

Shakespeare as The Subject of Aristotle's Discourse on Tragedy

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Abstract: This Paper tries to show how Aristotle's discourse dominates the structure of Shakespearean Tragedy. It argues that any structural concept in Shakespearean tragedy can be judged in relation to the *Poetics*. Even when deviating from the principles laid down by Aristotle, that deviation can be interpreted in relation to Aristotle. In other word, Aristotle's *Poetics* has become the grounding principle from which one can assess tragedy and understand it. It should be remarked also, as the study will reveal, that this does not apply only to Shakespeare, but to all other tragedians, classic or modern.

Keywords: discourse analysis, Shakespeare, tragedy, Aristotle.

I. Introduction:

Any study of tragedy cannot help but take Aristotle's conception of it into consideration. Aristotle wrote his book on the subject in 330 BC or thereabouts. Since then the impact of his treatise on literary critics and playwrights remained unprecedented. His principles on how a tragedy should be composed became the cornerstone on which critics have relied in assessing the success or failure of a tragedy, and writers have used them as a manual for writing their plays.

Even when a writer as great as Shakespeare deviates from Aristotle's prescriptions and asserts his assumed individual talent, the authority of Aristotle can still be felt in the background as the subsequent discussion will demonstrate. Aristotle can be regarded as the originator of tragic theory and the ultimate authority on the topic.

This Paper tries to show how Aristotle's discourse dominates the structure of Shakespearean Tragedy. It argues that any structural concept in Shakespearean tragedy can be judged in relation to the *Poetics*. Even when deviating from the principles laid down by Aristotle, that deviation can be interpreted in relation to Aristotle. In other words, Aristotle's *Poetics* has become the grounding principle from which one can assess tragedy and understand it. It should be remarked also, as the study will reveal, that this does not apply only to Shakespeare, but to all other tragedians, classic or modern.

Before surveying the elements which Aristotle put forth as the foundation of any tragedy, a word should be said to describe how his *Poetics* approaches the subject. The *Poetics* analyses tragedy comprehensively. It analyses all the aspects of tragedy, its origins, purpose, structure, language, and the nature of the tragic hero by breaking the discussion into manageable statements. By studying these elements, one can understand how Shakespearean Tragedy does not stand on the power of Shakespeare's transcendental mind but in dialogue with already existing discourses which control what Shakespeare can produce and how.

II. Definition of Tragedy:

Although his work was mainly a description of tragedies of Sophocles and Aeschylus, Aristotle's *Poetics* was taken as a prescription or a blueprint by dramatists and theorists alike.

The following passage from his *Poetics* has become the most widely quoted in the history of literary criticism:

“Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action of high importance, complete and of some amplitude; in language enhanced by distinct and varying beauties; acted not narrated; by means of pity and fear effectuating its purgation of these emotions. (Potts: 24).

Aristotle's discourse is felt everywhere in Shakespearean Tragedy that one is justified to say that Shakespeare was a dead author in this regard. Like any other author, Shakespeare had to draw upon the immense cultural repertoire that preceded him and on which he has little influence. He was implicated in a social and material process beyond his control (Kavanagh 150). The theatrical structures and conventions that preceded him turned him into a mere

location where language crosses and recrosses. It is the preexisting discourse and conventions that make his individual text intelligible (Culler 154). Shakespeare's only power was to mix writings, to redeploy and rearrange other texts. His texts, like any text, are:

made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is focused, and that place is the reader, not as was hitherto said, the author.

(Barthes 148).

III. The Structure of Tragedy:

Aristotle's approach to tragedy stems from his definition of the beautiful. For him whatever is beautiful must be proportionately well arranged, and perceptible by the senses. If something is too big or too small to be seen as a whole, it can not be described as beautiful. The work of art is an imitation and this imitation must obey natural system, or as the romantics thought, it must have organic unity. This aesthetic view led Aristotle to approach the subject intrinsically and to impose two restrictions on tragedy, time and plot. He referred to them as unities; the paper refers to them as 'restrictions.' The reason the paper is going to adopt the term 'restrictions' is that it believes that the unities are a kind of discourse order that endows power on those who abide by it and excludes other methods equally valid and at times more creative and useful. The time restriction says that a play should not exceed a day, while the plot restriction says that the story should be a simple unity. These restrictions are derived from viewing the Greek plays written by Aeschylus, Euripides, and Sophocles, where the tragedians told the story of the downfall of their heroes in less than a single day and used only one main plot (Potts 1953).

The majority of Renaissance dramatists adhered to these restrictions and never attempted to challenge or modify their master's principles. On the contrary, by trying to be more kingly than the king, some dramatists added a third restriction to these two, the place restriction. Examples on the commitment to the restrictions can be found in the plays of Ben Jonson, who tends in his plays to remain within the boundaries of London or Venice, and sometimes to remain within the boundaries of a single room as in the *Alchemist* where he tells only a single story within a single day (Burgess 50).

Unlike Ben Jonson and his fellow dramatists, Shakespeare emphasized his own individuality when dealing with the restrictions. They were not his primary concern. He imposed his own statement by allowing his characters the freedom of space and time, and even of plot. In *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Hamlet* etc. we are always taken to fresh settings and introduced to new stories which though enhance the main one, can stand on their own feet as single plots. In *Hamlet*, for instance, the main story is the story of Hamlet seeking revenge on his uncle for the murder of his father. The story complicates by including the stories of the attempt to discover the source of Hamlet's grief, the murder of Polonius, the attempt to kill Hamlet and how he survived, Ophelia's madness, and Laertes's search for revenge. This pattern of complication by including sub-plots can hardly be found in other Elizabethan dramatists who, as it has been indicated, preferred to work within the unities.

Aristotle insists that tragedy can not begin and end at haphazard. It must have a beginning, middle, and an end. The 'beginning is that which does not necessarily follow

anything else, but which naturally leads to another event or development. The end is the opposite, that which itself naturally (either of necessity or most commonly) follows something else, but nothing comes after it. The middle is that which itself follows something else and is followed by another thing (Potts 40-41)

This kind of structure gives a clear and perceptible linear form for the arrangement of events in tragedy, which in turn can reveal the beauty of the literary production. These events must be logically related to the story. Aristotle states clearly that the 'action must be a complete unit, and the events of which it is made up must be so plotted that if any of these elements is transposed or removed the whole is altered or upset. For when a thing can be included or not included without making any noticeable difference, that thing is no part of the whole' (Potts 28-9).

