CHAPTER - SIX

TRAGEDIES: PATTERNS OF DEATH

(A) HAMLET  (C) KING LEAR  
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Chapter - 6

Synopsis

TRAGEDIES: PATTERNS OF DEATH

The truth of our suffering is mirrored in the imaginative art of Tragedy. Our suffering is occasioned by evil but tragedy also assures us of the good in life which is found in evil and beyond life. Tragedy rejects defeat and death. The conquest of death results in the triumph of life. Tragedy transcends not only Time but also Death by its timeless accent of life.

Shakespeare's Tragedies embody the truth of fatality along with the truth of human responsibility. His great Tragedies are essentially spiritual. Here is Shakespeare's cosmic vision ranging between life and death in a world where good and evil are confused. The metaphysics of death is revealed in Shakespeare's cosmic vision. Evil in Shakespearean Tragedy is the principle of death. It destroys death. In this beyonding is our Katharsis. It offers a spiritual or metaphysical experience of the dying hero. His mind is interlocked with the mystery of life. Shakespeare enfolded the sombre fact of death in the soul of man. His major Tragedies project the mighty theme of death in a dissolving social order. Here, Shakespeare is engaged with the essential nature of man. Each major tragedy tries to raise the metaphysical questions about life and death. Shakespearean Tragedy is a drama of discovery, a revelation, a disclosure to the inward eye about temporal existence.
'HAMLET'

'Hamlet' is a play around an overwhelming consciousness of death; from death wish to fulfilment in death. Here death is not an event but a process commensurate with life. From the first to the last, death rules the story. From the very start the play deals with the mystery of death. Hamlet's is a triple tragedy. He dies young, in the moment of victory and with blood on his hands. He does not die a victim of situation. He transcends it. His soliloquies offer glimpses into the very heart of being. In death Hamlet combines the physical and the spiritual. The fear of death is now changed into felicity. His 'To be' soliloquy, the graveyard dialogue and the last scene project death as the deepest assurance. Hamlet is both Arjuna and Krishna on the battlefield of his mind. He is deeply concerned about life beyond the grave. The fear of death dies in Hamlet before his own death. Hamlet meditates on death in doubt but he dies in certitude. The heart of the play is the claim of the past on the present. In Hamlet, we have the modern man in an old social and religious frame. Providence is the invisible force shaping the meaning of life. In death the eternal soul changes old physical garments. After life's searing ordeal he sleeps well. What makes 'Hamlet' a tragedy and not a mere Revenge Play is the Prince's apprehension of and encounter with death which is so patterned around him that he too cannot escape.
In 'Othello', Shakespeare has transmuted melodrama into a Universal classic of Tragedy. It is a perfect example of Shakespeare's catholicity and his deep sympathy for the human predicament. Man in this world is overthrown by evil. Shakespeare and Iago are aware of the Presence of death in love. Othello has to know the misery of killing innocence. It is in death that both Othello and Desdemona are made perfect. Desdemona's murder is dissolved into Othello's sacrificial suicide. Our sense of loss at the death of Desdemona is balanced by the sense of completeness of murder equated with wilful suicide. Othello's suicide is the triumph of humanism and the reversal of misanthropic cynicism. Othello displays the power of man's unconquerable mind but his recovery come at the time of his death which reveals the all-in-all sufficient Othello. Iago who delighted in other's pain is destroyed as well as destroying. In Emilia defying death, we have a symbol of nemesis. All in all 'Othello' is a supreme illustration of the non-doctrinal creativity of Shakespeare. The death conclusion of 'Othello' relates it the mystery of eternity. 'Othello' is a personal tragedy raisea to cosmic plance by use of appropriate contrasting imagery. Here death is a Unifying force transcending all jealousy, errors of judgement and violence. The protagonists who fail in life triumph through death.
'KING LEAR'

'King Lear' is an exploratory allegory. Lear, the King is a symbol of social authority who before death, is transformed into a figure of suffering and renunciation. Lear in the storm represents the Universal Sufferer and judge. Lear's World is a metaphysical world of the Soul. Lear, stung with the cruelty of his evil daughters plunges into the long night of his catastrophe. Lear through his suffering and death raises fundamental metaphysical questions about man's guilt, his own identity, the source of cruelty, the justice of Gods and the mystery of death. Lear and Gloucester have betrayed natural bonds and nature takes a terrible revenge. Death is deliverance for Lear. His heart must break to deliver him from the rack of this tough world. Lear is an archetypal Secular job. He asks Heaven for an explanation but the world of the Gods is not the world of men; and Cordelia remains a tragic fact of life. She was alive. She is dead. Lear knows she is dead but is unable to accept it. So at some point in a cycle of despair, insanity and hope, Lear expires but he remains a titanic symbol of the inner enduring nobility of unaccommodated man, and Cordelia a pledge of abounding grace in life on this Earth. Death is imaged in many ways including the storms. Life in juxtaposition is a rack, a terrible wheel of fire. And death remains a deliverer.
'MACBETH'

The metaphysical forces of Time are fully deployed in 'Macbeth'. Murder, most foul, a sacrilege against human and natural bonds is an act performed by Macbeth in spite of his horror of the deed. It is a dark deed in a dark world which terrorizes the rest of the play. It isolates Macbeth from humanity. It incarnadines the land of Scotland. The feel of blood is the tragic tie between husband and wife. They are in Hell though alive. Fear goads Macbeth from murder to more murders. The mystery of evil is conveyed through the witches, the bell that signals death and the three apparitions. The suicide of Lady Macbeth is the defeat of Macbeth in the battle of the mind. His final soliloquy is the utterance of one who gets lost in the torture of the mind. Close to his death, Macbeth regains his valour. Macbeth meets his doom alone. The contaminated Kingdom of Scotland is cleansed through the sacrificial deaths of Master Macduff and God's soldier Siward. As with a green tide of Nature, the land is rejuvenated by the 'grace of Grace' and Time is free again. The tragedy of Macbeth is in his complete spiritual death and in the survival of the hyper sensitive conscience which cannot be silenced. Lady Macbeth is haunted by the Furies of memories and Macbeth dies in a fury of action. Death in 'Macbeth' is a great disintegrating and destructive force. Of all the great tragedies it is 'Macbeth' in which death is most ubiquitous, running from end to end, interwoven with poetry on the lips of the villain-hero. Death here is an actor. Death haunts both the outer and the inner worlds of Macbeth stirring his imagination toward 'the last syllable of recorded time'. Life, to Macbeth, is reduced to a waking shadow; death alone has any substance.
Drama is an art of illusion. It follows a triple process—created by a dramatist, presented by an actor and incarnated in the illusion of the spectator. Drama exists as our finest medium for truth. It is only in the world of imagination that man can work out the truth of his own tragic suffering.

Our suffering is occasioned by evil, so the problem of tragedy has always been the problem of evil in the world; but tragedy is not the experience of evil alone. It is the experience of good along with evil, even of good beyond the evil. Tragedy assures us of the good in life which is found in evil and beyond life. Religion, philosophy and metaphysics join hands at this point with tragedy.

Tragedy is the most effective method of teaching by example the lessons of moral philosophy. It is in the very excess of man's suffering that we find man's claim to dignity. In tragedy, as in real life, we see how man can learn and be redeemed through suffering. We see in
tragedy the smooth flow of life disturbed by an evil force, the apparent triumph of that force and then the reassertion of a normalcy which has been strengthened through trial.

Tragedy takes a complete view of the human situation. An account of life that omits the tragic element is untrue because it is incomplete. The world of tragedy is a linking of two worlds—the daylight world of Apollo (the world of reason) and the nocturnal world of Dionysus (the world of passion).

Tragic experience offers artistic co-existence of contraries. The theatre as we know, is involved in the problem of illusion and reality. Tragedy involves us in the contemplation of a curious combination of knowledge and mystery, of the probable and the necessary. It scrutinizes man’s predicament as an agent and a patient of mysterious forces. Tragedy does not offer problems to be solved, rather it offers a mystery to be shared.

Tragedy brings out transcendent beauty out of suffering transcending all limits. Great tragedy is never depressing. There is in the suffering itself something of an affirmation of imperishable value—a sense of the
eternal, a sense of absolute goodness, truth and beauty of valour, love and innocence - so that we know defeat and death as illusory. Tragedy thus rejects defeat and death. The conquest of death results in the triumph of life.

The heroic spirit of man is formed and shaped by the infinite energy of death. In the words of Helen Gardner:

"The rhythm of pure tragedy is of a single life fulfilling itself and coming to an end in death." ¹

The true meaning of tragedy is not limited either to heroic death or to ironic survival. It is a communication of a significant life experience.

Tragedy is but "an interim reading of life", ² yet as Prof. Iyengar points out:

"this 'interim' reading is meant to hint at the ultimate unfoldment of the mystery". ³

Thus tragedy is quintessentially a religious experience.

Comedy is presided over by fortune, tragedy reflects destiny which is death. But as in crucifixion
of Christ, so in the tragic situation, there is a promise of resurrection, which rules out depression. In great tragedy we are faced with the expression of a spiritual value which carries its own conviction of immortality.

"The immortality expressed by tragedy is a timeless immortality in the realm of value".4

Thus tragedy transcends not only time but also death by the timeless accent of life.

The Greek and the Shakespearean Tragedies are the altitude of world drama. Greek tragedy is presented more as an exultation than as a failure of the human spirit. In the Greek tragedy the gods intervene more directly than in any other type of tragedy. There are two kinds of death in Greek tragedy: ordinary death which happens to everybody; e.g. as in Aeschylus

"Nor sitting by his hearth at home doth man escape his appointed doom".5

and heroic death which may be caused by the will of the Gods out of anger or by the impersonal force of fate as an oracle is being fulfilled in the fall of Oedepus. The
Gods and Fate both represent an order; if this order is disturbed, a reaction starts and ceaselessly works for restoring order. This reaction is called nemesis.

"In Greek Tragedy we see how death is both the punishment of the aggressor and the reward of his victim".  

The Greek dramatists have made the communication of death through a chorus which makes the audience realize that no one can be called happy until he dies in peace. In Sophocles, we are abjured:

".... count a man not blessed in his life until he's crossed life's bounds unstruck by ruin still"

Euripides has put the same idea succinctly. "Account ye no man happy till he die."  

**Shakespearean Tragedy**

The drama Shakespeare inherited, had both popular and learned elements. In form it descended from medieval plays. In content it had picked up elements from the Renaissance Italian theatre. Shakespearean tragedy is a
story of calamity leading to the death of the Protagonist.

The great period of Elizabethan Tragedy was introduced by the University Wits: Kyd and Marlowe. The Machiavel or the ambitious 'overreacher' was the centre of Marlovian Tragedy. Overvaulting ambition for military conquest (Tamburlain) for money (Barabas) and for knowledge (Dr. Faustus) shaped the ends of heroes. A reassessment of Barabas and Shylock, Tamburlain and Richard III, Faustus and Macbeth reveals the range and greatness of Shakespeare's art in refining the material and motives of Marlovian Drama into something subtle and wonderful in complexity of character and multiple vision of Death. Marlowe has deep sympathy for ambition. Shakespeare is involved in the consequent suffering.

