CHAPTER 4

WILLIAMS’ CONCEPT OF TRAGEDY

Modern Tragedy is one of Williams’ seminal works which gives us an important insight into his literary theory. It was written between the publication of Drama from Ibsen to Eliot and the major revision of it in Drama from Ibsen to Brecht. This is a book of far-reaching importance in the development of Williams’ work as a whole. Besides drama, it also discusses novels, philosophy and political history. According to Williams, “It was as if I went into the lecture room with the text of a chapter from Drama from Ibsen to Eliot in front of me, and came out with the text of a chapter from Modern Tragedy.”

In fact, there is a key point of continuity between the two works—the same authors are discussed, the same quotations are used. But the earlier work is more technical and concentrates mainly on dramatic conventions and their relationship with theatrical staging and individual playwrights. It shows a close relationship between the ‘structure of feeling’ and dramatic forms. In “Modern Tragedy”, according to John Eldridge and Lizzie Eldridge, “Williams explores the development of tragedy in both the drama and the novel, observing changes in form and, interlinked with this, in ‘structure of feeling’.” The dramatic or literary forms are changed with a change in the ‘structure of
feeling’. There is constant and continual development from one dramatic form to another, for instance, from personal/subjective expressionism to social expressionism, from an absurd private drama to an absurd social drama and so on. Modern Tragedy, on the other hand, is closer to ‘ideological criticism’. The concept of tragedy, as defined by Williams in this book will go a long way in understanding his literary theory.

According to John Higgins, “Modern Tragedy was above all a polemical work, addressed to the dominant ideology which he (Williams) saw as produced and reproduced in the Cambridge English Tragedy paper, as it was epitomised in George Steiner’s successful The Death of Tragedy.” Steiner viewed the history of tragedy as the history of the decline of a form which had achieved its moment of unparalleled perfection with the Greeks. The history of tragedy is the history of this decline. Steiner does not regard Ibsen as a tragic dramatist. In his work there is “no tragedy at all, but dramatic rhetoric summoning us to action in the conviction that truth of conduct can be defined and that it will liberate society.” In Williams’ opinion Steiner’s book embodies a distinctive anti-Marxist stance. It identifies three main elements in the death of modern tragedy. First, there was the impossibility of reviving the original Greek forms; second, the way in which Christianity with its belief in redemption spread antipathy to the harshness of Greek tragic values; and finally there was the denial of tragedy by a Marxism which he sees as the twentieth-century heir to the willful delusions of Christian belief.
Williams counters Steiner's notion of tragedy by admitting the fact that tragedy like other key words—culture, industry and democracy—"is a single and powerful word" and above all it is a word with a history. This history is open to interpretation at various points of time through the mechanism of the 'selective tradition'. It is not a difficult thing to see this tradition as a continuity. Many of the later writers and critics have been conscious of the early writers and their works. All of them have contributed to 'a common idea or form'. For a cultural historian any tradition is not the past "but an interpretation of the past: a selection and valuation."°

Tragedy, for Williams, is both historically and culturally specific and this recognition is itself a rejection of received definitions. This rejection gives rise to his criticism of the academic separation of tragedy from ordinary human experience of suffering, a separation which Williams regards an ideological distinction. Williams suggests that 'tragedy' should be understood in the historical context or as John Higgins reminds us with a "fully historical understanding" of it with "a history of its forms, and the different social conventions underlying those forms."° The specific differences in the idea of tragedy correspond to shifts in the basic structure of social organisation or what Williams calls 'structure of feeling'. The dramatic form and within it the idea of tragedy changes with a change in the 'structure of feeling'. The medieval emphasis on 'the fall of princes' is comprehensible in a feudal period while Dryden's idea of the necessity for 'decorum' is "an aristocratic rather than a feudal conception."° The ahistorical idea
of tragedy relies above all on the notion of an unchanging human nature and this assumption, Williams suggests, has to be rejected if the notion of tragedy is to be understood. Now tragedy is “not a single and permanent kind of fact, but a series of experiences and conventions and institutions” and “the varieties of tragic experience are to be interpreted by reference to the changing conventions and institutions.”