Again, Aristotle retained his influence on dramatists and critics. Dramatists for centuries followed this rule by beginning their plays and arranging the plot in a logical manner to produce not only literary tragedies but knowledge on these tragedies. In the beginning, the audience or readers are introduced to everything they need to know in order to understand the unfolding events; then the story develops in terms of cause and effect. For example, *Oedipus the King*, a play written by Sophocles and used by Aristotle himself as the bases for expounding his ideas in the *Poetics*, opens with the Thebans near the palace of their king Oedipus appealing for his help. They are confident that he can find the cause of the plague and remove it. Oedipus expresses his concern with the plague and tells them that he has sent his brother-in-law, Creon, to consult the oracle of god Apollo about the cause of the people's calamity. This beginning sets forth a vexing situation, it introduces the main characters, and incites the desire to know what will happen next, in other words, this part is relevant to the whole (Brooks, Purser, Warren, 575-576).

Shakespeare adhered to this principle. However his adherence was not absolute. In some of his history plays, particularly the early ones, he violated the Aristotelian statements and started his plays abruptly, startling the audience and leaving them to construct the gap which such beginnings created. Richard III for instance starts with a soliloquy by Richard where he sums up history and surveys a situation, describes his own appearance and character, and reveals his future plans (Bonheim 2).

Such Shakespearean dis-identification remained outside the power of literary discourse. Shakespeare himself abandoned this structure in his great tragedies and obeyed the Aristotelian principles by writing his plays in terms of causal development. It would be worth mentioning that Shakespeare's dis-identification in this structure became a discourse worth identifying with, and the power emanating from these plays acquired a new force in the drama of Bertolt Brecht in the twentieth century.

To sum up, Aristotle considered tragedy as an art form that should be beautiful to regard. The beautiful thing must have an internal structure and this can be achieved by imposing a particular form on the tragic work. For example, the story must have a beginning, middle, and end. The story should be restricted to one plot and a single day, and it should be told in a probable manner.

IV. Purpose of Tragedy:

One of the most important statements in the poetics is catharsis. Aristotle uses it to refer to the effect or purpose a tragedy should achieve, i.e. the purgation of the soul through pity and fear. Aristotle employed the term as an answer to Plato's criticism of art in the *Republic* where Plato launches his psychological objections to poetry. Dramatic poetry, in his opinion, does not appeal to reason but to emotions, which he considers to be inferior to reason and subject to illusions. Such illusions can be corrected by reflecting and reasoning. However, the dramatist is mainly concerned with arousing sympathies for the distress of the heroes rather than controlling and checking these sympathies. This will render us vulnerable to self-pity when we encounter misfortune ourselves, and will also distance drama from true reality and wisdom. Therefore, Plato demands expelling the artists who foster it. (MACDONALD 333-334)

Aristotle counter-identifies with Plato. He thinks that people tend to develop burdensome emotions which need to be expressed, pressed out. A tragedy helps achieve this by artistically arousing the emotions of the spectators, bringing these emotions near the psyche, and then allowing them to steam, which will finally bring tranquility to the spectators.

Including the spectators in Plato's attack and Aristotle's defense has significant consequences. The success of the work of art is not autonomous. In order for a tragedy to succeed it needs to produce the right effect, which is, as Aristotle indicates, arousing pity and fear. One should observe here that Aristotle conceives of tragedy as a work to be performed on the stage and not read on the page. This means that the success of a tragedy does not depend only on the playwright's craftsmanship but on the actors' ability to send the right message through their body movements and verbal utterances. A failure to act the part properly may turn the tragedy into a comedy or even a farce. This is clearly indicated in Dryden's *Essay on Dramatic Poesy*, where he calls for avoiding the representation of death on the stage because it is almost impossible to represent it properly, and the failure of its presentation will produce a humorous effect destroying the sympathy required for the tragic identification:

I have observ'd that in all our Tragedies, the Audience cannot forbear laughing when the Actors are to die; 'tis the most Comick part of the whole Play. All *passions* may be lively represented on the Stage, if to the well-writing of them the Actor supplies a good commanded voice, and limbs that move easily, and without stiffness; but there are many *actions* which can never be imitated to a just height: dying especially is a thing which none but a Roman Gladiator could naturally perform upon the Stage when he did not imitate or represent, but naturally do it; and therefore it is better to omit the representation of it. (Dryden, 2004. CD)

Aristotle's inclusion of the tragic effect in his definition has more far-reaching consequences. It is clear that his principle goes beyond the last death scene, and subordinates the success of a work of art to the emotions it generates, which is sufficient to destroy the possibility of establishing any absolute critical standards whatever and makes all assessments empirical (Brereton 31). Thus, a tragedy can be viewed as a kind of unstable dialogue with the audience. Again, the point can be better clarified with an example. In the *THE FAULTS OF OTHELLO 1692*, Thomas Rymer, launches a vitriolic attack against Shakespeare's masterpiece. In his attack, he seems to rely on Aristotle's idea of the probable in drama. Again, one can see Aristotle's power and its effect on assessing Shakespeare's tragedies:

Nothing is more odious in Nature than an improbable lie; and, certainly, never was any play fraught, like this of *Othello*, with improbabilities.... Othello ? is made a Venetian general.

We see nothing done by him, nor related concerning him, that comports with the condition of a general, or indeed of a man, unless the killing himself, to avoid a death the law was about to inflict upon him. When his jealousy had wrought him up to a resolution of his taking revenge for the supposed injury, he sets Iago to the fighting part, to kill Cassio, and chooses himself to murder the silly woman his *wife*, that was like to make no resistance. (cited in Kennedy and Dana Gioia 1717-18)

It is clear from the preceding extract that *Othello* did not arouse pity and fear in Rymer, and that is why he is attacking its failure, but it should be remarked here that Rymer does not base his attack merely on his own judgement but he uses Aristotle's principle of probability to do so. This time it is not acting itself that failed to create catharsis, but the plot. Aristotle preferred the probable impossible to the improbable possible. Since *Othello* lacked the required probability, as to Rymer believes, it failed as a tragedy. What should be remarked here is that that Rymer identifies with Aristotle's statement on the probable in art and helps circulate it, while he counter-identifies with the critics who regard *Othello* as one of Shakespeare's masterpieces and thus one of the world's tragic masterpieces. This counter-identification is ineffective and could not become a discourse capable of subverting the way Shakespeare's play is treated, since the tremendous number of the circulating texts supporting the greatness of *Othello* succeeded in containing Rymer's subversive view.