The death of Marlowe's Edward II is in contrast to Shakespeare's dramatization of the death of Richard II. Marlowe has focussed on the suffering of sleepless starving Edward standing waste deep garbage in the prison. Pity for his suffering makes the audience forget his sins. Shakespeare on the other hand has revealed a lofty moral point of view and a genuine streak of patriotism in Richard II. Shakespeare has connected the death of Richard II with the
weakness and sentimentality in his character. Whereas the antagonist in Richard II (Bolingbroke) is penitent, the antagonist in Edward II (Mortimer) scorns the world and looks forward to new possibilities beyond the grave.

In the dramatization of death Marlowe remains a rapturous lyrist of limitless desire, whereas Shakespeare reveals himself as a majestic spokesman of inexorable moral law. Only in the death scene in Dr. Faustus does Marlowe reach the zenith of his poetic art. It is a terrible and to which the hero curses the eternity of his torment, appeals to the sun to rise again. In the ultimate hour of his life, he strives in vain to catch a drop of the redemptive blood of Christ. Faustus and Hamlet are scholars both. But one ends in extreme degree of agony and the other gains the rest of silence. The terrible spiritual suffering of Faustus is distilled in his final soliloquy whereas the mercurial shifts of Hamlet's spirit are spread over several soliloquies. Both characters represent the Renaissance passion for knowledge infinite.

Shakespeare combined the fate-tragedy of the Greeks with the villain-tragedy of the Elizabethans and created the psychological tragedy of his own. Classical tragedy is
mainly a tragedy of fate. But blind fate is unconvincing whereas in Shakespearean tragedy is revealed a vein of justice. Of the two theories, the theory of fatality and the theory of responsibility, Shakespeare perceives and exploits the truth in both.

The bare bones of Shakespearean dramatic stories are to be found in a fardel of old tales and legends, chronicles of medieval events, lives of ancient heroes and adventures of contemporary voyagers. Tales of doom and death which had persisted in human memory were the very plasma, the flesh and bones of Shakespearean tragedy, but the spirit he breathed into them was that of new humanism. Elizabethan tragedy like the Age was vibrant with energy. It was an Age of energy, and energy was life. The Shakespearean tragedy lives, though it is focussed upon death as an essential event of life.

In Shakespeare's major tragedies,

"the giant strength is the strength of the spirit and the forms and shapes of other images of life are as puny dolls and saw dust puppets, and Death alone the last antagonist against which the force of human passion deigns to measure its strength."
Shakespearean Tragedy is centred on the isolated few "the moral elite at the top of the pyramid of society." On one level presents a world which seems very real to us. On another level we find human beings who are superhuman in the intensity of their passions. When these deep emotions are destroyed, we feel that it carries catastrophic significance. In major tragedies, we find social and political implications of death. The death of the protagonist spells disorder and disaster for the nation.

Oblivion and mutability are terribly feared in his tragedies. In the Shakespearean tragedies, the short span of human life is surrounded by an atmosphere of gloom and chaos, death and oblivion, which intensifies man's need for love and loyalty as faith in others provides man with a sense of security and gives meaning to his existence on our planet.

Shakespearean Tragedy presents existence framed around with the dark negative forces of oblivion. Time is a process of decay, destruction and oblivion and man lives in time. This human predicament necessitates the dramatic affirmation of man's dignity in the face of forces of chaos. Such surrounding void creates the conditions for cynicism when the protagonist discovers that in his special
predicament, human values have no meaning. This explains why Macbeth has lost his claim to "honour, love, obedience, troops of friends" Macbeth (V, iii, 25) and has reached the conclusion about life:

"it is a tale Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury Signifying nothing".

Macbeth (V, v, 23)

Whether Shakespeare places emphasis on the fickleness of fate or on other destructive factors such as time and oblivion, the theme is the same - the erosion of all values. The mighty power of nature grinds all values into dusty death. In such context

"history can either confirm system of values or .... destroy them. If it destroys, it is .... tragic." 11

The pattern of history is repetitive, suggesting that no act is final and complete. Every act is therefore tragic, as the many political murders testify.

Chance or accident plays an important part in the action. Certain accidents give a decisive turn to the action — Juliet waking just a minute too late from her trance, Edmund's
message which would have saved Cordelia's life, is delayed just for a short time; Desdemona lost her handkerchief at the fatal moment. All these involve tremendous tragic consequences. There are accidents in Shakespearean Tragedy, but besides chance or accident, the fatal flaw in the character moves the action to its doom. There is causal connection between defect in the character, the deed and the catastrophe. A moral necessity governs the tragic world; this moral necessity is more mysterious than the proper adjudication of reward and punishment. This fatal flaw not only destroys other people through him but it also destroys him. The flaw conceals in itself seeds of destruction. It is negative; it is a principle of death, annihilating not only its opposite, but also itself. There is evil, it disturbs the order and ultimately destroys itself but

"There is no tragedy in its expulsion of evil; the tragedy is that this involves the waste of good." 12

Shakespeare's tragedies represent a mood of darkness, not of despair. Shakespeare shows that good remains good at all cost. Shakespeare's attitude in his tragedies is not of the rejection of the world. He finds
It good and reveals the heroic human spirit. The metaphysics that runs through the very structure of Shakespearean Tragedy is, in the ultimate sense, optimistic. Suffering is the badge of the protagonist but it is a badge of distinction.

Shakespearean Tragedy yields its meaning in its total context and not in any of its correlated parts. However interesting the character or the poetry of the play, the totality of the play unfolds the tragic meaning. Even the formal pattern of the play throbbing with existence, leading to a climax and finally softening to sweet peace is a reassurance against the pessimistic interpretation of tragedy. At the centre of his tragedy is Promethean agony, albeit, combined with the profundity of his poetic genius.

Total reversal of fortune coming unawares upon a man, was to the Medieval mind a tragic fact. Shakespeare's idea goes beyond to show how man walks the knife-edge path of destiny; a single false step starts him on a course of events which he can neither anticipate nor control and so he is compelled to face terrible consequences.

Tragedies of Chance are more unendurable than Tragedies of Fate, which implies eternal laws and the wisdom
of such laws. Man may bend against fate but he must rebel against unreasoning chance. Chance assumes a lawless universe. Shakespearean tragedy is either a tragedy of choice or a tragedy of unmerited guilt. In the former the hero is free to decide the course of the action. The Gods watch passively until he makes a mistake. Then they punish him for his wrong choice; but in the Tragedy of unmerited guilt the hero does not have any say in what happens. He cannot escape fate. What fated to happen, will happen.

In typically Renaissance tragedy, the hero has full freedom of decision, and he falls because of his weakness. Hamlet fell through his own indecision, Macbeth fell through his over vaulting ambition, Lear through his senile arrogance and Othello through his baseless jealousy. But Romeo and Juliet are blameless. Their tragedy arises from simple bad luck. They are star-crossed. The new morality instilled by Renaissance was based on the assertion of the free will of man, on his sense of responsibility towards himself and the world.

Shakespeare placed at the heart of his great tragedies, what he saw in the soul of man — the sombre fact of death. Death has been the major theme, the basic
Inspiration of his tragedies. His poetry rises to the heights at the moment when man is in proximity of death.

From *Julius Caesar* on Shakespeare's faith in the existence of spiritual entities beyond human consciousness increases. His great tragedies are essentially spiritual. Here, Shakespeare's cosmic vision ranges between life and death and even beyond the finality of death. In this beyonding is Katharsis. In *Macbeth* we experience hell, in *Antony and Cleopatra* we sense paradise whereas in *King Lear* we find purgatory. In the words of G. Wilson Knight; in *Antony and Cleopatra* "we have a fiery vision of a Paradisal consciousness," in *Macbeth* "the dark and nightmare torment of a conscious hell."

We find in his major plays suggestive parallels between man's tragedy and universal cosmic disorder but they end on a note of restored order. In the tragedies what finally shakes us is the magnitude of the suffering and the sacrifice. Shakespeare shows how humanity is poised between bliss and perdition. What is most striking in Shakespearean tragedy is that the protagonist does not abjectly surrender to defeat. "Shakespearean tragedy is, in one sense, a fall, in another, a rise."
Shakespearean tragedy offers a spiritual or metaphysical experience of the dying hero. His mind is interlocked with the mystery of life and death. Each major tragedy raises the metaphysical questions about life and death. Shakespearean tragedy is a disclosure to the inward eye about temporal existence. A.C. Bradley has remarked about Shakespearean Tragedy:

"If only we could see things as they are, we should see that the outward is nothing and the inward is all." 16

But how could it be otherwise? The theatre deals with appearance and reality, the actor and the spectator. In drama, the actor is an impotent spectator and the spectator an impotent actor.

Shakespearean tragedy probes into the fundamental universal problems. It is an expression of unique experience of the hero.

"Shakespearean tragedy effects a Katharsis - a cleansing, a beyonding, a transcending - of the emotions and passions that rage in the human breast and are duly reflected in the plays." 17
Shakespearean Tragedies present a multifarious panorama - They present the smaller world of the Heathen Gods, Ghosts and witches, which have a special prominence in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth*. Besides there are ordinary people of all types, a world of old rascals and grave-diggers as also of Friars and Holy men.

An important type of Shakespearean tragedy is the Tragedy of Revenge. Kyd made a rich contribution to Elizabethan popular Tragedy with his *Spanish Tragedy* -- which incarnated the Senecan spirit and centred around revenge and madness. He anticipates in some respect the marvellous tragedies of Shakespeare. The play begins with a ghost accompanied by revenge (who also serves as chorus). The plot is full of court intrigues. The lovers Horatio and Belimperia are pale anticipation of Romeo and Juliet. The lover is murdered. His father goes mad and takes revenge in a play within a play. Kyd pioneered the Introspective Tragedy and Shakespeare developed it into powerful drama of inner life. But Kyd has a very crude moral basis not extending beyond personal vindictive passion for revenge.

During the Renaissance, that is after the revival of Greek learning, the Elizabethans sought connection between character and calamity - hence nemesis is a convincing
instrument of tragic inevitability. At times we find cruelty and even bankruptcy of all hopes - after reading these tragedies we doubt whether life is worthwhile, whether there is any meaning of human existence. But catastrophes are never shown for their own sake, they reveal something profound in the soul of man. Pessimism is alien to Shakespeare. An interesting illustration of the interpretation to which Shakespeare lends himself is found in the approach of A. Smirnov.

"Not even the most grim of Shakespeare's tragedies emanate hopelessness. They open up perspectives into a better future or affirm the inner victory of truth over human baseness. Shakespeare's tragedies emanate... a courageous call to the struggle even though the struggle may not always promise success." 