The word ‘tragedy’, Williams says, is loosely applied in everyday life situations to any kind of unpleasant and untoward incident. But tragedy is not simply death and suffering. It is rather “a particular kind of event, and kind of response” which get embodied in a tradition which persists for a long time. This tradition, Williams maintains, should not be confused with other kinds of ‘events and response’.

While tracing the history of tragedy, Williams says that in Greek tragedy the ‘structure of feeling’ was such that the action centered around the royal families belonging to the past and the hero was not an individual in his own right but represented the collective personality of a society or community. He was also an intermediary figure between God and Man. The stress in Renaissance tragedy was no longer on dynastic personages as such but on the fall of famous men. The tragedy of this period had ‘men of rank’ as protagonists and these figures were chosen because their fate (rising or falling) affected the fortunes of state and not because they served as intermediaries between men and supernatural powers. Here a remarkable development takes place in
the realm of drama. At this point the process of secularisation of tragedy which becomes more manifest in modern tragedy has started. All drama after the Renaissance is secular in its overall character. There is a change in another important respect. In ancient tragedies, characters represented the substantive ethical ends of the society as a whole.

In modern tragedy, on the other hand, the ends seem to be strictly personal. The interest in modern tragedy is directed towards the 'isolated individual and his condition' rather than the representative figure in whom the ethical norms and sentiments of the whole society find a concentrated expression. The 'structure of feeling' is that of a tragedy where a man is viewed at a juncture when he is simultaneously at the height of his power and limits of his strength, at once aspiring and being defeated and destroyed by his own energies. The structure is based on measuring the expanse of an individual's capabilities through a recognition of defeat or the limits of victory. The tragic hero is invested here with the status of a victim of forces more powerful than himself but not necessarily superior to him.

With the ascendancy of the new middle classes in the eighteenth century, the concept of tragedy, according to Williams, underwent a further significant change. After the Renaissance, in the earlier tragedies, the emphasis was on the 'men of rank'. Both the action of the tragedy and its hero had an important status. The fate of man of rank chosen as protagonist in the Renaissance tragedy reflected the fate of the whole state. The whole empire rose
and fell with him. But the common man becomes the hero in the new tragedy which emerged in the eighteenth century and here his fate does not have linkage with the fate of the state. The representative significance of the hero as also of the action is of an entirely different type. These symbolise the human condition in the particular conditions of existence, and neither the hero nor his situation directly represents the fate of the society as a whole. There are different ways in which death is shown as a singular and solitary event, "as a proof of the loss of connection." The extension from the prince to the citizen became in practice an extension to all human beings. These shifts and changes from the Renaissance period onward show realism at work in tragedy. This does involve some loss for tragedy which as it became more and more personal and private finds its general and public character gradually diluted and its resonance consequently weakened to a certain extent.

According to Williams it was an attempt to adopt tragedy to the habits of middle class people. The hero in this type of tragedy is "stripped of Royal pomp and glaring show. His muse reports a tale of Private Woe." There is a change in the reader's, the audience's response too. "We never can pity what we never can share." The rank has lost its meaning and relevance in the changed social scene. As the 'structure of feeling' changed with the collapse of feudalism so did the dramatic forms. Williams is of the opinion that an intimate relationship exists between the social change and the art forms. This subtle connection cannot be
discerned very easily, but it does exist and Williams tries to show it effectively in his *Drama from Ibsen to Brecht*.

