic Justice and Tragic Justice*: Man, whether in the high state or in the low state, must remain human; he must have his failings along with his virtues. There Shakespeare is true to nature: he sees life in its true colors. It must have brightness and darkness, joy and misery, evil and good, sunshine and squally weather. To portray only the bright side and hide the dark one is to shut one's eyes to naked truth. Shakespeare could not have been so untrue to nature. His characters are taken from real life, and they are chosen from all grades and shades. In his dramas there is no poetic justice or an ideal distribution of reward and punishment: the innocent suffer along with the guilty. Shakespeare never tries to improve upon nature; he never preaches or theorizes that men should be more virtuous; he never seeks to make nature more just, more philosophical, more moral than reality. In great poetry there is infinite suggestion, and difficult matters are left to the imagination of the reader. "We hear of poetic justice and the like" says Froude (1864), "as if nature and fact were not just enough...So far as poetry attempts to improve on truth in that way so far it abandons truth, and is false to itself. The greatness of the poet depends on being true to nature without insisting that nature should theorize with him" (pp. 44-45).

It is quite clear that in Shakespeare there is no poetic justice or an ideal, mathematical distribution of prosperity and adversity, proportionate to the deserts of the agents. Such poetic justice is incompatible with the stern facts of life. Certain critics, however, have tried to distinguish tragic justice from poetic justice. The idea of poetic justice implies that goodness can never go unrewarded and evil can never remain unpunished, and that the reward or punishment of the good or evil must be accurately proportionate to the good or the evil in him. The implication in tragic justice is a bit different. This term has been employed to denote that good may go unrewarded, but evil cannot remain unpunished and that an evil person can never escape scot-free. This we find in Shakespeare to a considerable extent; villainy never flourishes in the end. But to use the term justice in this sense is a misnomer, if virtue can go unrewarded. The conception of the universe as amoral order, in which truth must ultimately destroy evil, though at the cost of many virtuous lives, cannot be accepted in our discussion of the Shakespearean tragedy.

(v) *Diagnosis of Evil*. This diagnosis of evil as presented by Shakespeare will, we think, be accepted by all as fairly accurate. According to COLIE (1974), "Othello is a Moor, by stage convention expected to be lecherous and violent, as well as servile" (p. 147). This suggests that Othello was meant to act violently. His plays mirror nature, and the evil portrayed in them may be safely taken to represent the evil in real life. All his plays taken together constitute a microcosm, as a tiny tragic world, in which human nature in its various moods and conditions, grand, noble, mediocre, mean and sordid, is accurately portrayed. To depict this world, therefore, as a moral order in which evil must perish, though often at the cost of truth, is to fail in absolute conformity to nature. The advocates of the moral order theory start from the character of evil in Shakespearean tragedy, but the inference they draw from this premise are fallacious. Because the presence of evil in this world is not tolerated by good, and evil is ultimately turned out, "the inner being or soul" of this world, they seem to say must be akin to good. "if it is chiefly evil that violently disturbs the order of the world, this order cannot be friendly to evil or indifferent between evil and good, any more than a body which is convulsed by poison and food" (Bradley, 1905, p. 34). Tragedy, on this view, is "the exhibition of that convulsive reaction" (Nevo, 2015, p. 10). It is, however, impossible to accept this theory in its entirety, because the evil which the good wants to drive out is not something alien to this world. It is an integral part of it.

This tragic world, which reflects itself in the small world of Shakespearean tragedy produces both evil and good, “produces Iago as well as Desdemona, Iago’s cruelty as well as Iago’s courage. It is not poisoned, it poisons itself” (Kottman, p. 106); “there is no tragedy in its expulsion of evil: the tragedy is that this involves the waste of good” (Bradley, 1905, p. 37).

(vi) *Catharsis*. Like all tragedies, Shakespearean tragedy too affects a Catharsis—a cleansing—a beyonding—a transcending—of the emotions and passions that rage in the human breast and are duly reflected in the play’s action. And for this Catharsis to happen, the mind and soul and poetic wizardry of the dramatist should intervene between us and the characters involved in the tragic action of the play. The tragic is something akin to a religious feeling and experience: “in tragedy” stated Nicoll (1873) “man stands alone in terrible presence of his god, and evil steps on to the earth from the impenetrable and incomprehensible unknown” (p. 36). The tragic hero and heroine, even when they are apparently in and out, somehow achieve superiority to the event, either through a tremendous stoicism or through a faith that outsoars defeat and death. One summary way of reading Shakespeare’s great tragedies would thus be to see in *Hamlet*, the implied passage from death to immortality, from the fear of what may happen after death to the certainty of ‘felicity’; in *Othello*, the passage from falsehood to truth, from Iago’s cunning fabrication to the truth that is Desdemona is at last revealed by Emilia’s self-sacrificing devotion to her dead mistress. ORKIN (1979) is of the view that “Rhetoric was considered by the Elizabethans and Jacobean an essential prerequisite of good expression” (p. 59). By using rhetoric to manipulate Othello and other characters, Iago succeeds in defeating others in the play. In *King Lear*, from the darkness of the world of Goneril and Regan to the light that is Cordelia’s love; in *Macbeth*, from the play of evil and the resultant chaos of values to the grace and the return of order; in *Antony and Cleopatra*, from insatiable sensuality to fulfillment in death and the deathless marriage on the other side and shoal of Time; and in *Coriolanus*, from the assertion of self to the defeat of self and its transcendence in death