Thus Shakespearean tragedies are based on heroic humanism, far removed from fatalistic despair or hopeless pessimism. Neither Lear nor Macbeth can be dubbed as pessimistic. Though King Lear shows cruel breaking of man's personality, it also presents humanity in its grandeur. Macbeth, similarly, presents this earth as a mighty battleground. These plays, though full of
imagery of disintegration, have the storm and stress of life, enveloped in dark mystery.

Shakespearean Tragedies represent social disorder symbolised in storm and tempest. Tempests in nature are symbols of cruelty. They correspond with the tempests of the spirit and tempestuous risings in the human mind. These volcanic eruptions are Shakespearean insights into the boiling centre of existence. They dramatize Shakespearean apprehension of discord. Nature provides a wide range of imagery of wind and water suggestive of the mutability of human life. The tempest image is the very centre of a tragedy like King Lear. With discord at its centre, the Shakespearean tragedy becomes an inquiry into the very metaphysics of discord. This turns the tragedy into a sublimation of disorder. Tempests suggest tragic fate. In Macbeth and King Lear, Shakespearean symbol of tragic conflict—storm or tempest lends splendour. Storm in the element accompanies the thunder and lightning of the passionate heart of man.

Shakespearean tragedies depict evil and suffering, but we find no reasonable scheme of rewards and punishments. Othello is instigated to murder his chaste wife. He then
realizes his mistake, so the only way out for him is suicide. Lear is hot tempered, at the most foolish, but by no means does he deserve the punishment he receives. Desdemona and Ophelia are guilty of nothing, yet they are destroyed; Cordelia refuses to play her father's game, and is hanged.

The grandeur of true Shakespearean tragedy is due to two elements - passion and death. He is fairly modest in his holocausts compared to other Elizabethan playwrights. At the close of King Lear, five are dead, four at the end in Hamlet and three in each Romeo and Juliet, Othello and Antony and Cleopatra.

No play at the end of which the hero remains alive, is in the full Shakespearean sense, a tragedy. In most of the Shakespearean tragedies, the main characters are dead or shattered when Vth Act concludes. Death is the final solitude in Romeo and Juliet, as almost in every Shakespearean tragedy, Shakespearean tragedy counts upon death for its great effects. 'I'll make death love me,' III, xi, 192 swears Antony as he prepares for battle, and as he falls on his sword he elaborates the image "... but I will be A bridgegroom in my death". (IV, xii, 99-100). Cleopatra gives it its most sophisticated form "The stroke
of death is as a lover's pinch, which hurts, and is desired" (V, ii, 297-298).

In Hamlet and Timon of Athens Shakespeare focuses on death. Hamlet thinks of the processes of decay as Timon cries out for death. To Macbeth, death comes as the ender of crime and to Lear, as the ender of suffering. Death comes to Lear as a blessing. "Break heart, I prithee, break." (V, iii, 314) — says Kent over Lear. There is no time - thinking of immortality. In King Lear, death is the end. Here, in the end of Lear, we are at peace with death whereas in Antony and Cleopatra we find

"the synchronizing of faith with death, we are left with a vision of a timeless instantaneous ascension in death to love, which is life." 19

Though death comes at the end of every tragedy, every tragedy ends with an affirmation of life. Lear's suffering leads to a spiritual regeneration; Othello's suffering leads to a rebirth of faith in Desdemona's purity. Antony's death leads to a revelation of the universal process.

Apart from the content of Shakespearean tragedy,
the aesthetics of its close inspires a sensitive interpreter like G. Wilson Knight to poetic expression:

"Shakespearean tragedies work up to a .... ritual of pictorial and sacrificial quality: The star-crossed Romeo and Juliet in the tomb, Hamlet carried off to a dead march, with Cannon; Cordelia limp under the white hairs .... of Lear, Cleopatra's self-dramatized immolation, guided and guarded by her two girls in their dying loyalty. In close relation are reminders of the Community's continuance. The purgatorial conflicts hurl themselves up to these formal and ceremonial conclusions recalling the .... positive .... unforced and naturalistic beauty in agony of the crucifixion." 20

There have been attempts to force Shakespeare into conventional and orthodox moulds. The ambiguity of art has tempted interpreters to read theological and religious conformity in the works of Shakespeare. Some critics have harnessed on the plays of Shakespeare the burden of Christian belief. They project the tragedies beyond death even up to the Day of Judgment. Shakespeare may have held this idea but he certainly has not dramatized it. His theological references are always within secular context. His morality is humanistic rather than religious. According to Ribner,
"Tragedy and Christianity are incompatible." 21

Only two of his tragedies — Hamlet and Othello belong to the Christian era but even in Hamlet, apart from the Ghost, there is no indication of a next world and the ghost of the murdered King is a very ancient convention.

Shakespearean tragedy is influenced by the exuberant worldly spirit of the Renaissance, which was saturated in Pagan humanism. Essential man was all that counted in that Age. It is therefore more proper to read into his plays not explicit eternal theological verities but a picture of man's achievements and failures in life and in death.

Shakespearean Tragedy reveals through the Protagonist the militancy of human soul and the stoicism of human spirit. It is a dazzling vision of the Promethean fire within the hero. We find in him something to sympathize and much to strengthen our spirit. We re-emerge ennobled and with peace of mind, all passion spent. We gain a new evaluation of the redemptive quality of love, which outweighs all the treasures of the world. It is in this sense that Shakespearean Tragedy is analogous to religious experience. It is an initiation into a mystery. The trend of thought is...
"from death to immortality, from the fear of what may happen after death to the certainty of felicity."  

G. Wilson Knight has noted in Shakespeare's handling of death a parallelism with crucifixion:

"In Shakespearean Tragedy, death has never existed as a simple negation. It is the same in Ibsen: 'In death', he wrote in Brand V 'I see not overthrow'. Death is as a needed completion to cover the wholeness of human existence, corresponding with Christ's words on the cross 'consummatum est'. Perhaps Christianity has been part of it, since we do not have quite the same effect in Greek Tragedy."

The wonder of Shakespearean Tragedy is always a mystery, which makes itself manifest to the inward eye in the form of half understood images. Macbeth's soliloquy following the murder of Duncan is fundamental to the spirit of Shakespearean tragedy: "Better be with the dead Whom we to gain our peace, have sent to peace." (III, ii, 19-20). "After life's fitful fever he sleeps well" (III, ii, 23). The sequence of tragedies comes as a vision, as an act of poetic creation with a revelation of death.
In Shakespearean Tragedy, the treatment of death is profound and rational.

"The optimism of Shakespearean Tragedy is potent. Rooted in a sense of death as a supreme good, death as a consummation and evaluation of passion and passion as a justification of death, it is not nihilistic, but in the finest sense of the words philosophic and mystic." 24

It always what happens within the drama that is important and not the end alone. In retrospect we find that tragedy is shadowed by death, for which the rest is a preparation. At the ultimate moment the weak Richard II takes on true royalty, brands his accusers and dies magnificently. Romeo and Hamlet attain a spiritual poise towards the end, even Othello and Macbeth.

Shakespearean Tragedy drew a firm line after the death of the hero and then totalled up good and bad deeds. The true grandeur of Shakespearean Tragedy is due to man's sense of victory over death. Death stands at the end of each Shakespearean tragedy and in none of these plays is death the beginning of life, for 'The Rest is Silence' (V, ii, 372).
Elizabethan Tragedy in its essence is centred round death. Shakespeare in the fecundity of his imagination has viewed and presented death in its many masks and images. Life and death are so interlinked that love of life leads to fear of death and love of ideals and values in life leads to a joyous acceptance of death. So the plays of Shakespeare present death from varied angles – there is death in life, there is death which is an end of life, an annihilation, a nothingness. There is also death which is felicity.

The dying hero's concern for his image after his death itself shows the accent of life in the midst of death. It is faith in life that endures, no matter how the hero perishes.

The plays from Hamlet to Henry VIII are death visions and immortality myths. Hamlet and Macbeth both emphasize death. Hamlet is weighed down by horror of death; it starts with a ghost scene and there is a graveyard scene, nearing the end. In Macbeth, death is a rampaging force. Here the combined forces of hell are deployed against life on earth. King Lear is purgatorial; Antony and Cleopatra is paradisial, where love conquers
In a sense all tragedy is, in the final analysis, moral. This morality is an integral aspect of life, not death, and hence death in tragedy does not mean mere death. Death here means measure and meaning of life. As Jan Kott remarks:

"In tragedy, the protagonists die but the moral order is preserved. Their death confirms the existence of the absolute." 25

Shakespearean Tragedy falls under three main categories - Tragedy of Order, Tragedy of Passion and Tragedy of Isolation. Julius Caesar, Macbeth and Hamlet are Tragedies of Order; Romeo and Juliet, Antony and Cleopatra and Troilus and Cressida are Tragedies of Passion, whereas King Lear, Othello and Timon of Athens are Tragedies of Isolation. Some of his tragedies have aspects which link them with all the three groups.

In most of his tragedies, the tragic action is based on three main character groups (1) Order figure — of which Julius Caesar, Duncan and King Hamlet are instances. (2) Rebel figure — Brutus, Macbeth and Claudius are instances (3) Nemesis figure - Prince Hamlet, Malcolm and Macduff
play this role. The nemesis figure is both a revenger and an avenger, mainly obsessed with killing the rebel figure, but he is, at the same time, a restorer of previous order. The order ultimately re-asserts itself, though at a heavy price. The heroes are spiritually victorious, though materially vanquished. They emerge from the ordeal, both internal and external, purified. They leave the world better than they found it.

In the Tragedy of Passion, the conflict is between the positive value of love and the negative principle of corrosive cynicism, resulting from hate. Troilus and Cressida is concerned with love, as also Othello until the end, at its climax, the problem of love is linked up with the problem of eternity.

Pertinent to Shakespeare's art is the dramatization of death in life as related to the themes of ambition, revenge and madness. In all the three, the character is swept away by passion, his actions are divorced from reason and in that sense reason is dead before his physical death. Macbeth driven by his sinful ambition is so isolated from all reason that his life becomes meaningless. Iago generates such a storm of jealousy in Othello that he kills under the delusion of meting out justice. Hamlet, laden
with grief for a dearly loved father is so paralysed by
the revelation of the ghost that he is practically dead
to everything in life. His mind is practically unhinged
and the antic disposition is not just a pose but a true
reflection of his condition. Ophelia is deranged by a
double loss of father and lover and even death comes
unawares to her.

The theme of madness is handled with psycholo-
gical realism by Shakespeare. He has hinted at the germs
of madness in Hamlet, with his obsession for his father’s
treachorous murder and resentment at his mother’s re-
marrriage. He traces Ophelia’s madness through secretive-
ness and rigid restraints. The insomnia of Lady Macbeth
is a kind of madness. It results from her ethical blind-
ness to her sinful act. Lear’s madness issues from morbid
and assertive egotism and possessiveness. Othello’s
lunatic fits are marked by his blind trust and self ignorance.
In each case, the derangement is in accordance with
character.

