HEMINGWAY’S CONCEPT OF TRAGEDY

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ABSTRACT

Tragedy is an eminent form of literature. Aristotle deals with tragedy in his famous discourse Poetics calling it synonymous to poetry. Aristotle was perhaps the first important writer who discussed on tragedy in a serious and meaningful way. Poetics is a kind of retaliation of Plato’s famous objection to art and the artist. Aristotle’s concept of tragedy has been a source of several other thinkers of the following generations. Aristotle finds the source of tragedy in the character himself. ‘Character is the destiny’ is his famous pronouncement. Stoicism is an important trait of the Aristotelian tragic hero.

Hemingway demonstrates the pessimism with the deterministic view of life. His concept of tragedy is formulated by several factors, which were responsible for modernism as a literary concept. Most of the novels and short stories of Ernest Hemingway are tragic. He is perhaps the greatest maker of tragedy of the century, considering the range of tragic vision he displays and a variety of characters he creates.

KEYWORDS: Protagonist, infliction, substantial, naturalism, determinism, frustration, brutality, disillusionment, catastrophe, determination, confrontation, aphorism, simultaneously, brutality, indiscrimination, subsequent, relinquishment, reconciliation, corruption, incapable, inescapable.

INTRODUCTION

Aristotle says tragedy is the highest form of literature. Aristotle’s concept of tragedy has been a source of several other thinkers of the following generations. Aristotle says ‘Character is destiny’
because he finds the source of tragedy in the character himself. Aristotelian tragic hero is a man of highest person in the society or lofty king, prince or princes. This tragic hero has a flaw in his personality, which Aristotle calls Hamartia. It is this tragic flaw which leads him gradually towards the tragic end. Several issues are brought in revenge, ambition, mistaken judgment, thwarted affection etc., bring grief and add to the main action of the story. The tragic hero unknowingly gets involved in all factors and finally dies.

Tragedy has been an equally eminent genre during the European renaissance. Writers like Christopher Marlow and Shakespeare wrote famous tragedies. The Shakespearean tragedy is based largely on the classical rules laid down by Aristotle. Concept of tragedy changed considerably in the course of time. The Hegelian concept was that of the romantic philosopher who believed in the revolutionary spirit of an individual and its conflict with the traditional morality. Darwin’s theory of evolution laced main within the track of his own creation. Darwin’s theory put forth yet another equally important notion of man and his circumstances, namely Determinism. The 20th century American novel discards Naturalism as a literary device and tends to be more realistic. However, determinism and the pessimism associated with it remained as parts of the artistic vision of the 20th century American fiction.

Hemingway demonstrates the pessimism with the deterministic view of life. His concept of tragedy is formulated by several factors, which were responsible for modernism as a literary concept. The tragedy in the Hemingway’s fiction is the result of circumstances often beyond the control of tragic hero. Hemingway’s stories make some discoveries about the nature of life and death that the human society confronts. Some of the stories of Men and Women, a collection of stories published in 1927, contain the most impressive writings of tragedy. The Undefeated, a story demonstrating Aristotelian flaw and catastrophe, is unarguably tragic. Nick sometimes suffers principal catastrophe and sometimes a shadow of it. In The Undefeated the tragic condition and fatal flaw is associated with aging matador who has also the elevating quality of heroic identity.

Like The Old Man and the Sea, The Undefeated intersects other sub-species of tragedy. Manuel suffers from a Heilmanic division of essences; the confrontation between the dictates of common sense to give up fighting and of his passion to continue it produces. The fateful, but ennobling and transcending choice. Also, there is an element of Hegelian tragedy here, for Manuel represents a ‘good’ imperative to be sensible and give it up—may seem at first to have no adequate objectification. But if one looks closely he finds that Zurito, the picador, fits splendidly. Zurito helps Manolo, on the condition the Manuel will retire if he fails. At the end, the scene between the two thus emerges as the final confrontation between the two imperatives. Zurito is trying to cut his pigtail, the mark of the matador; gravely wounded. Manuel stops him. The imperative of the passion prevails, and it will very shortly carry Manuel to his death. More powerfully than any earlier story, this one dramatizes the famous Hemingway ‘double-dicho’ a philosophic aphorism that means almost the same if reversed; ‘A man may be destroyed but not defeated’. Hence it is entitled as The Undefeated.

