

Shakespeare's Concept of Tragedy - Character is Destiny. Macbeth

William Shakespeare is the brightest star in the galaxy of English characters, dramatists. He has written a number of tragedies which are read with equal interest in all the ages. His tragedies depict human life with all its minutiae and are immortal books of human nature. He is always original, realistic and well acquainted with human character. He has made a progressive revolution in the traditional concept of tragedy.

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Shakespeare's predecessors were fatalists and enjoyed a strong faith in the supremacy of fate and helplessness of Man. Man was considered to be a puppet in the hands of Fate. But Shakespeare revolutionised this concept and pleads that Man is the master of his destiny. Of course, chance and circumstances play some roles in moulding character but Man is at liberty to choose what he likes. He is quite free to choose his course of action and so choosing he decides his own Fate. Secondly, Shakespeare's tragedy is a complex picture of good and evil. There is a perpetual conflict between virtues and vices. This conflict is many-sided. It may occur between two groups or between two persons, representing good and evil. Sometimes, it comes in one person between his good and evil nature. On the one hand, he wants good deeds and, on the other, he is also in mood to do some wrong. He is ultimately overpowered by the evil that results in his tragic end. It is this conflict of the hero which is the special characteristic of Shakespeare's tragedy.

The conflict between good and evil is a universal truth. In this struggle evil dominates and causes sufferings. That is the hero becomes a tool in the hands of the villains or evil agents and commits mistakes leading to the catastrophe. He commits wrongs but feels it seriously. That is why he remains a tragic hero not a villain. By the realization of his guilt and intense emotion of his mind, he gains pity and sympathy.



of the audience. As for example, Macbeth utters these words when Lady Macbeth asks him to wash off the blood: -  
"What hands are here? Ha! They pluck out mine eyes  
Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood  
Clean from my hand? No, then my hand will rather  
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,  
Making the green one red." M.A. HAQUE

Thus, Shakespeare Tragedy is a tragedy of a person who has some flaw, weakness or drawback in his character. This is known as tragic flaw, which brings death to the hero as well as other characters of the play. This is Shakespeare's view of tragedy. It is common to all his tragedies. As for example, Hamlet is a prince, and is endowed with the richest gift of nature, culture and nobility. But, he lacks the quality of prompt and sharp action. His indecisiveness serves as his tragic flaw. Similarly, Othello is a brave, valiant and faithful Moor who becomes a general. But, he is too passionate to think rightly in any action. The villain makes him believe that his wife is false to him. He kills Desdemona and, at the end, realises his mistake that leads him to suicide. In the same way, King Lear commits an error of judgment, is banished and dies a wretched death.

The present drama, Macbeth, also possesses all these attributes of Shakespeare's Tragedy. Macbeth is a noble, brave and valiant general. He is loyal to his King and his countrymen. He is Thane of Glamis and Cawdor. But he is ambitious. The witches along with Lady Macbeth sharpen this ambition and make him tread on the wrong path. He becomes completely overpowered by the external forces and kills his King under his own roof. He realises his mistakes but it is too late to mend. Consequently, he becomes friendless, his wife dies and he is killed by Macduff.



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Thus, vaulting ambition is the tragic flaw of Macbeth as  
indiscreteness is of Hamlet, or overcredulous nature is of  
Othello or wrong judgement is of King Lear.

In short, Shakespeare gives a new direction to  
the traditional concept of tragedy. It is he only who  
makes a villain out of the hero or hero out of a villain.  
His hero meets tragic end because of his tragic  
flaw in his character. Macbeth's vaulting ambition  
serves as his tragic flaw that brings all catastrophe.  
However, he dies a death of a real Shakespearean  
tragic hero.