(vii) *Recognition of a Moral Order in the Universe*. This moral order shows itself akin to good and alien from evil. This moral order can be described as a balance or harmony. This harmony or balance is disturbed by the temporary success of evil. It is sure to right itself by eliminating the evil. It has a passion for perfection; everything that is not perfect will perish. The hero perishes because he has some marked imperfection or defect—such as irresolution, precipitancy, pride, credulousness, excessive simplicity, and excessive susceptibility to sexual emotions. Thus the irresolution of Hamlet brings ruin on him. Man is therefore the victim of his own passions and desires. The tragedy lies not in the expulsion of evil: the tragedy is that it involves the waste of good. In its effort to overcome and expel, the whole (moral order) is agonized with pain, and thus loses not only evil but priceless good. That this idea is no solution of the riddle of life is obvious. Shakespeare was writing tragedy, and tragedy would not be tragedy if it were not a painful mystery. Bradley (1905) states that:

We remain confronted with the inexplicable fact, or the no less inexplicable appearance, of a world traveling for perfection but bringing to birth, together with glorious good, an evil which it is able to overcome only by self-torture and self-waste. And this fact or appearance in tragedy. (P. 39)

(viii) Final impression of Shakespearean Tragedy. Only through grace, perhaps, if at all, can man find blessedness; and Shakespearean tragedy simply because in it Fallen Man seeks to find rehabilitation in “infiniteness” but without grace. The tragedy is in the failure, and perhaps the failure is general to the case of Man. The tragic character (and in this there is no Senecan “cheering oneself up”) will not resign himself to confinement in the secular world; but he has no certitude of status in a world more absolute. We cannot judge the tragic character in terms of our temporal moralities; neither can we schematize those mysteries of redemption which might at last exempt him from such judgments. He believes that he belongs to this world and he believes that he does not. He would jump the life to come—and yet he dare not. He comes to know that “the readiness is all,” but that same ripeness, which releases him from the importunities of this world, discovers for him no other. Shakespearean tragedy is the product of the change in men’s minds—the Renaissance change—by which men came to feel themselves separate from God; by which, indeed, the idea of God receded from men’s habitual certitudes and became no more and often less an intellectual construction, a merely credible hypothesis, a Being remote and not certainly just or beneficent. Perhaps the Enemy. In a world where anarchism was of recent development and men had not yet resigned themselves to a disabling opportunism man’s perennial hunger for metaphysical being prompted Shakespeare to create supreme dramas out of the question. How shall man find the intersection between that which is in time and that which is out of time? Or, to put the matter simply. It cannot be as simple as that.

Conclusion

As has been seen in the discussion above, in all the four tragedies of Shakespeare women also die. The deaths of Cordelia, Ophelia, and Desdemona provide what is more pathetic than tragic in the play. There is intense pathos because of their helplessness. In the case of Lady Macbeth, the pathetic borders on the tragic. Around this pathos there arises tragic pain which becomes sublime because of the struggle waged by the hero and his partial responsibility for some of his suffering. At the end of a tragedy, there is no complete relief, no calm of mind, all passions spent. The awareness of pain remains at the end of a tragedy in varying degrees.

The emotional impact of a tragedy does not depend on the last scene only. When we meditate on our total experience of a tragedy, many feelings are blended with the emotion aroused by the last scene. The richness of Shakespearean tragedy lies in the intricate emotional music that it provides the sharp contrasts between paradise and inferno, the pain of Lear and the ecstasy of his tender feelings for Cordelia.

Shakespearean tragedy moves on several plans all at once. It reflects the contradictions of social life during the Renaissance culture. It anticipates the development of realism and romanticism in the nineteenth century. It reveals the hidden depths of the human mind unknown to literature before. Above all it is the finest evidence of Shakespeare's humanism which shows such a profound understanding of the human soul in pain.