In A Canary for One, there is a death of love when the marriage ends. In Hills Like White Elephants, man persuades his beloved to have an abortion; killing their love and denying their own possibility. In Ten Indians also similarly the love is lost. Banal story is flooded with
confrontation of death of Maera, the matador. In Another Country a cheerful Italian major collapses emotionally at the news of his wife’s sudden death, and thinks that the end of romantic love is death and that any promises of happiness the universe makes, are false. A Pursuit Race shows efforts of a bicycle rider who loses race against the man who starts behind him. He feels catastrophe like a man defeated in the bed. The Killers produced tragedy the impact of which is observed on the witness. Gangsters appear at the dinner, tie up Nick and a co-worker, and calmly prepare the murder of Ole Anderson without warning. This, to Nick appears almost taken his life and then released unharmed. But when he goes to warn the primary he finds that Ole Anderson has decided to accept death without further resistance. He must die without a mysterious transgression. Nick is forced to understand that there is evil in the universe that cannot be explained, conquered, or evaded. In An Alpine Idyll, life and death are juxtapose and there is an end of love. The narrator hears the unnatural heat of the mountain sun as an attempt to flee the life force but cannot escape from their secondhand encounter with the peasant Olz, who mutilates his wife’s body by handing a lantern from the open mouth of her frozen corpse and reduces her to the level of inanimate convenience, a woman whom he loved. It was a brutality latent in romantic love. In Fifty Grand victory is defeat and defeat victory and the catastrophe is so problematic. Jake’s real enemy is time, not his opponent and it is form time that he wishes to wrest the psychic transcendent victory. In a Simple Enquiry the Italian major’s intention brings catastrophe without signal and almost simultaneously when he delicately makes a homosexual advance towards his orderly. After the Storm, asserts that life promises and then takes away: all life forms ultimately prey upon and consumes one another. The captain’s fight comes upon the false understanding of the man who has died. His character as scavenger and predator is revealed by the attempt to loot an abandoned schooner, and what he finally finds is the result of a large, more capricious violence by nature, the big liner is grounded in quicksand just under water. The random violence and absurdity have created a steam of greed and gratification. The captain ends in catastrophe. The Sea Change is a classic form; a young woman discloses to her love that she is going away from a lesbian affair by which he is hurt. But he forgives her and sends her off with his blessings. Human beings break out of self-isolation to join shattered self-enclosed pride to attain compassion and community. A Clean Well Lighted Place is built upon twin catastrophes. The old man attempts suicide the week before as the two waiters watch him drinking in the sidewalk café. The one waiter feels sympathy for the old man because he also confronts Nada and hopelessness. This is man’s eternal confrontation with the void.

Hemingway’s stories are invariably tragic. Capital of the World is the story of Paco’s indiscrimination romanticism, an impulse to be a bull fighter. This impulse prompts him to accept challenge from Enrique, the dishwasher who emulates bull by heavy sharp knives to the legs of a chair. Paco’s death comes directly to him from his desire to prove truly brave in his own eyes. It is the noble youthful aspiration and fatal flaw that surrounds and brings death through the risky game.

Hemingway has evolved in The Snow of Kilimanjaro even greater intensification of Greek tragedy. The last scene of the last act of the story is full of intensity, shattering, emotional impact. Harry the protagonist is brought down by fate, which attributes much of the powers of Shakespearean tragedy, where harry surrenders his talent for comfort, marries the rich woman, and betrays his self. His attempt to come out of corruption, achieve wholesome life, and rise again is the attempt of doom. He is doomed by the accidental thorn scratch, which he does not
treat. As a result, bold poisoning is caused and Harry contracts gangrene, which finally kills him. His own flaw and the hostile unknown in the universe together have destroyed him. He is caught between his need and compulsion between which he struggles. Death is a kind of reconciliation between the two. His relinquishment of work and personal negation followed thereof, destroyed him. His own weakness was the cause of his moral disintegration and incongruous, carelessness, gratuitous acts against the moral universe.