Shakespeare’s plays are convincing as documents
which ring true to life. Clifford Leech comments:

"It is common to find an Elizabethan or
Jacobean tragic hero losing mental control."
In Shakespeare's major plays we find Lear actually insane, Hamlet on the borderland of madness, Othello falling into a momentary fit, Macbeth too is subject to hallucination though he never quite loses the sense of the actual .... and Lady Macbeth has to endure the torment of deranged wits.  

Villains like Iago manipulate their victims into madness. In fact madness becomes an effective device in the hands of this master dramatist. It is at times a punishment by the enemy or a doom on the character.

In Shakespearean Tragedies most crucial scenes are night scenes. The nights seem to be more congenial to tragic happenings. But more than that, they symbolize in a way not merely evil but also death.

In the opening scene of Othello, when old Brabantio is awakened in the middle of the night, to be told of Desdemona's elopement, he cries:

'Give me a taper

.............

.............

Light, I say! light

(I, i, 141-144)

Light and Darkness here do suggest in a subtle way
disparity of colours — dark Othello and white Desdemona. It also assumes profound symbolical significance when Light signifies good and darkness evil. But in an oblique way light distinctly stands for life and darkness for death. This light-darkness symbolism becomes sharper in the final scene which opens with the stage direction:

'A bed chamber in the castle
Desdemona in bed asleep. A light burning.
Enter Othello

Othello reiterates the same symbol of light. 'Put out the light, and then put out the light' (V, ii, 7). Thus in the most crucial murder scene Light-darkness symbolism stands for life-death.

In Shakespearean Tragedy death has no absolute value in spite of its power of physical annihilation. It seems as if life is not cased merely in flesh and blood. The mystery of life, its wonder is more in the spirit than in the physique, and hence life before, through, and in a sense beyond death emerges as the pervasive dream in the sleep of death. Eternity has an infinitely greater context of life than death, for it transcends mortality and ranges in infinitude.
Tragic Protagonist

Shakespearean tragic protagonist is an oppressed person who either drifts to destruction or struggles against his doom. He is a doomed man, moving towards his destruction. Tragic action exposes the blind helplessness of the hero. His flaw is the cause of his own fall. At the centre of Shakespearean tragedy is the protagonist, placed between mighty opposites, working out his own salvation or damnation.

"Shakespeare is most within his men when tragedy overcomes them, lending them strength to overcome tragedy".27

Shakespeare's protagonist is exceptional in the sharp sense of his own "being". The protagonist, morally sound or otherwise, is compelled to live in isolation and comes to greater self knowledge. What is remarkable about him is his adjustment with common humanity, his ties with common man. What makes him great is the birth of an imperishable soul in the protagonist during his penultimate moments in life. Though Lear dies with his nerves stretched beyond breaking point, and Othello in remorse — every hero gains a new clarity, a higher consciousness, a nobler selflessness in the
face of death. As Shakespearean heroes approach death, the
"force of biological existence is mastered by the strength of spiritual compulsion." 28

A protagonist, however noble, has a flaw. The tragic experience depends upon the kind of flaw in his character and the causes of his fall as also on its meaning. He is tormented by bitter questionings and rooted sorrows, as he feels, like Hamlet, that he is called upon to reshape the universe out of chaos.

Though responsible for his fall, the protagonist need not be morally guilty. Such is Hamlet's acceptance of the responsibility to stay at his post but that involves him in the acts which outrage his conscience. Lear takes upon himself the burden of the universal sufferer and universal judge, Macbeth's attempts to jump the life to come, and Othello's decision to destroy what he does desire — such are the actions which determine tragic responsibility of the protagonist.

The Renaissance liberated the individual and burdened him with the responsibility of his deeds. Shakespearean protagonist is not a mere victim of fate. He chooses to make his destiny. Disaster is essential to tragic experience and
the hero opts for disaster. It is this sense of free choice which lends splendour to the hero even in his ashes. Shakespeare has presented choice as so proper to man that not to choose is not to be. His heroes are sinned against and sinning. They may be pitied as victims and condemned as wrong-doers.

Shakespeare makes his tragic heroes exceptional by the intensity of their feelings. Their emotional responses are akin to moral responses. They indicate the moral stature of the heroes. The tragic heroes are great of heart, but they are not perfect. Their faults appear trivial, contrasted with the greatness of character. Their irresistible passion leads them to the breaking point.

Some critics feel that there is less of conversion and more of acceptance in the Shakespearean tragic characters, as they approach death. Alfred Harbage, for instance, notes:

"The victims of tragedy meet the last disgrace with resilience. For Shakespearean characters, suffering and death are suffering and death. There is little book humility and book resignation." 29

True, Shakespearean Protagonists have stoical endurance. Equally admirable is their courage but far more
remarkable is the dignity of their exit. The intrigues of the villain lead to the death of the hero, but they also bring about the hero's spiritual sublimation. The protagonist is transformed through his terrible trials. Lear, the proud King discovers that he is "a poor bare forked animal". (III, iv, 112). Othello provides another example of the process from blind passion to final purification. The tragic end of the hero is a monument of the fatal power of his passion and error.

Shakespeare modelled his hero on the Renaissance concept of the great man. His status is indicated by the social consequences of his fall. The tide of his actions overflows the Kingdom. At the hero's death, society itself begins to disintegrate. In destroying him, society is impoverished. It is in his death that his true greatness is measured. An interesting sidelight on Renaissance humanism is the self awareness and the self praise of the hero at the moment of death. In death, Hamlet is solicitous that his name be restored. "Oh God! Horatio, what a wounded name; Things standing thus unknown, shall live behind me" (V, ii, 353-360). He remains true to himself even unto death. He attains the highest moment of his greatness in death. He gains an awareness of the nature of life but at the expense of his own life.
T.S. Eliot makes an accusation against the dying hero that he thinks only of himself when he dies. He complains against the self-loving spirit in which the Shakespearean hero dies. Eliot calls this spirit "the odour of Seneca". In reply Howard Baker points out "the self-conscious speeches of Shakespeare's dying heroes are statements of tragic relationships to other human beings".

The Shakespearean tragic hero, in the tradition of Renaissance humanism feels lofty in adversity. As his nobility cannot be destroyed by malevolent fate, he feels spiritually invincible. He refuses to make himself subject to anyone's will. Hence Othello resists capture and prefers death to captivity. His suicide is motivated by the same sense of nobility which urges him to refuse to submit himself to the shameful conditions of imprisonment.

T.S. Eliot strongly objects to the dying speeches of Shakespeare's tragic heroes "they are not speeches of contrition, remorse, humility, repentance". He points out that deaths in Shakespearean tragedies display not so much Christian contrition as Renaissance magnificence and individualism.

Shakespeare's characters change in the course of
action. They are not types of this or that passion. They are dynamic, moulded by circumstances. He enters into the spiritual world of his heroes. He translates external action into inner spiritual experience of his heroes. His characters do not live in themselves and for themselves. They are born to love or to hate, to destroy or to dodge death. They refuse merely to exist. Each of them tries 'to be' but to be means not only to think and to feel but to act and to struggle.

"They begin to live from the moment they become ripe for action ... Emotionally and intellectually they reach out towards the Absolute". 33

Tragedy is the impact of heroic energy on human situation. The action of the protagonist isolates him from society, from being the cynosure of his society to being estranged from it. The hero is persuaded to merge himself with it but he does not accept compromise, with the result that he is exiled. His isolation is due to his refusal to accept appearance as reality. Isolation intensifies his self-consciousness. His action leads him to death without sacrificing his nobility. He tries to link his self-awareness with social awareness. The isolation of the
protagonists is commented upon by John Lawlor:

"We find the principal agents of evil alone, solitary, realizing the waste they have wrought in their being cut off from natural affection." 

Their punishment consists in finding themselves friendless, Richard III on Bosworth field complains "There is no creature loves me And if I die no soul will pity me". (V, iiii, 201-202). Richard is denied even self-pity. No one will lament his fall and he knows why. "I myself find in myself no pity to myself". (V, iiii, 203-204). Macbeth is aware that his old age is barren of honour, love, obedience.

Shakespearean tragedy is centred on a single life fulfilling itself and coming to an end in death. The hero's capacity of bearing tortures of mind and spirit makes us aware of his mighty spirit confronting vast forces.

Shakespearean Protagonists take shelter under Cicero's dictum "no one should do harm to another unless provoked by wrong." Murder is followed by bereavement which fans the fire of anger and leads to revenge. This is borne out by the revenge taken by Hamlet, Laertes and Macduff for the deaths of kinsmen. Likewise Romeo seeks revenge for the murder of a friend; Othello for the adultery
of his wife; and Coriolanus and Alcibiades for the ingratitude shown to them by their countrymen.

What confronts us in tragedy is not what the characters learn but what we learn from their experience. Their resurrection is in our awareness. This is the true transcendental aspect of the tragic experience of the hero. In a thousand hearts in the auditorium little lamps are lighted.

Not only are the protagonists allowed the dignity and repose of death, but they also gain self-recognition when they face death. Death comes as a liberation, as a liberation, welcome release. They are not condemned to go on living with their loss. Troilus and Cressida alone are not so fortunate.

The Shakespearean heroes find nothing to fear in death. They rather accept it as a release from the suffering and anguish they have been enduring. For them it is bliss to die when life is a curse. As Othello tells Iago: "I'd have thee live; For, in my sense 'tis happiness to die". (V, ii, 238–289).

The true greatness of the protagonist is seen in his death. In retrospect, the deaths of Richard III and
Macbeth are restorative. Richard is the bloody wretch whose death heals England's wounds, and Macbeth must be a dead butcher before his country can live again. Othello dies to expiate the killing of Desdemona. Lear grieves over his treatment of Cordelia. In the case of all tragic heroes their accounts have been settled - each of them makes his peace with those he has wronged. They hold true to the highest nobility. On the brink of death, Hamlet can count on the friendship of Horatio. Even the fickle Cleopatra rises to tragic heights by manifesting her constancy. Not only have great and good men faced death bravely but even villains and traitors show redeeming courage in the proximity of death. For instance Cawdor faced death heroically when he was executed - as was reported by Malcolm.

"The almost superhuman proportions of Shakespeare's tragic protagonists are indicated by the grief and distraction felt by their associates at the time of their death". 36

When Lear dies, Albany observes: "Our present business is general woe" (V, iii, 318). The depth of Kent's devotion is more intense "I have a journey, Sir, shortly to go. My master calls me. I must not say no". (V, iii, 324). Like
Kant in King Lear, Cleopatra's ladies wish to die with their
mistress. Charmian exclaims at Cleopatra's death "Dissolve
thick cloud and rain that I may say. The Gods themselves
do weep". (V, ii, 301–302). Similarly Horatio seizes the
poisoned up to follow Hamlet in death. It underlines the
extent to which pagan humanist values of friendship and
fidelity can go. Fidelity to the hero shows how worship of
God is replaced by worship of the hero. In his fidelity to
Hamlet, Horatio is justified in saying "I am more an antique
Roman than a Dane" (V, ii, 355). The feelings of grief are
counterbalanced by a eulogy which praises the qualities
of dead protagonist. The hero's tragic stature depends on
his capacity for inspiring admiration and grief in the
survivors.