Tragedy is both a form of literature, and an order of human experience. Imagination is the essence of both, for the man without imagination –without the capacity to feel, to forge similitude and identities by leaping across all barriers-cannot face tragedy nor even recognize it; and the dramatist without this Promethean gift of the imagination, which is heat and light and life at once, cannot create poetic tragedy. The central mystery of life is that we must almost die (some of the lower species actually die) to give new life; the seed must lodge in the common earth and cease to be if it is to kindle into life. Why did Shelley declare that our sweetest songs are those that tell of saddest thoughts? The thought of failure, defeat, death is the cancer of the mind, and to sing of failure, defeat, yet insinuate beyond them victory, fulfillment, immortality, is the true function of poetic tragedy. Tragedy is a confrontation of life, not a turning away from it; tragedy is not the experience of evil alone but rather the experience of good-the good along with the evil, the good in the evil, or the good beyond the evil. The stress is not on weakness, error, flaw or ugliness although these are there, no doubt; but rather on rightness, wholeness, beauty or puissance for these are there too, and are triumphantly there. Tragedy is not a tame acquiescence in defeat but a determination to see beyond the seeming finality of defeat and glimpse something positive or promising ahead. The crucifixion of Christ would be merely depressing but for the subsequent Resurrection. Without the happenings at Maricha's Ashram, the mating of the lovers at Kanva's Ashram would be no more than a tale of girlish folly and unscrupulous male seduction. In tragedy, the resurrection is always implied however dimly or remotely. Tragedy thus involves, not the acceptance of the seeming end, but the intuition of the conclusion yet to be concluded. This is the very apotheosis of poetic *dhavani*. Looked at this way, the apprehension of tragedy is akin to religious experience- it is initiation into a mystery, the deepest mystery of life and death and the life to be.

References

- Adade-Yeboah, A., Ahenkora, K., & Amankwah, A. S. (2012). The Tragic Hero of the Classical Period. *English Language and Literature Studies*, 2(3), 10-17. Retrieved from <http://www.ccsenet.org>
- Aristotle (1907). *The Poetics of Aristotle* (PROJECT GUTENBERG E-TEXT # 1974). Samuel Henry Butcher (trans.) (4th ed.). London: Macmillan.
- COLIE, ROSALIE LITTELL (1974). *Shakespeare's Living Art: Othello and the Problematics of Love*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt13x15ww.7>
- Bradley, A. C. (1905). *Shakespearean tragedy: Lectures on Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Macbeth*. 2nd ed. London: Macmillan. Pp. 1-480. Retrieved from: <http://www.shakespeare-navigators.com/bradley/tr12.html>
- Froude, J. A. (FEBRUARY 5, 1864). "The Science Of History": A LECTURE DELIVERED AT THE ROYAL INSTITUTION. Retrieved from http://www.forgottenbooks.com/readbook_
- Hawkes, T. (1977). *Twentieth century interpretations of Macbeth: a collection of critical essays*. Michigan: University of Michigan: Prentice-Hall.

- Johnson, S. (2005) [1765]. *Mr. Johnson's Preface to his Edition of Shakespeare's Plays* (ONLINE REPRINT). Ian Lancashire (Ed.) (online edition published by RPO Editors, Department of English, and University of Toronto Press as *Samuel Johnson (1709-1784): Preface to his Edition of Shakespeare's Plays (1765)*. (ed.). London: J. and R. Tonson and others. OCLC 10834559.
- Kottman, Paul A. (2009). *Philosophers on Shakespeare*. Stanford University Press. Retrieved from <https://books.google.ps/books>
- Lerner, L. Ed. (July 1970). *Shakespeare's Tragedy: An Anthology of Modern Criticism*. London: Penguin Books
- Milton, J. (1900). *The Poetical Works of John Milton*. Edited by Henry Charles Beeching. Oxford: Clarendon Press. Retrieved from <http://oll.libertyfund.org/titles/556>
- Nevo, R. (2015). Tragic Form in Shakespeare: *Princeton Legacy Library*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Nicoll, A. (1873). *British Drama*. Barnes Noble, Inc. Pp. 1-392. Retrieved from <http://www.archive.org/details/britishdrama001751mbp>
- Knight, G. W. (1972). *The Wheel of Fire, Interpretations of Shakespearian Tragedy*. London: Methuen & Co.
- Novalis. (n.d.). *BrainyQuote.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.brainyquote.com>
- ORKIN, M. R. (1979). MODES OF SPEAKING IN SHAKESPEARE'S TRAGEDIES. *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, 53, 59-69. Retrieved from <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24247683>
- Ribner, I. (2013). *Patterns in Shakespearian Tragedy*. London: Routledge.
- Swinburne, A. C. (2013). Delphi Complete Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne (Illustrated). *Delphi Poets Series, 4*. Delphi Classics. Retrieved from <https://books.google.ps/books>