Life is tragic according to Hemingway. The real triumph of life is possible only in death but the quest for life must go on. There are two main factors which make The Sun Also Rises essentially a tragedy: primarily, the protagonist suffers catastrophe, which is irreversible on its own term and secondly, the work should have sufficient powerful impact. The Sun Also Rises satisfies both the tests. Therefore it is a powerful tragedy according to him. It is parallel to Greek Tragedy.

To Have and Have Not, is yet another tragic novel. It is written with the intention to expose disparity and malfunctioning of American society of his time. It is the Aristotelian tragedy of fatal flaw, located somewhere between Frey’s concept of tragedy arising out of powerlessness of individual against universe and falling through protagonist’s own failure. Man participates in shaping his own catastrophe. There is therefore, a sharing of responsibility for the catastrophe. In this novel, the catastrophe of Harry Morgan’s life begins with the opening of the novel; its culmination is in his death. Hostile forces draw steadily around him. His determination that he will maintain his self-sufficiency at all cost and the illusion that he can control his own destiny, bring the catastrophe. He has been forced to go for illegal means of earning his living, which he did not intend to. But the world deprived him of right to make a reasonable living on his own reasonable terms. He is a victim of tragic necessity and of a failed economic system of America. He pursues his own fatal flaw and murders two individuals who were murderers themselves and who were committed to living their lives on their own terms and imposing their terms on the universe. Hemingway seems to emphasis that those, who try to conquer alone, die alone. But, of course, all die alone, no matter how small or ruthless he or she is.

For Whom the Bell Tolls, offers an epic variety of experience. Baker calls it a tragic epic. The book is engaged with the great political events and issues of the time in Spanish republic. In this novel Hemingway emphasizes the brutalities of Fascist government of Spain and sympathies the brutalities of Fascist government of Spain and sympathies for the communists. Showing their spots and virtues Hemingway paints out that communism and Republicanism are not the same, rather they are co-belligerents. The novel contains several varieties of tragedy of personal flaw that dignifies and ennobles but then destroys the character and finally Hemingway’s own tragedy in which protagonists co-author their own catastrophe.

Robert Jordan, the protagonist, undertakes his mission to blow up the bridge for Golz, develops the incarnation of an ethical absolute duty to cause, and duty to one’s immediate group, the band with which he is working for the mission. Maria, a female protagonist, raped by fascist, becomes the embodiment of another absolute. The romantic love that Maria and Jordan make is to all commitment to each other in the four days that are available to them. Maria makes Jordan aware of his duty, as a result, there is confrontation between love and duty within him. Bridge becomes the concentration of all forces of enemy, destructive and absurd forces of nature, fascism, the
force of negative human liberty and dignity, etc. Jordan blows the bridge and is killed in the process. Jordan makes decision of blowing bridge that is fatal and will bring death in all probabilities. He could have easily abandoned the assignment and escaped with Maria. But he does not do so, though there was a choice for him. The Drydensque heroic tragedy also operates here, which is the tragedy of choice between the two imperatives. There is a choice of two imperative decisions before Jordan, the romantic love of Maria, and the blowing the bridge. He chooses the later i.e blowing of bridge. This brings catastrophe to him; his leg is broken when hit in the action; he does not run away from the field, remains very much on the scene and delays the pursuers by machine gun so that his other people of the band could flee. The assessment of Jordan’s decision in Aristotelian terms, is the flaw ethical- absolute that is fatal, ennobling and self-defining virtue, which brings catastrophe to him. It is the spiritual triumph over material disaster.

The Old Man and the Sea is Hemingway’s realistic and Christian tragedy. Philip Young called it a triumph of classic tragedy; perhaps the most complex form, and other fables built upon it are equally tragic. Santiago the hero of the novel is worst kind of unlucky old fisherman, falling down from the eyes of his fellow fishermen because he has failed in having any catch for eighty-four days. His beginning in the deep sea makes his rise to the pinnacles of taking the fish more thrilling, the catastrophe of its loss more heartening- and his victory spirit inside and after that catastrophe more life enlarging and transcendent. The tragic action starts in those depth clusters about certain dominant elements.