"It is at the moment of death that Shakespeare
particularly points to the great-hearted
quality of the hero, at the moment when he,
the other characters and the audience are
most conscious of his intrinsic nobility." 37

Horatio's cry "Now cracks a noble heart" (Hamlet (V, ii, 376)
and Cassio's tribute "For he was great of heart" - Othello
(V, ii, 361) show their feelings of admiration for the dead
hero. The death of a truly heroic character inspires feelings
of awe and admiration even in the heart of his enemy. When Octavius hears the news of Antony's death, his reaction is "The breaking of a great a thing should make a greater crack". *Antony and Cleopatra* (V, i, 14). It was a theatrical convention to eulogize the hero after his death. As Horatio said "Good night Sweet Prince; and flights of angels sing thee to thy rest". (V, ii, 373–374). Similarly it was said of Brutus "He was the noblest Roman of them all" (V, v, 63). These eulogies cannot be dismissed as mere conventional rhetoric. Heroic death commands respect even from enemies. There is no enmity beyond death. They are heart-felt tribute to the dead protagonists of heroic stature and noble spirit. The death of the hero is a revelation of the Prometheus within the hero and the thunder without. Anticipations, presages, eerie warnings regarding death of the doomed one enshroud the mystic element of the death of the hero. The Shakespearean Protagonists preach no Christian doctrine when they die. Though Othello and Macbeth speak of damnation they look forward to peaceful death. In the words of E.E. Stoll:

"Shakespeare's heroes and heroines alike are not supported in their hour of trial by the thought of the life beyond or even by trust in God and His righteous but unsearchable counsels".
In the vicinity of death, Shakespeare's heroes are pre-occupied with humanist values of honour, fidelity, friendship.

"They do not philosophize about God, do not theorize about Him, but relate the practical problems of their existence to their thoughts of God and vice versa". 39

At the moment of their death, their final concern is about their reputation, and not about Christian doctrines.
The play centres round consciousness of death - from death-wish to fulfilment in death. Here death is a process commensurate with life. From the first to the last, death, concern for death, rules the story. From the very beginning, the play deals with the mystery of death.

The setting of the opening scene, its very milieu is highly symbolical. The hush and darkness of the night symbolise death. The gradual emergence of the world of shadows and sounds suggests the emergence of life against death. The play opens at midnight with sentries on guard duty. The sentry at post cannot leave his post until he is relieved, is a metaphor for the soul in this world directed from above. Philip Brockbank finds a comparable prelude in 'Oedipus Rex':

"The city stumbles towards death, hardly able to raise up its head. .... The analogue is clear and it happens in both plays that the roots of infection are revealed by a sudden dramatic discovery or anagnorisis. The messenger in Oedipus and the ghost in Hamlet
reveal murder and incest at the head of state." 40

The sin which led to death is wilful in Hamlet, but in Oedipus it is so destined.

The play is about death and decay, about physical and spiritual death and decay. Death is present all through, covering a wide range from death as a physical fact to death as a metaphysical terror. Hamlet is essentially sweetness and light, but tragic circumstances force him into doubt and despair. Even before the play begins, evil has been on foot. Claudius has committed fratricide. Its evil permeates the play. Evil and its disorder spiral up in the play.

When the young Hamlet returns to Elsinor after his father's death, he finds his mother remarried, his father forgotten and the court gay. His moral universe is shattered by doubts about his father's death. He had faith in the two; of the two who seemed good to him, his father is dead, rather killed and his mother is neither good nor just. Goodness is destroyed for him. With a father dead and mother corrupted, he has no purpose left in life.
"But I have that within which passeth show;
These but the trappings and the suits of woe."

(I, ii, 35-86)

In Elsinor life balances death, marriage balances funeral. "But two months dead: nay, not so much" (I, ii, 137). ..... "She married. Of most wicked speed, to post with such dexterity to incestuous sheets. It is not nor it cannot come to good." (I, ii, 156-158). The incompatibility between his sensibility and the practical sense is clearly brought out when his grief at his father's death is considered unnatural by his mother and uncle on the ground that death is common. He is deeply shocked by his mother's response to his father's death. The husband's death involves just a commonplace observation.

"Thou know'st 'tis common; all that live must die,
Passing through nature to eternity".

(I, ii, 72-73)

It is monstrous insensitivity on the part of Gertrude, which is satisfied with a commonplace utterance. Her second husband Claudius shows the same seemingly rational
response to his brother's death.

"But, you must know, your father lost a father;
That father lost, lost his; and the survivor bound
In filial obligation for some term
To do obsequious sorrow; but to persever
In obstinate condolment is a course
Of impious stubbornness; 'tis unmanly grief".

(I, ii, 89-94)

"This argument", as Hawkes comments, "explains and it
even explains away." Claudius argues that death is
part of the world of fact, merely to prove that Hamlet's
grief for his father's death is irrational.

Both Claudius and Gertrude harp on the theme
of not merely inevitability but also universality of
death with only one difference: Gertrude views death
as a passage through nature to eternity, perhaps
suggesting that one mingles with the tissue, of the
universe after death.

"It shows a will most incorrect to Heaven,
A heart unfortified, a mind impatient,
For what we know must be and is as common
As any the most vulgar thing to sense,
Why should we in our peevish opposition
Take it to heart? Fie! 'tis a fault to heaven,
A fault against the dead, a fault to nature,
To reason most absurd, whose common theme
Is death of fathers, and who still hath cried,
From the first corse till he that died to-day
This must be so"

(I, ii, 95-106)

Claudius' approach merely hints that death becomes commonplace because it is universal. So Hamlet grieves and grieves alone — not even his mother shares his grief. He suspects a hereditary taint, in his blood. He wants his sullied flesh to melt. He is sick of life. His sensitive outburst is conveyed in his first soliloquy, revealing not merely a sense of terror and nausea but also dissonance between flesh and spirit, flesh prone to decay and death. The mother who considered death as a common event, should have known that it was murder 'most foul'. This tragic isolation of Hamlet has upon it the mark of death.

"Hamlet suffers the shock of finding that he is alone in a universe of enthroned corruption to which he is opposed. ..... Behind the situation is the big query that Hamlet voices 'Is life like this'?"
Hamlet remains a baffled man. His burden

"The time is out of joint; o cursed spite
That ever I was born to set it right!"

(I, v, 138-189)

Time is out of joint and Hamlet struggles to put it right.

Hamlet's vision is that of death. His is a living death in the midst of life. The play starts with a sombre note of death. The ghost cataclysm is a keynote of the play. Between Hamlet and the ghost, there is an abyss of the eternity of death.

The ghost's world is a sort of sombre hinterland between the world of the living and that of the dead.

"Hamlet begins with an explosion in the Act I; the rest of the play is the reverberation thereof. The eternity of death falls as an abyss at either end and Hamlet crosses the stage of life aureoled in its ghostly luminance." 43

Death, for Hamlet, is a hideous reality and not a common fact of mortality. He is death obsessed and so the Ghost finds in him a sympathetic listener. The
true Hamlet is found only when he is alone with death. The Ghost is on a mission of death and Hamlet who converses with the Ghost and is enjoined to perform a mission of death, is himself a kind of symbol of death. The Ghost is ambiguous in its intention to take revenge for his foul and most unnatural murder, but the same Ghost commands:

"Taint not thy mind, nor let thysoul contrive
Against thy mother aught; leave her to Heaven"

(I, v, 85–86)

The Ghost is "vindictive and morally perverse, condemning all murder, yet urging Hamlet to commit one." The moral shock that Hamlet receives kills in him the zest for life and uproots his belief in life. G. Wilson Knight looks at it as

"the contest between human life and the principle of negation. That principle may be sub-divided into love-cynicism and death-consciousness."

Hamlet's pain is intensified by the terrible secrets of death hinted by the ghost's words: "I could a tale unfold whose lightest word would harrow up thy soul freeze thy young blood." (I, v, 15–16).
"Hamlet, after conversing with the ghost, has plunged deep beyond life." 45

After his encounter with the ghost, Hamlet is isolated, his suffering is inward. He can recover from the shock only if he is able to forget, but the ghost enjoins; Hamlet, remember me." (I, v, 91).

The basic conflict is between the visible and the invisible worlds, between the daylight world of Elsinor and the mysterious midnight world of ghost. It is the contrast between appearance and reality.

The ghost-tainted Hamlet is isolated from his mother, he is isolated from the world in the name of honour of his house. What adds to his melancholy is his realization that Ophelia is a pawn in the corrupt politics of Denmark. He finds evil everywhere. The evil of fratricide has affected all relationships at the royal court. Fear debases all. Politics has top priority. Everything — marriage, love, friendship is poisoned by it. He finds the time out of joint and his mission, he thinks, is to put it right. As Time is an abstract concept, so thought becomes the action.
Hereafter, he develops the acid touch, which burns out affection. He is emotionally shattered. This is reflected in his chaotic thought and utterance. He has pledged to remember his father's command.

"And thy commandment all alone shall live
Within the book and volume of my brain,
Unmix'd with baser matter; yes, by heaven!

(I, v, 102-104)

"Now to my word;
It is, 'Adieu, adieu! remember me.'
I have sworn't."

(I, v, 111-112).

The supernatural agency has done its work.

Hamlet has the tragic burden; he knows that he does not retain complete control over himself. He assumes madness, he cannot help it. The antic disposition is assumed when Hamlet, stunned by the disclosure of the ghost, momentarily loses control over his limbs.

"Hold, hold,
My heart!
And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,
But bear me stiffly up!"

(I, v, 93-95)
The sensitive Hamlet has guessed this all pervading corruption around him from the beginning:

"How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable seem to me all the uses of this world,
Fie on't! O fie! 'tis an unweeded garden
That grows to seed, things rank and gross in nature
Possess it merely".

(I, ii, 133-137)

But it is only through the ghost that Hamlet learns the real facts of his father's death and it is the ghost that urges Hamlet to avenge his foul murder. As John Wain finds

"After his first meeting with the ghost, .... he sees beyond doubt that fate has planted him in the middle of a cobweb of evil and that his own life is caught in the net." 47

There is an overwhelming consciousness of evil all around and of the responsibility of avenging most foul murder. But his natural meditative bent of mind and the shocks of circumstances have paralysed his will. The conflict between his natural idealism and the ugly
experience of life in this harsh world made life impossible for him. Hamlet sees not life, but death, "Death in the form of the ghost, brings to birth a death in Hamlet's soul." Hamlet is recoiled from life and dedicated to death. We feel that we are in the cold empty land of death. He thinks of death and death alone. The play concerns, though obscurely and in a sense inarticulately, an obsession with death.