*Modern tragedy* is criticised by Stein for establishing its own deterministic framework. He finds in this book “a tendency to equate the problem of modern tragedy more and more totally with the problem of tragedy and revolution.” Sturart Hampshire looks upon *Modern Tragedy* as a book which is “wandering around in a circle, from the imagined social experience to the dramatic literature, and from the literature to social experience.” But these criticisms, according to John Eldridge and Lizzie Eldridge, arise from Williams’ use of the concept of ‘structure of feeling’ as a critical tool. They find that this concept “is essential to Williams’ analytical approach.” It enables him to analyse specific issues incorporating and implying related factors. Williams does not view literature in isolation. There is, according to him, a constant and continual movement between literature and the social experience. When he is writing about one, as implied by the concept of ‘structure of feeling’, he is writing about the other also. This is, in fact, an inevitable aspect of Williams’ methodological approach. Williams makes it more clear in *The Long Revolution*: “All the acts of men compose a general reality within which both art and what we ordinarily call society are comprised.” In the modern tragedy a lonely man is shown confronting a blind fate. This is a basic factor in the sense of isolation of the tragic hero. What we see in modern tragedy is man in a state of loneliness bereft of all human connections.
Tragedy generally dramatises evil in many particular forms. Whether man is naturally good or evil is a debatable issue. But it seems that man is not naturally anything: that men both create and transcend their limits and they are good and evil in particular ways and particular situations defined by pressures they at once receive and can alter and create again. It can be safely said, against the earlier emphases on transcendental evil, that most of the great tragedies of the world end not with evil absolute but 'evil both expressed and lived through'. Williams emphasises: "We must try also, positively to understand and describe not only the tragic theory but also the tragic experience of our time." Another feature of tragedy which Williams points out is that there is an overemphasis on an action in which the hero is destroyed. The focus on the hero marginalises the tragic action as a whole. A part is taken for the whole and the hero is taken for action. Williams observes: "We think of tragedy as what happens to the hero, but the ordinary tragic action is what happens through the hero."

Williams further observes that bourgeois critics uphold the doctrine that human nature does not change. They take this position because they want to block all attempts to bring about radical changes in society. If human nature remains unchanged all the evils of the present society will continue to exist. But with this category, they fail to understand the genesis of evils prevalent in a particular society. The social relations based on private property promote evils like greed, cruelty, envy, selfishness, ruthlessness and so on. The tragedy of naturalism is the tragedy of passive suffering,
because man cannot change the world, he can only endure the suffering. In this regard Williams observes: “What became naturalism, and what distinguished it from the more important movement of realism, was a mechanical description of men as the creatures of their environment, which literature recorded as if men and things were of the same nature.”

In the literature of romanticism, on the other hand man is shown as making himself. He is individual liberator changing and transforming the world. Romanticism is the most important expression in modern literature of the first impulse of liberation of man. An individual person is viewed here only as a liberator of the whole of humanity. He is guilty of the ultimate and nameless crime of being himself. The desires of man are imperative here and they are let loose to test the universe itself. The society is considered as convention and convention is the enemy of desires. Prometheus, creation of P.B.Shelley and Faust, creation of Gothe, are the best examples of assertion of full freedom of the individual against the odds set by conventions of society. But unconsciously their desires become devious and often perverse and the revolt or rebellion takes the form of defiance of ‘heaven and hell’. The following observations of Raymond Williams on the genesis of modern tragedy are pertinent: “The impossibility of finding a home in the world, the condemnation to a guilty wandering, the dissolution of self and others in a desire that is beyond all relationships: these Romantic themes are an important source of nearly all modern tragedy.”
In the concluding section of Part 1 of *Modern Tragedy* Williams attempts to counter and question the leading ideas of both liberalism and Stalinism. His reflections on tragedy are part of a social phenomenology which refuses to allow event and response, order and accident to be separated. Modern tragedy is above all a response to the human experience of revolution, an experience which is necessarily at once personal and political, public and private. Williams tries to expose the ‘radical connections’ in modern tragedy between “event and experience and idea.” One such connection exists between tragedy and revolution. Williams argues that liberalism, with its emphasis on the individual, is especially responsible for the opposition between the concept of tragedy and the idea of revolution. Alan O’Connor rightly points out: “An important part of the argument of *Modern Tragedy* is to bring together the history of two keywords: ‘revolution’ and ‘tragedy’.”

Williams replaces conceptions of a permanent human nature and a fixed social order with his belief in the possibility of human and social transformation. In other words, human nature is not absolutely evil, nor is it good in any absolute way: humanity is historically shaping and shaped. Concepts such as ‘fate’, ‘destiny’ and ‘fortune’, which are significant to the received definition of tragedy, come into conflict with the notion of revolution. For Williams revolution is a struggle not only “against mere institutions and social forms, but against other men.” He views revolution in ‘a tragic perspective’. He argues against the ways in
which we commonly narrow down the meaning of revolution to a moment of violence and terror rather than accepting revolution as a moment of violence in a whole history of violence and terror. Here Williams’ main concern is to restore the inter-related concepts of tragedy and revolution to the realm of the ordinary, in a way that can relate to our experience of the modern world.

