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KING LEAR: A SHAKESPEAREAN TRAGEDY

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ABSTRACT

Shakespearean plays have been divided into comedies and tragedies. His tragedy may be stated as a story of exceptional calamity and sorrow leading mostly to the death of the hero in high estate. It is prominently the story of one person, the hero, or at most of two, the hero and the heroine, the latter coming into prominence mainly in love tragedies.

KEY WORDS: Comic relief, Hamartia, Catharsis, madness, etc.

SHAKESPEAREAN TRAGEDY

A tragedy is a tale of death or suffering, Shakespeare's tragedy are also powerful tales of death and suffering but Shakespeare's tragedy is something more than a mere story of death and suffering. His tragedy not like Thomas Kyd's 'Spanish Tragedy' where we find more than eight murder scenes, Kyd was a prolific playwright but there is a lack of universality in his Spanish Tragedy or Tourneur's 'Revenge's Tragedy' but Shakespeare's purpose was to deal with universal problems: though common readers like us think that his tragedy deals with families' internal conflict. As in 'Othello' jealousy in 'Hamlet' inactivity and in 'Lear' arrogance these are common human problems to all human beings. Therefore, we can conclude that Shakespeare's purpose was to show the universal human problems through some unique characters but they are not too good as too bad. Dr. Johnson says Shakespeare's plays are pure gold, Shakespeare is great because in his work there is just a representation of general human nature. His characters are faithful representation of humanity, for example, Lear's arrogance and passion of anger is common human nature, artistically woven in the play.

A HIGH RANKED HERO: A tragic hero is typically on the top of the wheel of fortune, half way between society on the ground. King Lear was in top at first part of the play. In the case of King Lear in spite of his flaw, he cannot be considered evil, he created the tragedy because he placed his trust in his eldest daughter, who is real evil.

THE TRAGIC FLAW: Aristotle's term "Hamartia" can be used in the case of 'King Lear'. As Humphrey House points out 'hamartia is not a moral failing, it is a fault from the part of the protagonist.' In the case of King Lear the Hamartia arises in an act of anger when he banished Cordelia, he wants to keep believing in his two daughters. For that reason he is not the first one to complain about the way he is being treated as Goneril; however, in hearing one of his knights' comment that Lear is not receiving the due treatment from Goneril. Another fault of Lear is extreme arrogance. Perhaps Campbell rightly points out that Shakespeare's protagonist are the slaves of passion.

INTERNAL CONFLICT: In the words of Campbell, there is always a psychological complexities in the minds of Shakespear's protagonists. Perhaps the best example of psychological complexity in the character of 'Hamlet'. In the case of 'King Lear' the scene of 'madness' and 'storm scene' clearly points out his inner conflict. In King Lear there is conflict is between good and evil characters Lear and his daughters, between Edmund and Edgar. The inner conflict in the minds of Glouster and Lear.

CATHERSIS: There is no appropriate explanation of the term 'Catharsis' in Aristotle's 'Poetics' but critics points out that catharsis mean purification of human emotion or we can say it as 'Pity' and 'Fear'.

Edgar and Edmund meet in Act-V the dual between them is a conflict that represent the ongoing battle, between good and evil, with Edgar defeat Edmund signaling the triumph of righteousness over corruption. When Lear enters with Cordalia's body immediate ideas about divine justice in the mind of readers vanishes.

The death of Regan, Goneril, Edmund etc. is apt and justified for the reader but Cordelia's death created a new question about divine justice because her character is marked by faithful and loving daughter at the end of play the stage is littered with bodies some deserving of death while some victims of evil. Thus, pity and fear raises in the play "King Lear".

COMIC RELIEF: According to great Shakespearean critic G. Willson Knight, the play has strong effect of comic elements. Through them Shakespeare has achieved a criss-cross tears and laughter. Shakespeare himself believe that life itself is the mixture of tears and laughter. The comic elements make the play structurally perfect.

The fool is a professional jester. His task is provide comic relief. His voice is ironic, humorous, witty but full of wisdom. So, once Lear himself says fools as "My Philosopher". He represent the consciousness of the king. The fool express the sarcastic remarks regarding the follies of king. For example, once he asks king to give him an egg and in return he will give the king two crowns. He explain that he will eat the egg and give two halves of the shell of the egg to the king. This sarcastic elements comments on king's wrong decision to distribute his kingdom to his two evil daughters.

Edgar disguise as a Bedlam beggar. He speaks like a mad man as suitable to his role. But he is minor source of comedy.

MADNESS: Madness plays a vital role in Elizabethan tragedy. Perhaps the most perfect example of madness is 'Hamlet' and real madness of 'Ophelia'.

There are different kind of madness in "King Lear". First there is a madness of the protagonist, i.e. King Lear. His madness is caused by a series of shocks – Cordelia's behavior weighs heavily in his mind. Though Cordelia's intention was right, Lear angrily disowns her.

The evil daughter Goneril's refusal to help him shocks him. Lear feels hysteric to see Kent in the stocks. When Regan also betrays Lear, both the daughter directly say the would not take care of her old father Lear says, "O fool, I shall go mad".

CONCLUSION

Most critics have believed that the play "King Lear" is abhorrently pessimistic. Up to a point there criticism is valid since the stage is strewn with corpses at the end of the play. Swinburne found the play extremely pessimistic. There is no doubt that Shakespeare was in a ruthless mood when he wrote 'King Lear' and he does not provide any relief either through religion or through sentiments. It is true that the world of Lear is one in which cross evil is not only rife but also potent and goodness is rather outwardly unavailing. Yet this impression of the play's pessimism reduces considerably when we realize that the victory of evil is temporary and the defeat of good leaves us with the feeling that there are worse things than this defeat and this is not the last that we have heard of moral calamity in an otherwise magnificent existence.

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