Hamlet feels that he himself is tainted by the universal evil. His sickness of soul could have been cured by the love of Ophelia, but love retreats before Hamlet's neurotic despair. What adds to his melancholy is his realization that Ophelia is a pawn in the corrupt politics of Denmark. When Ophelia joins his enemies, there is nothing left in life. His only dialogue with Ophelia is a continuation of the death theme. In fact it is an act of spiritual suicide on the part of Hamlet. Ophelia transparently playacts the speech prompted by her father. This duplicity is a blow to Hamlet's last hope. Life no longer is worth living for him. In rejecting Ophelia, Hamlet has rejected life. With the revelation of the ghost and with his breaking away from Ophelia, Hamlet loses his contact with life. "He must walk alone
within the prison of mental death." Just as Horatio’s philosophy is of little use for Hamlet who communed with the ghost, who had returned from the land of the dead, the innocent Ophelia is of no help to him.

Hamlet loses not merely the father and the mother, he loses Ophelia, he loses friends, he loses the crown, above all he loses his faith in life itself. The Prince who is turned into a university drop-out is lost in the evil world of Denmark. The disinherited Prince is a disillusioned anarchist.

Now onwards, his mind is full of thoughts of the foulness of life. His spiritual sickness results from the horror of the fact of death as also from the repulsion of life. The shock is deeper than his loss of Ophelia, deeper than his mother’s frailty and his father’s death. "These but the trappings and the suits of woe." (I, ii, 86). As G. Wilson Knight interprets:

"They are the outward symbols of it, the causes of it: but the thing itself is ultimate, beyond causality." 50

He looks inward but fails to understand himself.

Hamlet’s predicament is the result of double
loss: father's death and loss of mother; as, though she is alive, communication with her ends. All his ideals are shattered. Playing the chess game of politics hardens him into cynicism. Hamlet had to choose a course of action, involving tremendous issues of life and death. His is the tragic role of a chooser - the basic alternatives for his choice are the old values of the University of Wittenberg and the new values of the Court of Elsinor. The former are academic values, the latter are the worldly values of action. Hamlet, the contemplator is thrust into a world of action and that is his tragedy. Honour demands that Hamlet should avenge his father's death, but his contemplation paralyses his will. His thoughts are about his murdered father.

“For murder, though it have no tongue, will speak
With most miraculous organ. I'll have these players
Play something like the murder of my father
Before mine uncle; I'll observe his looks.

(II, ii, 630-633)

..... the play's the thing
wherein I'll catch the conscience of the King.”

(II, ii, 641-642)
The mousetrap underlines the basic theme of appearance and reality in the play.

"The play sets an apparent murderer to catch a real one - a player of one sort to condemn a player of another." 51

Claudius feels that his crime is so enormous that repentance will be of no avail.

"Pray can I not, Though inclination be as sharp as will; My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent."

(III, iii, 33-40)

Claudius yearns to repent but cannot.

"Try what repentance can; what can it not? Yet what can it, when one cannot repent?"

(III, iii, 65-66)

The irony is that Claudius is not praying but he is cogitating on the inadequacy of his prayer.

On his way to the Queen's chamber, Hamlet finds Claudius on his knees, praying. The guilt established, there should be no hesitation in executing the ghost's command. But he cannot kill a defenceless man at prayer.
Hamlet's conscience cannot be reconciled with revenge without justice. He debates the justice in revenge. For him revenge is not justice. It is not enough that Claudius dies. The manner of his death is important. He must die in sin, when he is

"about some act
That has no relish of salvation in it."

(III, iii, 92)

Shakespeare has dramatically presented Hamlet's willingness to kill and his decision not to kill.

"The new fact immediately evokes new possibilities (now might I do it pat); new decisions (and now I'll do it) and then new and unforeseen results (and so he goes to Heaven)"52

Hamlet does not kill Claudius at prayer for two reasons. (1) Claudius is defenceless and Hamlet thinks it ignoble to kill. (2) Prayer may deserve Heaven and so he may go to Heaven. So in not killing Claudius, Hamlet has preferred to punish the soul of the King. He wishes to send Claudius to death in sin,

"in death absolute and eternal: which is hell. Then only will Hamlet's revenge be commensurate with the hell he himself endures."53
To Hamlet, death is not an end, it is only a terminal with some eternal Unknown — death as a passage to Heaven or hell.

Besides, to kill a defenceless man at the back, and that too at prayer, would be murder most foul, and not revenge. Moreover, such a base act would be against the nobility of Hamlet's nature. So Hamlet resolves not on death, but on damnation of the murderer; so by refraining from killing him, he devises surer revenge — not only against his life but even against his soul. J.K. Walton explains:

"If he refrains from killing Claudius, he will be self-defeated, but only in a more .... transitory physical sense." 54

Hamlet has contrived only against the soul of Claudius by refraining from killing him. So Hamlet chooses not only murder for murder, but damnation for damnation.

In the Queen's Chamber Scene, there is a pattern of a Christian confessor. Hamlet is like the Christian Priest, demanding that sin has to be confessed and renounced. He demands mortification and vivification through which the sinner is purified.

The pity is that by hesitating to murder one man,
he is placed in a situation to murder many more. With prolonged deliberation, he does not kill the right man (Polonius). Hamlet thought Polonius to be Claudius, thus the words of Harry Levin: "Polonius dies a martyr to mistaken identity." Even then he does not repent. He feels that he has acted as a scourge in the hand of God whose will was that Polonius should die thus.

"but Heaven hath pleas'd it so,
To punish me with this, and this with me,
That I must be their scourge and minister."

(III, iv, 173-175)

The character of Hamlet and the death of Polonius are not unconnected. 'Heaven hath pleased it so' - is Hamlet's defence. This fatalism in Hamlet is like an echo from Greek Tragedy, but the deed is Hamlet's and Hamlet must answer for it.

The corpse of Polonius pollutes the atmosphere of the play with foul smell. The play becomes replete with the foul smell of the rotten corpse - a dead dog, a living worm and a dead Polonius are food for worms. They are the images of deathview of life. Mortality is here presented in its nauseating aspect. Being asked where the body of Polonius is, Hamlet coolly says that he is at supper.
"Not where he eats, but where he is eaten; a certain convocation of politic worms are e'en at him. Your worm is your only emperor for diet: we fat all creatures else to fat us and we fat ourselves for maggots; your fat king and your lean beggar is but variable service; two dishes but to one table: that's the end." ......

(IV, iii, 20-27)

"A man may fish with the worm that hath eat of a king and eat of the fish that hath fed of that worm".

(IV, iii, 29-31)

The killing of Polonius is a turning point in Hamlet's career. He now assumes a philosophic detachment. For him death, not life, is the only reality and man is food for worms. It is after this event that Hamlet changes from a rebel into an instrument of Providence. Many shocks that his sensitive mind and heart receive in Elsinor have matured this university student into a new ripeness towards life.

Polonius' death turns out to be a crisis for Hamlet. Hamlet is sobered after the death of Polonius; though Dover Wilson holds that
"Hamlet is sobered not by the death of Polonius but by the apparition of the gracious figure of his father." 56

When the ghost appears in the Queen's Chamber, she cannot see it.

"Las! how is't with you, 
That you do bend your eye on vacancy 
And with the incorporeal air do hold discourse?"

(III, iv, 115-117)

The queen being all flesh is blind to the ghost. "The world of the spirit cannot communicate with that of the flesh." 57 Gertrude has no spiritual perception and that divides the mother and the son. He sees the ghost though she sees "nothing at all" (III, iv, 130) and understands nothing. She considers it to be "the very coinage of your brain." (III, iv, 136). G. Wilson Knight interprets it in terms of Hamlet's conscience.

"Something in Hamlet warns him he ought not to have spared the King, ought not to have so cruelly wrung his mother's heart. This conscience aptly comes as his father's ghost." 58

Hamlet has behaved rashly in the queen's chamber and has stabbed Polonius, by mistake. It becomes a
nemesis. In killing Polonius Hamlet murders a father, providing a cause to a son to avenge his father's murder. The death of Polonius has also led to the insanity of Ophelia. Polonius dead could inspire deep affection in his daughter who died of grief at his death. This double tragedy confirmed Laertes' Vengeance. If at all Laertes was in two minds, his hesitation was removed by his sister's death. Hamlet is now the object of vengeance for Laertes. A situation like his own is created.

The killing of Polonius provides a good excuse for Claudius to plot against Hamlet. But the well laid plot of Claudius against the life of Hamlet goes awry through Hamlet's impulsive action. In the end, the King's death trap leads to the King's destruction. From the murder of Polonius, Claudius takes the timely hint and sends Hamlet with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern carrying his death warrant.

Hamlet's sea voyage with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern is symbolic of the voyage towards death. The sea holds a spiritual significance. Death comes in shape of the pirates. The altering of the sealed orders, making it a death warrant for Rosencrantz and Guildenstern and the fight with the pirates sustain the death atmosphere of
the play. A sequence of chances and accidents brings him back from exile.

The tragedy of Hamlet is the tragedy of Ophelia. The pain that is inflicted on tender Ophelia by the loss of her lover is no less acute than the feeling of loss of her father through death. In her insanity, the two losses co-mingle so that even the lover is remembered as dead. Shakespeare, the poet is not restricted by the truth of the senses or by the judgment of reason. Just as the ghost is a reaching beyond the grave, so the madness of Ophelia is an intuitive reaching after truth.

As G. Wilson Knight has observed:

"the bereavement of Hamlet and his consequent mental agony bordering on madness is mirrored in the bereavement of Ophelia and her madness."

The most touching moment of her insanity is in her gathering and distributing flowers. Her last utterance is a prayer for God's mercy upon her father's soul and upon the souls of all the Christian dead. Her watery death is sweet. "Here still waters and music blend." In paying tribute to her, even the prosaic queen becomes poetic.
Ophelia's death is like an allegory of Hamlet's death. The beauty of her death saves it from insufferable pathos. In the words of Stopford Brooke:

"How mingled of many drifts of pain and pleasure, of memories remembered to be forgotten, of forgetfulness intruded on by memory – and all broken, all astray – is her speech." 61

She speaks through flowers and dies with flowers in a stream banked in with flowers and singing snatches of sweet song. In loveliness she dies. It is a strange world, where the innocent perish like the guilty. "The others we do not care to think of, .... But Ophelia remains in the hearts of men." 62

There is a touch of beauty about her life and death. She dies singing and with flowers. She treats the flowers as emblems of remembrance of sorrow, and of Heavenly grace. In her insanity, she sings dirges mixed with love ditties. She lived in innocence and dies in innocence. Death is the ultimate touchstone of character. Ophelia being innocent, dies an unconscious death. Lovely like a flower, her life is broken like the twig of flowers which broke under her weight. Her death is as lovely as a

The imagery of flowers mingling with music sharpens the themes of life and death — music arising out of silence and lapsing into silence; flowers blossoming against cold, dead earth for a while and eventually withering away.