While Rymer did not regard *Othello* as a great tragedy, many other critics in the twentieth century tended to deny the possibility of writing tragedies in the modern age. In other words, these critics counter-identify with the whole genre basing their argument also on the idea of catharsis by arguing that the modern realities and scientific discoveries have made man shrink in greatness and that his fall and suffering can no more produce the cathartic feeling. Again, and though this is not directly stated, the least acquaintance with the *Poetics* enables the reader to sense Aristotle's influence in the background.

Joseph Krutch for example denies that tragedies can be written in our age. In his opinion, we can only appreciate tragedies written in the past, but we can never participate in their magnificent vision of human life out of which they were created. He even thinks that the present-day reader can find it difficult to understand why people for whom tragedies were written found them absorbing and satisfying. Those tragedies, he insists, have lost the immediate effect which they had on the original viewers; they have ceased to be works of art and have become deceptive documents. (271)

Although the possibility of producing and measuring the cathartic effect has been denied by many critics, it is the one with which the majority of tragedians, including Shakespeare, identified. This effect can convincingly be underpinned in all those works classified by critics as great tragedies. The effect can be found in the critical works on Elizabethan drama which try to explain not only Shakespeare, but also Christopher Marlowe, Chapman, John Webster, and many others.

Although highly justifiable, the principle of catharsis can also have disadvantageous consequences, one of which is the ultimate reliance on spectator's or reader's reaction. This dependence led many critics to reject this principle. The New Critics, for example, did not attack only the idea of catharsis in tragedy but the whole mechanism of assessing the work of art through its effect on the reader. For this purpose, they coined the term affective fallacy to refer to the mistaken act of confusing the text with its effect. Judging the text by its effect, they thought,

would lead to impressionistic responses and relativism, where the whole meaning of the text depends on the reader and the impressions the text leaves on him. This would result in chaotic assessments and complete destruction of the literary standards used for interpreting or evaluating literature.

Other critics used catharsis as a piece of evidence to counter-identify with the idea of universality, whether of tragedy or literature as a whole. What was tragic and inspired pity and fear in the Greeks may not arouse the same emotions in other cultures or periods. Thus, the evaluation of literature does not, as the New Critics insisted, depend on the scrupulous reading of the text and its internal structure, but on external factors defined by time and place, in other words, on culture.

Having to produce two effects, pity and fear, adds to the complication of the concept of catharsis. Pity and fear as I. A. Richards observes are two opposite and discordant qualities; pity is the impulse to approach while fear is the impulse to retreat. The reconciliation of these seemingly irreconcilable qualities produces catharsis (Richards 245). The failure to produce both effects in the reader or spectator will lead to a false assessment of the works of art and even to producing depressing works as those which produce only pity.

According to Aristotle, the effect can be produced by the mere plotting of the incidents and poetry, in addition to *mise en scene*. Reading between the lines, one finds that Aristotle did not restrict the presentation of the tragic to the stage, but extended it to reach the written and the spoken expression of the story as long as they produce the desired effect. Thus:

... without seeing anything, the story ought to have been so plotted that if one heard the bare facts, the chain of circumstances would make one shudder and pity. That would happen to anyone who heard the story of the Oedipus. To produce this effect by the *mise en scene* is less artistic and puts one at the mercy of the technician; and these who use it not to frighten but merely to startle have lost touch with tragedy altogether. We should not try to get all sorts of pleasure from tragedy, but the particular tragic pleasure. (Potts 34-35)

V. Nature of the Tragic Protagonist

Aristotle describes three kinds of characters that can be depicted in drama, those who are superior to ordinary people in real life, those who are inferior, or those who are like ordinary people. Two kinds are common, the superior character who appears in tragedy, and the inferior one who appears in comedy. Aristotle adds that the superior character should be neither a completely good nor completely bad one, but one between these two extremes. The reasons for this postulation are clearly stated by Aristotle himself:

... first, decent people must not be shown passing from good fortune to misfortune (for that is not fearful or pitiful but disgusting). Again, vicious people must not be shown passing from misfortune to good fortune (for that is the most untragic situation possible-it is none of the requisites, it is neither humane, nor pitiful, nor fearful). Nor again should an utterly evil man fall from good fortune to misfortune (for though a plot of that kind would be humane, it would not induce pity or fear-pity is induced by undeserved misfortune and fear by the misfortunes of normal people, so that this situation would be neither pitiful nor fearful). So we are left with a man between these extremes: that is to say, the kind of man who neither is distinguished for

excellence and virtue, nor comes to grief on account of baseness and vice, but on account of some error; a man of great reputation and prosperity, like Oedipus and Thyestes and conspicuous people of such families as theirs. So . . . there must be no change from misfortune to good fortune, but only the opposite. . . . The cause must not be vice, but a great error; and the man must be either of the type specified or better, rather than worse. (22)

According to Boas 'the heroes of all Greek tragedies were either gods or princes. This was erected into a rule by Aristotle and transmitted to us by the Renaissance theorists. We see its observance both in the French imitators of Greek tragedy and in Shakespeare even when he had a non-Hellenic subject' (123). Restricting the tragic heroes to the upper classes led the Marxists to accuse dramatists of identifying themselves with the ruling class. In a brief remark Boas explains the role history and culture play in the process of selecting the tragic heroes as he says:

It should be noted that if the plots of these spectacles were to be taken from history, there would be no way of avoiding the use of princes as protagonists. Ancient history says next to nothing about the common people and even the most unpleasant characters come from the nobility (tragedy vision and form 123)