By the time of Ibsen’s dramatic maturity, liberal tragedy had almost reached its point of culmination. The false society became an enemy of man. Apart from this identification of evil with false society, in other respects too Ibsen’s work displays the basic ingredients of liberal tragedy in a crystallized form. The important features of liberal tragedy are: humanist exploitation of the unknown reaches of life, contradiction between the bourgeois preoccupation with humanitarianism and with money, the romantic intensities of alienation, remorse and perverted desires, recognition of the pernicious influence of dead institutions. Ibsen’s plays show false society in a light where these features of liberal tragedy get fully highlighted. Here the fight against the lie is individual, concentrating on man fighting for his personal life. As Provost argues: “The surest way to destroy a man is to turn him into an individual.” The individual assumes the role of being his own liberator. His struggle is seen as both necessary and tragic. While compromise in such a situation breeds false relationships and a sick society, the attempt by the individual to achieve genuine self-fulfilment ends again and again in tragedy. The individual is destroyed in his attempt to liberate himself and the world. The
heroic liberator is opposed by a false society. Ibsen and Stockmen’s plays are fine examples of this type of tragedy.

In some of the modern plays, however, the emphasis shifts from the position of the individual liberator, the aspiring self against society, to a tragic position of the self against self. When this happens, the tragedy of struggle for individual liberation assumes a new form. The evil is seen as lodged almost entirely within the individual himself, a part of himself hurting the rest of the self. The guilt now becomes internal and personal. At this stage, as Williams tells us, liberalism is beginning to pass into its twentieth-century breakdown: “the self enclosed, guilty and isolated world; the time of man his own victim.” In this new shape of the tragic experience defined as man entrapped within himself, the desire for relationships becomes restricted and reduced to an image in the mind. The search for life ends in death without any concrete achievement in the form of personal relationships or intervention in the form of objective action. The pattern of Shaw’s *Saint Joan* could be cited as an example of the tragedy of the individual liberator of the former type. Here the heroine, Joan, is destroyed by a false society. But there is an essential difference between the tragedy found in this play of Shaw and that which we find in Arthur Miller who represents a late revival of liberal tragedy. In the process of this revival, the tragedy undergoes a significant mutation and assumes a slightly different form. The heroes of Miller are self-defeated and they bring death and destruction not only to themselves but also to the people who come
in their contact. Joan, on the other hand, is not a self-defeated and frustrated girl. The tragedy in her case emanates from the fact that society failed to understand the logic she was working on.

In *Death of a Salesman* Willy Loman, the hero or the victim, is not a conformist, but a defeated individual. He is rather a conformist, as false as the society in which he lives. From selling things he has passed to selling himself and has become a commodity. He has in his mind a construct of the false society and he wants to live accordingly. In this way, he sells his own freedom and also the freedom of his sons and thereby brings misfortune to the whole family. Willy invites the tragedy on him not by opposing the lie but by living it. A new consciousness is shaped in which the defeated hero has no living way out. He can try in death to affirm his lost identity and his lost will. Willy is not a hero nor a martyr or liberator, he is primarily a victim and his death only confirms this. He commits suicide for a wrong reason—to ensure insurance money to his sons who will keep his name alive. It is an unheroic act on his part. However, for those who had fully interiorised the prevailing values of society without being aware of the contradictions and falsities contained in them and defined a life of maximum dignity for themselves primarily in terms of bearing the brunt of these contradictions patiently and unflinchingly without necessarily being aware of them. The sense of personal verification by death of an individual’s commitment to values he has imbibed from society as if they constitute his authentic self, is the last stage
of liberal tragedy. Proctor in The Crucible too dies for the same reason—the act of self-preservation.