Death reveals the true self in the case of Ophelia. Love's distress finds expression in her plaintive tunes. The very pathos of it is beautiful. There is a touch of music and beauty in a willow and a weeping brook. Water and music blend, making her watery death sweet. Life's sweetest creation is brought to death. Her death by its beauty, is more than life.

"Nature herself loves her creations; and sacrifices her own choicest flowers of humanity to deck the bier of her love's death."64

Hamlet's life is ruined in the cause of his father's death and Ophelia's life is ruined because of her father's death. Ophelia's accidental death is different from the deliberately planned murder of Hamlet in a
challenge duel. There is a contrast between the ugliness of the poison plot and the innocence of Ophelia's death. Her soul is crushed by the cruelty of her lover. H.G. Barker points out:

"Hamlet loved Ophelia and he has killed her. It is that terrible paradox is the essence of their tragedy." 65

Ophelia's death is endued with a strange unearthly beauty. Her soul is cruelly crushed by tragedy. It is like a blossom crushed in its bloom. There is an emphasis on flowers:

"The impact of this scene is one of flowery pathos, love's purity conquering by its very frailty and distress." 66

Death by water is not new in Shakespeare. It recurs in "Full fathom five thy father lies" The Tempest (I, ii, 394). This watery death blends with the pathos of loss of love — making it a thing of beauty and melody. Ophelia's death has an immortal loveliness that destroys death itself. Ophelia by her sweetness, which she retains upto the last, turns death itself, in this play of death horror, to prettiness. Lovely as a flower as she is, she
dies crowned with flowers. G. Wilson Knight remarks aptly: "Ophelia touches a life beauty in death just as Hamlet touches a death beauty in life." 67

During the time that passes between Hamlet's exile and his return, there is a radical change in Hamlet. Hamlet re-enters Denmark literally and figuratively from the graveyard, the land of the dead. He has attained an air of self-possession and detachment of mind. After the voyage, Hamlet has come to accept death. He even welcomes it. Death over-rides all presumptions, all appearance, even reason itself. Through his contemplation on death, Hamlet acquires a terrible calm. He accepts death as providentially ordained, planned from above. "There's a special providence in the fall of a sparrow." (V, ii, 232-233). Man's problems are only temporary; they await the final solution of death.

The gulf between the rich and the poor in their attitude to death is vividly brought out. The rich see death with terror. The king fears so much that he will commit murder to rid himself of its fear whereas the grave diggers treat death as a matter of rough humour. They sing among the graves. They have pride
in their work. The houses they make "last till doomsday". (V, i, 65).

Hamlet's thoughts are engendered in the Churchyard. His grave reflections are contrasted with the light songs of the diggers. In the graveyard, revenge has yielded place to contemplation in Hamlet. He meditates and philosophizes about the reality of things. He muses on mortality. He has realized that death is beyond all the vanity of life.

The theme of Hamlet is Death-Life which ultimately ends in the disintegration in the grave. Hamlet has entered Denmark through the graveyard and finds himself at ease in the company of the grave diggers.

"The grave diggers' songs herald a scene in which Hamlet is at peace with death and speaks a serene lyric acceptance of mortal destiny. ... there is a sense of peace, a backwater in the turbulent stream of tragedy." 68

Thoughts of death pervade the play but Act V is imbued with mortality. Sculls are scattered around the stage. Here is death presented through different angles - how the philosopher looks at it and how the grave diggers take it. They sing at their labour. They
do not take it to heart at all. About the grave digger, Horatio remarks: "Custom hath made it in him a property of easiness" (V, i, 73-74). As W.F. Trench comments:

"These clowns have a philosophy. If not brilliant upon the subject of criminal law, they know at all events something about the Church's susceptibility to social influences. Indeed their philosophy goes deep enough to search the very foundations of society and they can declare descent from Adam to be their patent of nobility. Their jests may hover grimly around the gallows and the grave but they know something about life as well as death and they are sane. .... In the presence of death the leveller, Hamlet and the clowns meet upon a level for as they discourse upon mortality, the philosophy of the delvers is about as good as that of the philosopher."

Hamlet argues with the diggers. His arguments are about life and death. There is an all-pervasive concern with death for Hamlet in the Churchyard. He is metaphysically transformed. He has developed beyond the revenge obsession. The thought of physical death, its pathos, its inevitability and its hideousness are expressed in the graveyard scene. The Churchyard is cluttered with the physical symbols of death revealing the
hideousness of death. The contemplative Hamlet is at peace with death in the Churchyard. There is a serene acceptance of mortality in him. His aversion for life turns into resignation. Now he is master of himself ready to face his own fate. His spiritual development is complete with the grave diggers' scene. Side by side with their earthy digging, Hamlet does some psychological digging on death.

His graveyard meditations are remorselessly realistic. At the graveyard he is sad. He remembers his childhood. Death, the leveller is the dominant theme of the graveyard scene. Yorick, the clown and Alexander, the world conqueror share the same abode and the same fate in the Churchyard. They both fall to dust which they are made.

"Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander returneth into dust; the dust is earth; of earth we make loam whereto he was converted, might they not stop a beer-barrel?"

(V, i, 230-234)

He remembers the happy time he had passed with Yorick when he examines Yorick's skull. Hamlet as a child had taken delight in the pranks of Yorick. But now, Yorick cannot smile.
"Alas! poor Yorick, .... a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy: he hath borne me on his back a thousand times, ..... where be your gibes now? Your gambols? your songs? your flashes of merriment, that were wont to set the table on a roar? Not one now, to mock your own grinning?"

(V, i, 202-210)

It is proper that Yorick who moved with King when alive, is bracketed with emperors in the Churchyard. Yorick returns to dust as Caesar:

"Imperious Caesar, dead and turn'd to clay, Might stop a hole to keep the wind away."

(V, i, 235-236)

They all, Alexander the Great, Mighty Caesar and poor Yorick mingle with dust. Gerard Reedy comments on this observation:

"Alexander goes from flesh to dust, to earth, to the stopper for a bunghole, in an apparent parody of the Aristotelian Scholastic doctrine of substantial change. All things follow this metaphysical law, even the flesh and bones of the great Conqueror."

There can be no better way of showing death as the leveller.
Hamlet plays with Yorick's skull, musing how Yorick was mercurial in his laughter when alive. But that was an appearance, whereas his skull is the true reality. His address to Yorick's skull enshrines his meditations on death. He muses in the midst of graves on the nothingness of life, and even fame and the base uses to which dust returns.

"In the mode of Lucian speculating over the skulls of Greek heroes .... Hamlet satirically evokes the wasted lives of politicians courtiers and other ranks of society." 71

Hamlet generalizes that all - great and small - Emperors and jesters terminate in death as "all the paths of glory lead but to the grave." 72 The graveyard has turned Hamlet into man of resignation. Man of thought all throughout, he contemplates on death.

"In the graveyard, in the presence of human dust, the base affinities of our bodily nature prove irresistibly attractive to the curiosity of Hamlet's imagination; and he cannot choose but pursue the history of human dust through all its series of hideous metamorphoses." 73
The play is imbued with the imagery of mortality. It is most prominent in the graveyard scene where the skulls prompt Hamlet's comments—first cynical, then of feeling as he plays with Yorick's skull. Here the universality of his death—thinking is apparent. There is no self-torture that we find in his first soliloquy. There is no mood of doubt that we find in his third soliloquy. There is no bitterness. There is a spirit of true philosophic resignation, the mellow beauty of his resigned philosophy of death. He has been offering his meditations on death, little knowing that death has laid its icy hand on Ophelia.

The attitude of the professional grave diggers to death gives a new angle on the unjust social inequalities even in the face of death, the leveller. The grave they are digging is of one who had committed suicide. They point out that under ordinary circumstances, such a person would not be buried in a Churchyard. Hamlet generalizes about universality of death without knowing the ghastly actuality of Ophelia's death.

"Even as Gertrude was spared by a hairsbreadth the knowledge that her lover and husband is her husband's murderer, so Hamlet is brought to the very edge of discovering that this grave over which he so serenely chops logic, is Ophelia's."
In the graveyard, when Hamlet seems to be resigned to death, the funeral procession arrives and the identity of Ophelia is established in the mind of Hamlet: "What the fair Ophelia!" (V, i, 264). His sensibility receives cruel jolt. The emotional crescendo is reached when he jumps into the grave. Hamlet who had attained calm serenity in the graveyard scene loses self control and shouts melodramatically that he loved her: "forty thousand brothers could not; with all their quantity of love, make up my sum." (V, i, 291-293).

J.L. Styan remarks:

"When he realizes it is Ophelia's grave, he speaks with genuine sorrow, in his anger modulating into a parody of Laertes' high-flown expression of grief."

Dover Wilson interprets the exclamation "what the fair Ophelia" the other way.

"Dr. Bradley interprets the exclamation as the utterance of 'one terrible pang', but if Shakespeare had intended that, he must have phrased it otherwise. The epithet 'fair' makes it remote, almost callous. We are reminded of the bored Macbeth and his 'she should have died thereafter!' ......."
Such involuntary coldness produces its own reaction as he recollects what the dead has been to him and is shamed by the recollection." 76

The proceedings at the burial scene show her tragedy. The truth dawns on him, too late, at her death. Her death proves her innocence and makes her lover realize her innocence. But there is neither remorse nor apology in his utterances. He does not recognize his guilt and does not repent for his treatment. Hamlet who had attained calm serenity through his reflections on death in general, is put in disorder by one particular death. Hamlet who has all throughout evaded action, leaps into the graveyard and contrary to his contemplative nature, grapples with Laertes. It is all un-Hamlet like. Like the 'antic', Hamlet personifies death.

"Laertes and Hamlet struggling at Ophelia's grave are like symbols of life and death, contending for the prize of love." 77

What an irony that affection should create ugly scene in the presence of the dear departed!

All the theoretic observations of Hamlet about death are put to particular test when Laertes theatrically jumps
into his sister's grave on hearing the priest remark:

"her death was doubtful
And, but that great command o'ers ways the Order
She should in ground unsanctified have lodg'd
Till the last trumpet; for charitable prayers,
Shards, flints and pebbles should be thrown on her."

(V, i, 249-253)

The priest further insists that she should be denied requiem music, final prayers and sanctified ground

"No more be done:
We should profane the service of the dead,
To sing a requiem, and such rest to her
As to peace-parted souls."