The same principle stated by Aristotle applies to Shakespeare. Antony, Julius Caesar, Hamlet, Macbeth, Coriolanus, Lear, and Othello, all these tragic heroes are kings or people of high rank in the society. Although Aristotle's view and Shakespeare's adoption of it reflect the way their rank-based societies used to regard human beings, critics used to avoid this fact and circulate other interpretations saying that great personalities always tend to attract the attention of people far more than the common ones. Mc Collom, for instance, believes that:

The chief reason the hero must generally be superior to most men is that otherwise he can not awaken that intense concern for man's plight which is certainly essential to tragedy. Although the hero no longer needs to be of high social rank, he must speak to us of the actions in which we surpass ourselves of the moments in which we attain some barely probable kind of excellence. (Mc Collom 48)

On the same subject, Bradley observes that the pangs of despised love and the anguish of remorse are the same in a peasant and a prince. However, the presence of these great characters adds dignity and greatness to tragedy, and their fall produces 'a sense of contrast; of the powerlessness of man, and of the omnipotence - perhaps the caprice - of Fortune or Fate, which no tale of private life can possibly Rival' (Bradley 5), and because of the authority and influence they wield, it can also be assumed that the issues at stake will be important rather than trivial; the future of Rome and Egypt, for instance, was involved in the fate of Antony and Cleopatra.

In the twentieth century, with the rise of the so called democratic thinking, many modern critics 'have sometimes been puzzled to account for the fact that the concern of ancient tragedy is almost exclusively with kings and courts. They have been tempted to accuse even Aristotle of a certain naiveté in assuming (as he seems to assume) that the "nobility" of which he speaks as necessary to a tragedy implies a nobility of rank as well as of soul, and they have sometimes regretted that Shakespeare did not devote himself more than he did to the serious consideration of those common woes of the common man which subsequent writers have exploited with increasing pertinacity' (Krutch).

While some critics regretted that Shakespeare did not devote himself to the woes of the common man, others searched history to reveal that he did so. Critics of the eighteenth century

by understanding how Shakespeare used Hamlet to stand for the common man called for following the same course despite its difficulties. Arthur Kinney (2002), for instance, interprets William Guthrie's *An Essay upon English Tragedy in 1747* as a call that the tragic hero should be the common man. He quotes him indicating that although he had a whole age against him 'there is not the least necessity for the chief personage in a play to have either courage, wisdom, virtue, passion, or any other quality, above what is to be found in his real history, or in common life' (20). Kinney believes that Hamlet is just that hero as he quotes Guthrie who believes that:

[Shakespeare] has supported the character of Hamlet entirely by the force of sentiment, without giving him any of those strong markings, which commonly form the chief modern personage in a tragedy. He has not even made use of those advantages with which the great historian from whom he took his subject might have furnished him. . . . Where is the poet but Shakespeare who could have worked so insipid a character [as found in Saxo] into life by the justness of reflection, and the strength of nature, without applying those colours, which an inferior genius must have used to mark a principal figure. All we see in Hamlet is a well-meaning, sensible, young man, but full of doubts and perplexities even after his resolution is fixed. In this character there is nothing but what is common with the rest of mankind; he has no marking, no colouring, but its beautiful drawing, perhaps, cost Shakespeare more than any one figure he ever attempted. (Cited in Kinney 21)

It seems that in his search for the common man in Shakespeare, Kinney could not understand that what is meant by the term is not the man with the common ideas but the man of the common rank. A man who is neither a king nor a prince but one of those who used to be called at the Elizabethan period 'commoners' or 'plebeians.' Kinney virtually failed to impose upon Shakespeare a new honour like those his fellow critics used to impose in order to raise the Bard above any other literary figure in the history of humanity.

The failure of Kinney's attempt in my opinion springs from the fact that Western history has now become completely documented with evident clarity of its despise for the common man, or the plebian. Any attempt to disprove this fact would be doomed to fail, for the Western history circulating in our hands reveals that the commoners never had a place in it except for what the generosity of the nobility endowed them. However, the desire to see in Shakespeare's drama some occupation with the common man can be found after the New Historicists and Cultural Materialists use their thick description to bring the traces of the Renaissance commoners, as they have been viewed by their superiors, to the foreground, and give them a fallacious existence that they never had. Otherwise they will remain a symbol of baseness. This symbol appears in Hamlet, when the prince reproaches himself by saying 'O what a rogue and peasant slave am I!' (Hamlet II:ii:544).

Other critics could find more satisfying explanations for the occupation of the West, which Shakespeare represents in his tragedies, with the Aristocrats and the exclusion of the common man. They thought that the tendency among tragedians to lay the setting of a tragedy at the court of a king or one of his nobles not as the result of any arbitrary convention, but of the fact that the tragic writers believed in the greatness of man, any man. When Shakespeare dresses his protagonists, they used to be called heroes in the past, with robes and crowns, it was not because he believed in the greatness of kings and noblemen, but because this way of dressing was the most appropriate outward manifestation of his inward majesty. This act places Shakespeare as a man ahead of his time. He had a democratic thinking even when he does not express this literally for it is our duty to uncover the metaphor with which the Bard expressed his revolutionary views.

Krutch observes that 'any modern attempt to dress characters in robes ends only by making us aware of a comic incongruity; any modern attempt to furnish them with a language resplendent like Shakespeare's ends only in bombast.' If we reverse his observation and apply it to earlier tragedians, we will find ironically that any attempt on the part of Shakespeare or the other Elizabethan dramatists to depict or introduce any tragic hero as belonging to the common man will end in comic incongruity and the commoners, in my view, would have been the first to revile such presentation, as they were made believe of their inherent inferiority and that was the position that God, in his wisdom, chose for them. This is due to the fact that the identity constructed through the discourses of the period could never raise a commoner to the heroic stature required for the tragic hero.

There were many attempts, however, to introduce common people in tragedy and counter-identify with the long tradition the twentieth century. These attempts, nevertheless, encountered severe criticism and were branded by conservative critics in many inimical descriptions as semi-tragedies or anti-tragedies. Such antagonistic reception in my opinion results from the tremendous numbers of texts circulating on the subject which have been circulating for centuries. These texts related intertextually to two main sources the Poetics and Elizabethan drama.