Williams furthers his argument about tragedy in his discussion in the chapter "Social and Personal Tragedy: Tolstoy and Lawrence". Here he describes two types of tragedy: the social tragedy and personal tragedy. The former shows men being destroyed by power and famine and the latter shows men and women being destroyed in their closest relationships. As Williams puts it: "The individual knowing his destiny, in a cold universe, in which death and an ultimate spiritual isolation are alternative forms of the same suffering and heroism." 27

Williams elaborates his point by making comparative analysis of two novels: Tolstoy's Anna Karenina and D.H.Lawrence's Women in Love. In both the novels an important relationship ends in tragedy and death. There is division between the 'social' and the 'personal'. In both these novels, there is a deliberate rejection of the society by the major characters as if the society were the cause of their suffering and possible tragedy. While D.H Lawrence seems to validate this rejection of society, Tolstoy sees its negative consequences very clearly. Anna leaves a husband who has gone dead to himself and to her. No doubt, the tragedy of Anna is exacerbated by the society but the immediate source of her tragedy is her wrong choice. She leaves one inadequate man for another. Karenin's inadequacy lies in the fact that he is cold to a passionate wife and the inadequacy of Vronsky is that he could arouse passion in her but could not satisfy it and
this led to the death and destruction of both. Anna too contributed to the tragedy by not making any enduring relationship with either of the two men. Passion and vigour without meaningful relationship can be simply destructive and this is an essential part of the story of Vronsky and Anna. Williams quotes from Anna Karenina to reveal the nature of Anna’s relationship with Vronsky.

We walked to meet each other up to the time of our love, and then we have been irresistibly drifting in different directions. And there’s no altering that. He tells me I’m insanely jealous, and I have told myself that I’m insanely jealous, but it’s not true. I’m not jealous, but I’m unsatisfied.28

Anna isolates herself from the society and the immediate environment and this leads to an impoverishment of their humanity. Williams observes that the only thing Anna relies upon is passion and not relationship. Levin, an important character who serves as a foil to the tragic characters is an embodiment of life and health in the novel. He has an intimate connection with the society. He works in the field and is very social with the people around him. He has set up a meaningful relationship with his wife and his interaction with other people in his surroundings is also not perfunctory. He stands for life in society. Anna, on the other hand, isolates herself from the society. In negating the society she, in fact, negates the larger humanity in her own self. She stands for dissolution and disintegration. Anna is a guilty wife and a guilty mother and the combination is terrifying. She does not want marriage or children. What she needs is passion which in Vronsky
has gone. “A meaningful society and therefore a meaningful relationship in it, is for different reasons beyond both of them.”

Williams observes that there are both similarities and contrasts between *Anna Karenina* and *Women in Love*. In both the novels there are relationships ending in coldness and death and relationship growing towards life and continuity. The understanding of both is essential because it is related to the process in which the ‘social’ and the ‘personal’ are separated. Lawrence’s emphasis on the essential connections, the whole flow of living is strong and important. *Women in Love* is, in fact, the continuation of *The Rainbow*. Lawrence gives us a penetrating insight into the relationship of parents and children of three generations. Man-woman relationship is central in his thinking. Here too the same pattern of rejecting the society is at work. Gudrun and Gerald reject the society. A far more significant movement is taking place behind the formula about rejecting a society or a dead society. There is a continual rejection of personal relationships and with it a rejection of humanity itself. Ursula too rejects the idea of home. This is not a way to live. The negative consequence of rejection in terms of a ‘proud singleness’ of a whole body of relationships and roles are not recognised by D.H Lawrence and he almost legitimizes the attitude of detachment from society adopted by the characters. In any insistence on the ‘proud singleness’ of persons, the reality of other persons is scaled down. Home is rejected and so are children for whom there is evidently no place in the perfection of the polarised sex-circuit.
The polarised sex-circuit is single and static. A child is a human being who is also an embodiment of human relationships. Human continuity through generations or society is, in fact, rejected by Ursula and Birkin as well as Gerald, Gudrun and Loerke, in varying degrees of intensity. Birkin's difference is that he continues to insist that a personal relationship with Ursula is not enough. He wants more than this. But he cannot find it anywhere as the novel shows.