The climax of the tragedy reaches and becomes most awesome when marlin jumps and blood comes out. The blood resembles the blood of Christ. Thus, the novel resembles a Christian fable. Marlin thrice circles the boat of Santiago, after the third sunrise, before succumbing to death. The fish is also tragic protagonist in Hegelian concept. After death, also the fish suffers mutilation, which is the final phase of catastrophe and prolongs the catastrophe of Santiago. Santiago feels he has won but fears that he has also lost. He is apprehensive of approaching nemesis “if sharks come God pity him and me”.

The Garden of Eden reveals the causes of disintegration of happy marriage of a couple. It is indeed a Garden of Eden in Biblical terms. The hidden power is jealous of their happy life. David Bourne and Catherine spend very happy and pleasant married life. Their mutual devotion and delight in each other at first seem complete and idyllic. Promising David “a change and surprise”. Catherine cuts her hair short and begins playing teasing games that hint at exchanging sexual identities. She initiates a friendship with an attractive young woman, Marita, and invites David into an amorous ‘sharing’ of their three lives.

Catherine desires to be an artist but she has the sense of inadequacy of employment of language, has no confidence in herself because of her gender. Tradition does not permit her to access to the medium of expression of the body, which make can do better and which is easily accepted by society. She creates a text not with language but with her won body. Catherine wants to translate the body language into proper words. She provides the plot by living it moment by moment. The phallocentric control of letters produces insecurity in the female writer. Catherine believes that the female libido and not written word best expresses reality. She experiences frustration with restrictive gender codes and a sense of powerlessness in the world. She derives both self-respect
and sexual satisfaction from communicating with her body—each creative act of self-expression the hairstyles, the bleaching, the transsexual and bisexual acts manifesting sexual pleasure etc. Catherine clearly speaks a libidinal language and often lets her body express her thoughts, as evidenced when she tells David, ‘I will put on one of my tight shirts so you can tell what I think about things’.

Marita and Catherine practice female economy. Both wish to support David but their behavior differs. Catherine’s spending is amorous sharing with Marita at the instance of Catherine becomes the fatal flaw, consequently brings an agony and disintegration of happy life. The exchange of partners is a threat to the conservation of self. This action leads to disaster.

Hemingway’s work reveals a strong sense of tragedy. His heroes are common men, not men of high rank as Aristotle thought. The Hemingway hero, who as a common man, is equally tragic because his strength and weakness are the same as those of Aristotelian tragic hero. Hemingway belonged to an age in which the common man was the center of actions. All serious writers of his time wrote about this common man—his joys and sorrows, his disillusionment and the financial frustration he experienced. The Hemingway hero is a last person whose stoic struggle against the odd circumstances is wreaked in the end. He is the failure before the determining not altogether pessimistic. He is defeated but never crestfallen. He is morally a strong person. Morality operates predominantly and self-respect are the important traits of the Hemingway hero. He is stoically brave and does not succumb easily to the hostile universal forces. The element of love operates here strongly. The Hemingway hero loses whatever he is committed to. He loves his labour, which is the constant struggle and all the pain and suffering involved there in. Hemingway’s vision of tragedy encompasses a larger universe where pain and suffering anticipate a better world to live in. the Hemingway hero suffers vehemently, but he looks forward to a better world. He is morally a strong person who has total faith in himself and the strength with which he offers stiff resistance to the hostile power in the universe. In this sense, he is not really a lost man because in his effort lies the sense of regaining what is lost. The Hemingway hero is the soldier, a bullfighter, a fisherman, known for his physical strength. He is always involved in the violent acts like killing or getting killed. These acts in his part bring out the meaninglessness of violence and cruelty. It is a waste, which creates frustration and the ultimate disillusionment. The death, which is the ultimate result of every action in the Hemingway’s world evokes the necessity of love. Love alone will eradicate the pain and suffering associated with labor.

REFERENCES