The tremendous numbers of texts emphasizing that the tragic hero should belong to a high rank, in addition to the change in the way social relations are viewed in our time, created a kind of contradiction within the discourse of the literary institution and led to the inability on the part of the modern playwrights to present kings and princes on the stage. This coincided with the rejection on the part of critics to accept the common man as tragic, which in turn led many critics to maintain that tragedy is impossible in the modern age.

The idea of the tragicity of the common man, however, had its enthusiasts. Among these there was Arthur Miller. In his defense of his *Death of a Salesman*, Miller expressed his surprise at the academy's charge that Willy, the protagonist of the play, 'lacked the stature of the tragic hero'. In his view, Willy was always tragic; Miller could not understand that tragedies were measured 'by Graeco-Elizabethan paragraphs, which hold no mention of insurance payments, front porches, refrigerator fan belts, steering knuckles, Chevrolets' (164).

Miller, as his argument indicates, is aware of the fact that his play was not assessed as a creative work of art but by using ready-made mathematical formulas inherited from the Greeks and the Elizabethans. He puts it succinctly that because Aristotle lived in a slave society, it is inevitable that 'one will not be able to imagine drama, let alone tragedy, as being possible for any but the higher ranks of society' (165). He does not deny that being of a high rank endows the tragic hero with some appeal for the audience, but, in his view, this does not mean that a tragedy is restricted to important people. He emphasizes that a grocer can outdistance a president of the United States 'providing that the grocer's career engages the issues of, for instance, the survival of the race, the relationships of man to God - the questions, in short, whose answers define humanity and the right way to live so that the world is a home, instead of a battleground' (165).

Despite all the counter-discourses against the academic way of defining tragedies by utilizing prescriptions bequeathed by the long tradition of criticism and small tradition of production, as it will be shown, true tragedies according to critics, were produced only in two periods Periclean Greece and Elizabethan England; some critics were generous enough to add France to this small list. The so-called modern tragedies succeeded in circulating along with their

counter-discourse allowing in return a vaster circulation of Western texts in literary and academic circles.

In addition to being a member of a high social rank, Aristotle describes the kind of character that can best arouse pity and fear in the spectator. First, this man should not be decent because his fall will not arouse pity and fear but disgust. Neither should he be a vicious man passing to good fortune since this will be utterly untragic. Nor should he be utterly vicious passing from fortune to misfortune since this will arouse our relief in place of pity and fear. The tragic hero, Aristotle insists, is a man between two extremes. He is a man neither distinguished for excellence and virtue nor viciousness and vice. He should be an ordinary good man with an error. (Potts 33-34)

Here Aristotle departs from the nature of exclusion which characterised his discussion of the status of the tragic hero. Although in his discussion of status he excludes those who do not belong to high rank, in his discussion of the nature of character he includes them. As it has been just indicated the tragic character should be good, and goodness as he says 'is possible whatever the status of the person. Although females are inferior and slaves are beneath consideration, both a female and a slave can be 'good' (McLeish p.20). In fact Potts' translation of the statement just mentioned goes as follows: 'goodness is possible in every type of personage, even in a woman or a slave, though the one is perhaps an inferior, and the other a wholly worthless being' (15). However, one needs not dwell upon this slight difference.

It is relevant here to reveal how intertextual influence may affect writers and critics unconsciously. A writer may think he is producing creative artifact while all he is doing is to rearrange subconsciously internalized traditional canons and traces of stories and descriptions overlap with personal experiences. Critics may believe that they are revealing and decoding the intricacies of a text while in fact they are virtually imposing their own preconceptions. Bradley reflects this idea most eloquently when he says that:

Most people, even among those who know Shakespeare well and come into real contact with his mind, are inclined to isolate and exaggerate some one aspect of the tragic fact. Some are so much influenced by their own habitual beliefs that they import them more or less into their interpretation of 'every author who is 'sympathetic' to them.

If catharsis involves the reconciliation of two contradictory feelings, pity and fear, Bradley's remark, on close analysis, includes completely two contradictory concepts of the nature of criticism. First, he thinks that most critics can come 'into real contact with Shakespeare's mind, however, they 'are inclined to isolate and exaggerate some one aspect of the tragic fact.' Second, some critics 'are so much influenced by their own habitual beliefs that they import them more or less into their interpretation of 'every author who is 'sympathetic' to them'. He then elaborates that:

our reflecting mind, full of everyday ideas, is always tending to transform it by the application of these ideas, and so to elicit a result which, instead of representing the fact, conventionalises it. And the consequence is not only mistaken theories; it is that many a man will declare that he feels in reading a tragedy what he never really felt, while he fails to recognize what he actually did feel. (Bradley 17)

The irony involved in the preceding extracts is that the reader may think that Bradley, by being conscious of this process of producing mistaken theories, can escape it, while in reality he

falls prey to the same ideology he tries to reveal. After reemphasizing that Shakespearean heroes are exceptional beings and that the hero is 'of high degree or of public importance, and that his actions or sufferings are of an unusual kind', he attempts to describe the nature of the tragic character by saying that the nature of the tragic hero:

... is exceptional, and generally raises him in some respect much above the average level of humanity. This does not mean that he is an eccentric or a paragon. Shakespeare never drew monstrosities of virtue; some of his heroes are far from being 'good'; and if he drew eccentrics he gave them a subordinate position in the plot. His tragic characters are made of the stuff we find within ourselves and within the persons who surround them. But, by an intensification of the life which they share with others, they are raised above them; and the greatest are raised so far that, if we fully realise all that is implied in their words and actions, we become conscious that in real life we have known scarcely any one resembling them. (13)

It is clear here that Bradley is reflecting an Aristotelian ideology and not expressing the real nature of Shakespeare's tragic heroes. Bradley like any other critic approaching Shakespeare was immersed in a sea of texts discussing the subject of tragedy; these texts included of course Aristotle's *Poetics* in addition to Shakespeare's texts themselves. Shakespeare himself had been exposed to Aristotle's texts, whether directly or indirectly, in the tradition of preceding tragedies. In his attempt to take a subject position in the Elizabethan theatre, Shakespeare subjected himself to some conventions that endowed him with power. He also broke with others, which helped emphasise his identity. The same thing applies to Bradley and every other critic approaching the subject.