The difference from Anna Karenina is fundamental in this respect. It is a tragedy of a single actor in varying forms, and there is no character here like Levin of Anna Karenina who could bring to our mind the value of what is being cut out in the name of 'proud singleness' being asserted by the individual characters. Gerald dies in a snow abstract annihilation. Gudrun and Loerke not only survive but are seen as capable of surviving. Gudrun says: The only thing to do with the world is to see through it.” And it is Ursula and Birkin who want to grow beyond this reduction, this disintegration and dissolution; it is they who reach the most tragic position. Here nature is not, as in Tolstoy, a world where man works and learns. It is an alternative to man. Here the difference between Women in Love and Lady Chatterley's Lover is significant. Mellors in the latter novel, at the end, is thinking of the 'flame of life' that can be kindled in a loving relationship and he must find work to live and look after Connie and their child. Birkin, on the other hand, sees the 'flame of life' having to go beyond man and he is seen in the end breaking away from people.
and society. It is a break from society not only in the simple sense of rejecting and going away from it but a break in the deeper sense. The break from the society is in fact a break from one’s own self. A human being bereft of all relationships is no more than ‘a poor, bare forked animal’, to use Lear’s words about Tom in *King Lear*. All elements of personality which live in relationships are suppressed in the name of personality. To quote Williams: “The turning away from the social dimension is also, and inevitably, a turning away from persons. It is an attempt to create the individual person without any relationships.”

Like Tolstoy, Lawrence too shows the process of ‘dissolution and disintegration’ as a result of the division between the ‘social’ and the ‘personal’ and he also draws our attention towards the consequent loss of belief in the whole areas of experience of men and women but he does not have Tolstoy’s clarity of perspective on this vital issue. And this narrowing down of perspective is to be found in many writers of the twentieth century. “This”, Williams says, “is certainly the deepest and most characteristic form of tragedy in our century.”

In fact Part 11 of *Modern Tragedy* may be taken as an evidence to support the general positions advanced in the first part of the study. The works and authors discussed illustrate various constituents of the modern structure of tragic feeling. Ibsen anticipates Arthur Miller in the way his protagonists are no longer heroes but victims, caught and defined in a conflict with a social world beyond their control. John Higgins rightly sums up
Williams’ analysis of two novels: Tolstoy’s *Anna Karenina* and D.H. Lawrence’s *Women in Love*.

Lawrence’s novel *Women in Love* represents a crucial turning away from the social dimension, and the attempt to create the individual person without any relationships and Williams contrasts this turning away with Tolstoy’s emphasis on the social understanding of characters in his novel *Anna Karenina*.  

The drama of Pirandello, Ionesco and Becket reinterprets and remoulds the substance of Chekhov’s drama, moving it away from his emplacement in nineteenth-century realism and its assumption of a ‘total world’ to the twentieth century emphasis on the ‘general consciousness of illusion’. While analysing these novelists and dramatists Williams suggests that the ‘deepest crisis’ in modern literature “is the division of experience into social and personal categories.”  

This division mars the work of even those dramatists like Camus who wish to try and face the difficult relations between tragedy and revolts. While analysing the work of Satre and Camus—the former being described as a ‘tragic humanist’ and the latter as a tragic revolutionary—Williams argues that common to both the dramatists is a lost sense of a common process or a common life. Williams views their work as an analogue of individualism or as “the latest and most notable struggle within the deadlock which has, historically, taken over our consciousness.”  

Only Brecht, according to Williams, has some partial success with his ‘recovery of history as a dimension for tragedy’. John Eldridge and Lizzie Eldridge are right in observing:
“Williams connects themes, expression, form and ‘structure of feeling’ within and between different literary works. In this he uses humanism as a sort of yardstick against which to measure any developments.” 36 Williams’ historical humanist reading of literature is influenced by his reading of Brecht, with Brecht’s desire to create ‘complex seeing’ through the use of alienation techniques. It bears close similarities with the intent behind Williams’ ‘structure of feeling’. For Brecht, the distinguishing feature of ‘verfremdungseffekte’ (alienation effects) is the integration of form and content. The same can be said of Williams’ ‘structure of feeling’. In Coba which constitutes the concluding part of The Modern Tragedy, Williams tries to dramatise Stalinist tragedy. The two main concepts of ‘modern tragedy’—tragedy and revolution—are brought together in this play. Similar keywords and ideas to those found in Williams’ novel are present in this play. The following keywords are used recurrently: settlement, pressure and community. It provides a unifying and common factor in Williams’ analysis of drama and novel. In other words, Williams focuses his attention on the deep relations between the actual forms of our history and tragic forms within which these are “perceived, articulated and reshaped.” 37