Bradley, in subjecting himself to the Aristotelian ideology, faces contradictions that the ideology reveals. Aristotle insisted on goodness as a requirement that should be present in the tragic hero. But Shakespeare's Macbeth, Coriolanus, and Richard III can never be considered as good characters by most of us, and Bradley virtually realizes this. He indicates that Richard and Macbeth are villainous, and that they know that they are villainous. He observes that Shakespeare 'does admit such heroes. Shakespeare also appears to feel, and exerts himself to meet, the difficulty that arises from their admission' (15). In Bradley's view, by introducing such characters, Shakespeare complicates the process of identification with the hero, since the element of pity, which should occur side by side with the element of fear, is hard to materialize. Actually, in place of pity, the spectator will desire the death and defeat of the hero, and as it was indicated, a tragedy occurs when there is catharsis, and catharsis is realized through merging two contradictory elements, pity and fear. However, Bradley aptly solves this dilemma, Shakespeare as it can be inferred from Bradley's discussion, was aware of the problems introducing such characters will create. Therefore he gives to Richard 'a power that:

excites astonishment, and a courage which exhorts admiration. He gives to Macbeth a similar, though less extraordinary, greatness, and adds to it a conscience so terrifying in its warnings and so maddening in its reproaches that the spectacle of inward torment compels a horrified sympathy and awe which balance, at the least, the desire for the hero's ruin.

In this manner, Bradley brilliantly reconciles the contradiction between the transcendental vocabulary used to define tragedy and the real problems that arise from the texts of Shakespeare's tragedies. Bradley, as all the other critics who followed his line, seems to take catharsis for granted. This feeling occurs in the viewers of good tragedies, and its absence can also be detected and a tragedy can be easily distinguished from defective art forms which are

intended to be so but fail. Catharsis is for him a transcendental meaning; it seems as if it existed even before Aristotle applied it metaphorically. All of this can be true of course if catharsis does really exist, and if it is not just a term without a real referent.

The tragic hero then is a good man of high rank. This man encounters a certain calamity which stirs our feelings of pity and fear to produce catharsis and purge our souls. The question that may instantly come to our minds is why a calamity should befall this man. Aristotle, again gives the answer, and it is the task of the following section to explain it.

VI. The tragic Flaw:

It has been elaborated that Aristotle describes the tragic hero as a good person, a man like us, and that for him a perfect man or evil man cannot form the right ingredient for tragedy. It has also been indicated that Shakespeare in his tragedies does not adhere to this principle, but introduces characters like Macbeth and Richard III who commit their crimes consciously and purposely, and who, despite this, remain tragic.

In trying to uncover the source of the tragic fall, Aristotle introduces the word Hamartia, which means an 'error', 'a false step' 'a bad shot' or 'sin'. By Hamartia, Aristotle obviously means that the typical hero is a great man with 'something wrong' in his life or character; but I think it is a mistake of method to argue whether he means 'an intellectual error' or 'a moral flaw' (BRERETON 40). In his commentary on Shakespeare's Hamlet in 1711, 'John Dennis remarks that "young Hamlet," like many characters in Shakespeare, has no tragic fault, for his regicide answered a call from Heaven' (cited in Kinney). There is no flaw in Hamlet that makes him tragic, but an evil and intolerable situation. Professor Gurr also agrees that Hamlet is the only tragedy where there is no tragic flaw among all the others. This is expressed succinctly as he remarks that:

Hamlet differs from the other tragedies in the clarity of the hero's position. He commits no early error, has no moral flaw to make him a tragic protagonist responsible for the collapse of his universe. He is an innocent caught in the machinery of a situation engineered solely by Claudius. He is witness to a crime, and is ordered by a figure returned from the dead to avenge it. (Gurr 64).

However, these statements are among the exceptions not the rule, and they could not overturn the Aristotelian power. Critics tend frequently to follow the classical critical assessment of Shakespeare's tragedies and they usually look for the tragic flaw in the heroes. Burgess for example believes that 'the Shakespearian hero has the power of choice; he has free will. It is his own faults of character that bring about his downfall. Macbeth is ambitious but weak; Othello is jealous; Hamlet cannot make up his mind' (49). Bradley attempts also to impose the Hamartia on the tragedies of Shakespeare, but it should have come now obvious that he applies his adoption implicitly by avoiding the application of Aristotelian terminology and describing the whole process instead. This can be simply deduced from his following remarks on Shakespeare's tragedies:

In almost all we observe a marked one-sidedness, a predisposition in some particular direction; a total incapacity, in certain circumstances, of resisting the force which draws in this

direction; a fatal tendency to identify the whole being with one interest, object, passion, or habit of mind. This, it would seem, is, for Shakespeare, the fundamental' tragic trait (13).

The word trait in describing the nature of the tragic hero has significant implications here as it refers to an approach towards human identity that dominated the West since Aristotle, if not earlier. This approach can best be described as essentialist. The essentialist argument regards identity to be the name for a 'one true self'. The fundamental assumptions of this view are that a fixed identity exists and that it is 'a whole' expressed through symbolic representation. (Barker and Galasinski 30)

According to the essentialist theory, a person consists of measurable personality traits, abilities and attributes. These traits may be either superficial or deeply rooted. They may be inherent or the result of child rearing. The essence of a person or his actions are thought to be largely determined by the combination of traits they possess, which outweigh the influence of the immediate situation or the context in which the person acts or behaves. If we take the extravert as an example, we can find him described as a sociable person, who likes parties, has many friends, and does not like being alone. An extravert always:

... craves excitement, takes chances, often sticks-his neck out, acts on the spur of the moment, and is generally an impulsive individual. He is fond of practical jokes, always has a ready answer, and generally likes change; he is care-free, easygoing, optimistic, and likes to 'laugh and be merry'. He prefers to keep moving and doing things, tends to be aggressive and lose his temper quickly; altogether his feelings are not under tight control, and he is not always a reliable person. (Eysenck and Eysenck, 1964: 8).

The essentialist view can be summed up by Lionel Trilling's (1974) description of behavior in character's as the 'honest soul' approach to the self. People in this theory are viewed as if they were minor characters in a Victorian novel the *Pickwicks*, for instance, of Dickens' novels. An identity here is simply the dispositions a person has or the sum of his traits: dishonest, lazy, Machiavellian, good, sincere or whatever. These traits alone provide sufficient motive and explanation for their actions. A character can not control his behavior but his internal essence is what controls him whatever the situation as that is his disposition. A good person will remain good, an extravert remains extravert in his behavior. The honest soul person, the person who acts in accordance with his essence is entirely synonymous with their disposition and identify completely with it. The extravert does not pretend, he cannot help but be extravert, his essence overwhelms him. Honest souls have only one identity, not many. Hence, one can not talk about this kind of self having an identity crisis or separation within the self to produce the possibility of this kind of self-conflict (Rorty, 1976). It is not within the capacity of Othello, for instance, to wonder if he is being 'authentic' to his 'true' self; he can not help but be jealous.

To use linguistic terms, the essentialist theory views a person as a self-enclosed text that can be read and understood once the dispositions that make him are studied. This kind of discourse on the identity, like any other discourse, has become a kind of ideology acquiring power, across time, from the other discourses that give it support and its circulation through texts and the never ending processes of subjections that derived power from it and gave it power.

The essentialist theory helps us understand what Bradley means when he talks about the one-sidedness and the predisposition in the tragic character. In fact, and under the influence of Aristotle himself, characters were studied according to their temperaments and complexions. The human nature consists of four humours, the sanguine, phlegmatic, choleric, and melancholy. In 1741, Thomas Betterton analysed the nature of tragic character in a way that reflects the psychological attitude to that character more than it virtually reflects that character:

But the Action of a Player is, what is agreeable to Personation or the Subject he represents. Now what he represents is Man in his various Characters, Manners, and Passions, and to these Heads he must adjust every Action; he must perfectly express the Quality and Manners of the Man whose Person he assumes, that is, he must know how his Manners are compounded, and from thence know the several Features, as I may call them, of his Passions. A Patriot, a Prince, a Beggar, a Clown, &c. must each have their Propriety, and Distinction in Action as well as Words and Language....Sometimes he is to be a Lover, and know not only all the soft and tender Addresses of one, but what are proper to the Character of Him who is in Love, whether he be a Prince or a Peasant, a hot or fiery Man, or of more moderate and flegmatic Constitution, and even the Degrees of the Passion he is possessed with (cited in Campbell 105).

The essence of this passage itself can be, in my opinion, traced back to the Poetics. According to Aristotle, a character is supposed to be consistent. Even if the character is inconsistent in the author's source, this inconsistency should be retained all over the play making the character consistently inconsistent. In a tragedy, it is important to make everything inevitable or at least believable. Whenever a character says or does something, it should follow inevitably from the nature of that character (McLeish, Poetics 1998. p.21).

The essentialist attitude to the identity of the tragic character is extended by Bradley to the power that crushes him. This same power has an essence and definite identity. It 'has a nature so definite and fixed that whatever changes take place in it produces other changes inevitably and without regard to men's desires and regrets (Bradley, 1976. p.21).

Essentialists, it should be noticed, believe in the mechanical representation of characters and their identities. The rigour of this approach is reflected in Campbell who introduces his chapter on Shakespeare's Othello where he discusses the play as a tragedy of jealousy by applauding the way in which characterization and the theme of jealousy are both represented in a consistent manner. The play is so consistent that no interpreter has been able to overlook the evident intention of the author:

Just as the grief-ridden Hamlet is the inevitable choice for the subject of a play in which revenge is motivated by a ghost and inhibited by the very passion which at the same time made possible the perception of the ghost and the inability to persist in a purpose, so Othello is the perfect choice for a study of the passion of jealousy, since in him one can see the working of the passion in one of a race to whom it is natural to be jealous (Campbell, 152).

Othello's tragedy stems from his own character. His Hamartia is inherent, it is in his essence and he cannot change it. The remarkable thing about this quotation is that it does not treat a single person as a measurable essence but it refers to a whole race that is jealous. The Moors are naturally jealous. They are homogeneous people; they can be simply described in few sentences, if not words, by an insightful Western thinker.

In Hamlet, the effect of humours on character, according to Campbell, is evident. When comparing Hamlet, Fortinbras, and Laertes, one finds that each of them mourns the death of a father; each attempts to revenge the murder of his father, and each suffers the grief of the loss and intentions. However, 'each must act according to the dictates of his own temperament and his own humor (110).

Despite the tremendous numbers of texts which deal with characterization in tragedies by applying the essentialist theory, and despite the fact that this view itself became an ideology that blinded critics and psychiatrists from reaching the truth, especially when one realizes that this approach to the self was regarded as a universal one for those who were in the grip of its ideology and utilized the subject positions its discourse afforded them, contradictions appeared within this discourse and Shakespeare's tragedies were part of the fields that revealed this contradiction.

The idea of essence or predisposition implies that a person behaves in accordance with his internal predisposition which transcends the situation. An introvert remains an introvert even when he attends a party. His character never changes, in other words, he is predictable. Thus, Othello can be regarded, as one finds in numerous critical works, a walking jealousy and Hamlet as a walking grief. To further explain the impact of essentialist idea of the identity it would be relevant to investigate T S Eliot's discussion of Christopher Marlowe. Eliot believes that Marlowe's verse moved in a direction that is quite un-Shakespearian which 'like some great painting and sculpture, attains the effects by something not unlike caricature (124-25).

Eliot in his discussion refers to the language of Marlowe as a means of creating a caricature, a kind of depiction that emphasizes certain aspects of the depicted thing while suppressing others. If we shift Eliot's argument from versification to characterization while retaining the contrast that Marlowe's characterization is un-Shakespearean, we will find that Shakespeare's view of the human identity was to a great extent different from the one which the Elizabethan's inherited from the Greeks and Romans. This view remained in many aspects valid until the twentieth century, despite the contradictions it revealed and the modifications it underwent.