In his essay “Afterword to Modern Tragedy” Williams writes of what he describes as a strengthening of one of these ‘tragic forms’ which he argues, has become temporarily dominant and, at times, overwhelming. The tragic ‘structure of feeling’ is viewed as a reflection of a dying social order (capitalism) and a
dying class (the capitalist class), despite the divergent and alternative responses emerging within this ‘structure of feeling’. Williams observes a theoretical distinction between previous forms of subjective expressionism—for instance the work of Strindberg in which the conditions giving rise to struggle and conflict were seen as inevitable and unchangeable—and a new form of radical private tragedy in which connections are explored between destructive personal or sexual conflicts and social conditions which are now seen as capable of change. This new form of tragedy has, Williams suggests, been expressed in a variety of ways, all of which reflect a sense of shock and loss of hope. These feelings arise with the disintegration of an old and established social order. The concepts—shock, loss and disturbance—which occurred in the early work of Brecht and the ‘theatre of cruelty’ are now replaced with concepts such as abuse, attacks and insults. In Williams’ view, Becket’s work involves an even deeper form of degradation in which the consistent reduction and depravity of all represented forms of human life has led to the emergence of a new contemporary form. Williams finds that Becket’s latter work shows the total breakdown of communication. It marks the end of “the long and powerful development of bourgeois tragedy.” However Williams asserts that Becket’s dramatic form is not the dominant one. The dominant dramatic form of our contemporary existence is not based on the notions ‘of a public world or of a private feeling’; rather it is based on “our inability to communicate.”
The fact and source of tragedy are now centrally the inability to communicate. The inability to communicate is an impasse from which no progress can be made. The present situation becomes incapable of change if the very means of change have themselves been absorbed by a formal—dramatic and social form being firmly interlinked—which in itself denies any possible future. The dominant dramatic form is an ideological distortion involving a complete rejection of the historical and continued diversity of tragic theory and practice. Williams traces the origin of this new ‘structure of feeling’ to the Russian Revolution. He maintains that the Stalinist era crushed the original aspirations beyond the political actions and prepared the ground for stasis and incommunicability. Williams argues that the dynamics of a long and complex history, and recognition of the current struggles elsewhere, were forgotten in the focus on this historical era. To break this deadlock, Williams proposes the dramatic connection of the past, present and future struggles, a form “which follows the whole action and which is thus again profoundly dynamic”.

From the above discussion it is evident that Williams perceives a close relationship between social reality or what Williams calls ‘the structure of feeling’ and art forms—be it drama or the concept of tragedy. The concept of tragedy undergoes change with the change in the ‘structure of feeling’. However, these changes in society do not get reflected in the concept of tragedy all of a sudden and in a mechanical and matter-of-fact-manner. There are no sudden changes in a society and likewise the
concept of tragedy is also evolved gradually. A modern tragedy, in its tone and tenor, is markedly different from that of the Greek tragedy because the society has changed considerably during the intervening period and a new and changed 'structure of feeling' has to be expressed only through a new concept of tragedy. Thus Williams' concept of modern tragedy forms an important component of his literary theory.
REFERENCES:


6 ibid., p.16.

7 John Higgins, Raymond Williams, op. cit., p.70.

8 Raymond Williams, Modern Tragedy, op. cit., p.25.

9 ibid., p.46.

10 ibid., p.14.

11 ibid., p.57.

12 ibid., p.91.

13 ibid., p.91.


19 ibid; p.55.

20 ibid., p.69.

21 ibid., pp. 94-95.

22 ibid., p. 9.


25 ibid., p.96.

26 ibid., p.100.

27 ibid., p.121.

28 ibid., p.127.

29 ibid., p.131.

30 ibid., p.136.

31 ibid., p.138.

32 ibid., p.138.


35 ibid., p.189.


38 ibid., p.101.