This assumed revolutionary approach to human character and identity is indicated in Burgess who believes that Shakespeare sees human beings 'as strange mixtures, walking masses of conflict and contradiction, unpredictable, always surprising'. In his opinion, the failure on the part of Jonson to create such characters caused the failure of his tragedies and that contrasts his great success as a comedian. Jonson, as Burgess says, regards his characters as very simple and almost mechanical combinations of four elements, sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic, melancholic, and the various proportions of these mixtures. Johnson's comedy *Every Man in His Humour* seems to be a demonstration of the theory. 'In each character one quality predominates: amorousness, cowardice, avarice, irascibility, boastfulness.' In his plays the character, once established, never changes, and this is the secret of his success; had he added any hint of complexity or capacity for change the self-contained worlds that he built would have changed (Burgess).

Thus, the reason behind the little appeal of his tragedies is the lack of conflict and capacity for change. *Macbeth* the play has its appeal because of the warring within *Macbeth* the

character himself, the gradual corruption of his nature, had he been created on the pattern adopted by Jonson the tragedy would certainly fail.

The noticeable thing here is the contradiction between Bradley and Bergson. Bradley's criticism found a character that to some extent corresponds with the essentialist view and thereby Jonson's, while Bergson thinks of it as changing, a pattern that fits with what psychology currently calls the discursive identity. But the more remarkable thing is that we can not claim that we reached reality since we have moved from text to text and not through reality.

VII. Recognition:

Another important principle in the poetics is Recognition. This concept recurs time and again in Aristotle's discussion. We have seen that in a tragedy a good or a noble man has a hamartia, he has something wrong in his character that leads him act erroneously in ignorance of the consequences of his deeds. Oedipus kills his father and marries his mother. Although he does this unwittingly, he has to suffer the catastrophic consequences, and so he does. However, no matter how devastating the crime and its outcome are, the protagonist never dies before realizing his role in bringing about his own downfall. Part of Oedipus's tragedy is his recognition of his mistakes and self-inflicted punishment.

Again, Shakespeare evidently identifies with Aristotle in his statement on recognition, but not without modifications. In Shakespeare, recognition does not have to take place near the end of the play. In Hamlet, for instance, recognition occurs near the beginning. In Act I, Sc. 5, Hamlet discovers through the revelation of the ghost that his father was betrayed and murdered by his brother, who now reigns in his place. The discovery adds up to Hamlet's pessimist attitude towards life which has already been expressed in an earlier scene. This also reinforces his grief over the fact of his mother's incestuous marriage to his despised uncle within a few weeks of the death of his father. He now knows that this death was not a mere accident, he suspects that his mother may have consented to it, and that it occurred in a situation that gave his father no opportunity to confess his sins. Consequently, he undergoes the torments of hell. The same immediate reaction that occurs in the other Shakespearean tragic heroes at the moment of recognition recurs in Hamlet as he expresses his astonishment in wild words (Brereton 86).

How far the hysteria which underlies this speech and recurs throughout the rest of the play in Hamlet's words and conduct' involves true madness (however that may be defined) is a moot point which it is perhaps not necessary to argue all over again. It can, however, be said that Hamlet's 'madness' from then on does not appear to be always feigned-notably in his dealings with Ophelia- and that it is most satisfactorily explained as a disguise assumed, through necessity rather than as an effect of pure calculation. The necessity springs from the shock induced by the realisation of the true facts after which Hamlet can never again be confident of behaving rationally, since his rational world has collapsed. All this remains within the classic framework of the tragic recognition. The hero sees and understands the horror; it throws him off his balance, momentarily at least; he then commits suicide, having no further use for life (Brereton 86).

Recognition in Hamlet therefore plays a significant role in creating the tragic effect exactly as it does in Oedipus. It is evident that the two recognitions have much in common; in both plays recognition ruins the protagonists world and reverses his past success into

catastrophic failure and destruction. But while recognition in Oedipus occurs near the end and leads to climax, recognition in Hamlet can be considered as a part of the exposition which creates the rising action. Recognition in the Oedipus creates in the hero a sense of guilt justifiable for the audience of ancient Greece who accepted fatalism unquestionably. This same acceptance of the recognized fact may support the concept of hamartia, but in Hamlet the situation is different. Hamlet recognizes a fact for which that he can not be held responsible. He has not committed any crime which can justify his later destruction, and this may be the reason why many critics believe that Hamlet has no Hamartia (88-89).

In Macbeth recognition occurs at a fixed and identifiable point, which evokes in the reader, who is acquainted with Aristotle, that Shakespeare consciously and deliberately has placed it. It occurs at the point when Macbeth realises that he is doomed as he encounters Macduff, his opponent who was 'untimely ripped from his mother's womb', which subverts the confidence he earlier internalized that he is invincible since the weird sisters assured him that 'none of woman born' should harm him. At this particular moment he realizes that he was deceived by the sisters and that all the turmoil he initiated is based on metaphoric manipulation which is supported by the other misleading prophecy 'concerning the movement of the wood. "Birnam Wood appeared to move towards Dunsinane, shaking Macbeth's faith in another misleading prophecy (Brereton 97).

Searching for recognition in other plays, Shakespearean or non-Shakespearean can be tragic in itself. This is due to the fact that every concept in Aristotle's Poetics can be regarded as a generative grammatical rule. Thus, by internalizing recognition as a principle in tragedy, dramatists will include it in their works. Afterwards, critics searching for it will for prey to the game of circularity within an idealized system. This principle of course applies to any poetics that is taken for granted in the gigantic game of Shakespearean Tragedy. It is the task of the next chapter to search for the reasons behind the success of Aristotle's Poetics in trapping tragic characters known as critics, or troglodytes, in a circular game of representing Aristotle and Shakespearean Tragedy.

VIII. Conclusion:

As this study has shown, the presence of Aristotle's principles is pervasive in the tragedies of William Shakespeare. Since Shakespeare, as this study has indicated, subjected himself –or was subjected–to Aristotle's discourse on tragedy, the study is justified in calling him the subject of Aristotle's discourse. Aristotle's discourse dominates the structure of Shakespearean Tragedy. As the study has shown there is almost no structural concept in Shakespearean tragedy that has not been judged by critics without being related to the *Poetics*. Even when deviating from the principles laid down by Aristotle, that deviation can be interpreted in relation to Aristotle. In other words, Aristotle's *Poetics* has become the grounding principle from which one can assess tragedy and understand it. It should be remarked also that the study has shown how our discussion does not apply only to Shakespeare, but to all other tragedians, classic or modern.

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