(V, i, 257-259)

When the churlish priest points out this Christian objection to the burial of Ophelia, Laertes curtly snubs him:

"Lay her i' the earth,
And from her fair and unpolluted flesh
May violets spring! I tell thee, churlish priest,
A ministering angel shall my sister be,
When thou liest howling"

(V, i, 260-263)
Thus Laertes strongly reacts to priest's remark. This clear defiance of Christian religious rites can be understood in the context of Renaissance concept of family loyalty. In Renaissance, loyalty to family is placed ahead of adherence to the canons of religion, though Christianity has insisted on the obedience of Divine commandment and obedience to the Laws of God in preference to love for a human being. Thus in the burial scene

"is presented a dramatic clash between Christian values and the family obligations to honour the dead, even if they died by their own hands and to avenge their deaths." 78

It is clear that Shakespeare ridicules this religious prejudice against the victim of accident on just a suspicion of suicide, when the murderer and the murdered are not exempted from rituals. Shakespeare does not seem to share the religious prejudice against suicide. He extends his catholic sympathy, to the victims of suicide. Laertes seems to voice Shakespeare's own views. Shakespeare has all sympathy for 'sweet' Ophelia and nothing but resentment and ridicule for the Churlish priest who voices religious prejudice against the supposed victim of suicide. It is a convincing illustration of Shakespeare's humanism.
which cuts through sectarian bondage and extracts the 
universal human.

Edward Dowden endorses Shakespeare’s human 
approach to the religious ban and comments on this dog­
matic inhuman attitude of the religion:

"The distracted girl has by untimely accident, 
met her death, and therefore, instead of 
charitable prayers, Shards, flints, and pebbles 
should be thrown on her’. These are the 
sacred words of truth, of peace, of consola­
tion which Religion has to whisper to 
wounded hearts! This is the religion which 
helps to make Claudius a patterer with his 
conscience and Hamlet an aimless wanderer 
after truth.”79

There is a contrast between the flowery sweetness 
of Ophelia in death and the harshness of life towards her 
as represented by the priest. Nature offered her a lovely 
funeral, whereas Society was unpardonably rude about her 
burial. The unseemly quarrel of her brother and her 
lover in her grave is part of her harsh fate. Laertes 
comes out with the brother’s assertion of Heaven for his 
sister and Hamlet comes out with the belated confession of 
his love for Ophelia. Hamlet had never admitted his love
even in his soliloquies but now at her death, his sincere love for her breaks out — but alas, too late!

As a rejoinder to the cruelty of religion in putting ban on the burial service for the unfortunate victim of suicide, the Queen's tribute is the expression of love: "Sweets to the sweet, farewell" (V, i, 265). After the drowning of Ophelia, Gertrude gives proof of metaphysical change in her character. She is touched by pity into lyrical speech. The prosaic worldly Gertrude utters the most touching expression of her motherly love:

"I hop'd thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife;
I thought thy bride-bed to have deck'd, sweet maid,
And not have strew'd thy grave."

(V, i, 266–268)

After Ophelia's death, Gertrude is transformed into a loving mother. Gertrude is ennobled by Ophelia's death whereas Laertes is confirmed in taking revenge. If at all there is any hesitation in the mind of Laertes to avenge, is removed by Ophelia's death and Laertes resolves to take revenge on Hamlet; and that helps Claudius in his plot against Hamlet. But after the graveyard scene, Hamlet is
no longer an avenger. He is cured of his death wish. Aversion is replaced by resignation and melancholy by detachment. Like a philosopher, he strives to get at the Truth behind appearance. Death here has a chastening and redeeming effect on the survivors. To that extent Ophelia's death by drowning tends to be a sacrifice, even martyrdom, as it were.

Hamlet moves from the graveyard to the palace, from the world of the dead to the world of the living, only to find that the living aim at each other's death. After the graveyard, Hamlet enters the world of the royal court in which evil holds a poisoned sword and a poisoned chalice.

The first attempt of Claudius to have Hamlet killed in England, has failed. Now the King is doubly armed — with poison and sword, whereas on Hamlet's part, there is no more plotting, only cold resolution to do what he is destined to do. In the duel scene, Hamlet is a changed man, with all his former sweetness and charm. As a perfect Renaissance courtier, he offers apology to Laertes. He accepts the challenge of Laertes inspite of the protest of Horatio. He is convinced of the working of Providence behind earthly events. He does not scheme, but accepts life with detachment. He is prepared for all eventualities.
but never suspects the poisoned trick. Caludius, like a criminal, has specialized in poisoning. The poisoned sword and the poisoned chalice are his sure guarantee of Hamlet's death.

The fencing match reflects Hamlet both in his weakness and his greatness — but more in his greatness than in his weakness. He carelessly steps into the trap of his enemies. He justifies it with fatalism. He is, as it were, aware of the shadow of death. In this last fencing match "there falls about Hamlet the shadow of death. Hamlet is aware of it without knowing it." Hamlet's calm of mind is not ruffled by any premonition of death. He displays a stoicism that faces death with dignity. His recent realization of the working of Providence has added to his stature. The duel becomes a battle between the disinterested and material ends. He has the premonition of death which he has accepted smilingly. In the duel between Hamlet and Laertes, death-consciousness and life ardour oppose each other.

Hamlet is the soul of chivalry in the duel scene. He meets Laertes with transparent candour and almost the innocence of a child. The duel was a deadly plot, but
Hamlet with his new-found trust in Providence treats the duel as a brother's wager.

Hamlet kills Polonius rashly but the same Hamlet in the end kills Laertes in a different mood, all passion spent. Laertes' dying words are: "I am justly kill'd with mine own treachery" (V, ii, 321). Laertes bears no malice towards Hamlet. Laertes dies full of forgiveness and contrition: "Exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet; Mine and my father's death come not upon thee/ Nor thine on me!" (V, ii, 343-345). Laertes acknowledges the justice of fate by confessing his own share in the treachery.

"The foul\ practice
Hath turn'd itself on me; lo! here I lie,
Never to rise again."

(V, ii, 331-333).

It is the appropriate punishment of the poisoner poisoned. The revenge that Laertes craved for has resulted in contrition. The dying Laertes informs Hamlet:

"Thy mother's poison'd.
I can no more. The King, the King's to blame."

(V, ii, 333-334)

Hamlet knows that truth dwells on the lips of dying men. Laertes confesses his own share in the guilt but the criminal
king makes no such acknowledgement. Hamlet further learns from Laertes that he is to die by King's treachery.

By an irony the dull Gertrude is the first to understand the betrayal. She accuses the King. The complacent Gertrude now knows the King in his true colours, but it is a death view. She is transformed in the vicinity of death, as is Laertes, but not the King; Gertrude dies full of affection for Hamlet and disillusioned about Claudius. She makes no attempt to save or shield her husband. There is remorse in her words when she turns to her son.

"O my dear Hamlet!
The drink, the drink, I am poison'd"

(V, ii, 323-324)

"..... Hamlet, thou art slain;
No medicine in the world can do thee good;
In thee there is not half an hour of life;
The treacherous instrument is in thy hand;
Unbated and envenom'd."

(V, ii, 327-331)

The dying Gertrude snaps her ties with Claudius,
and dies not as his wife, but as Hamlet's mother. In Gertrude, the process of regeneration starts with the accidental death of Ophelia and is completed with her own accidental death. She knows nothing about the murder of her husband and dies without knowing anything about it; that is her salvation. Through disillusionment about Claudius, she is salvaged from the side of the guilty King. She understands that Claudius had prepared the poisoned cup for Hamlet and that transforms her into a true mother.

She is hurt not because she is dying but because Claudius is so treacherous as to kill her only son by poison. The vicinity of her own death and the threat to the life of her son transform her into a woman of understanding. Ophelia's death has ennobled her; that process of reclamation is completed with her complete disillusionment about her guilty second marriage. At the moment of death we see her as a true woman. H.G. Barker holds that Gertrude comprehends everything at the moment of her death. Now

"She dies companioned by the meaning of all this, conscious even of her dying son's implacable farewell."
Every line that she speaks in the last scene is vibrant with her love for her son. Likewise her affection for Ophelia acquaints us with a new Gertrude, so different from the Gertrude infatuated by Claudius.

The duel scene is the scene of nemesis. Here nemesis works relentlessly. His dying mother's words and the last words of Laertes spell out the doom of Claudius. The king is exposed and trapped. The erstwhile hesitating Hamlet responds promptly to her mother's cry. There is no delay now, though the action is unpremeditated. When the dying Queen and the wounded Laertes reveal the loathsome treachery of Claudius, Hamlet instantly plunges his sword in the King's body.

The Hamlet of Act V is incapable of a mean act, but deceived in terms of honour, he strikes back, blow for blow. His enemies have betrayed him; he will requite them in the same way. Claudius pays for his treachery to take Hamlet's life; he pays for the greater wrong that has made Hamlet's life in death.

Here the immediate is replaced by the Universal. The slaying of the King is not for personal revenge but a retribution for the universal need of Denmark. As John
Lawlor points out: 

"The duel which resolves Hamlet's problem does so by cutting the Gordian Knot. Hamlet finds himself the Agent of justice, requiting treachery point for point."  

Hamlet takes revenge on his uncle only when it is an act of justice. He kills his uncle when he is full of sins. So it is not death alone, but damnation as Hamlet had wished. Claudius lived a sinner, he dies a sinner, with no relish of salvation in it. Claudius knows that he is hurt by the envenomed sword; but he does not repent; he does not die with the name of God on his lips. Rather he dies with a plea to save him. In his last moments, he makes a frantic attempt to save his life. 

Hamlet has killed the king but only after having received the fatal wound. Hamlet fulfills his duty only when he has brought himself to the door of death. Hamlet seems to be defeated; but

"Out of the jaws of defeat, he snatches the spectacular victory that turns mere requital into a conscious vengeance."  

Hamlet has intuitively perceived that death solves the problems of life. His mission of avenging his father's murder is
accomplished. Ultimately almost in his dying hour, he performs the task of killing the king, though it is only accidentally achieved. It is plain that he would not have taken revenge in cold blood, he would have contemplated on its ethical implications, so what he would not have achieved preplanned, he achieved by accident. Hamlet at the end of the duel bridges the gulf that stretched between his contemplation and his action.

Hamlet's final view of life is different from the rosy picture his Renaissance education had imparted him. He is ennobled in the proximity of death. Personal revenge has yielded place to a larger philosophy of life. He does not work for revenge. The killing of Claudius is an unprepared act. He kills Claudius not so much in revenge, but as an act of justice, when he stands exposed both by the Queen and by Laertes.

In the last scene, we find Hamlet, the complete prince, cool, dignified and noble, though Dover Wilson finds "as failures will, he has become a sentimentalist in his last phase." But he is no longer a sentimentalist, no longer driven by strong passion; but he is content to be a part of the order of things. He has thus transcended circumstances and now he is not a victim of his situation.
He is reconciled to his fate. He has matured through his philosophic reconciliation with death.

Hamlet is immortal for what he is and not for what he does or what is done to him. Hamlet has that noble substance which no failure can disgrace, no death can annihilate. "The dying Hamlet leaves upon us a sense of power, of terrific force ..... which we have never before seen at full." 85

The last scene has the wonderful beauty of the revelation of Hamlet's soul, while poison is working to its bitter end in his blood, Hamlet's mind soars above the pangs of death.

Hamlet's mature wisdom is distilled in three words: "Readiness is all" ..... (V, ii, 236). By 'readiness' is indicated the preparedness for death. It further means the maturity of thought and feeling, but over all of 'being'. 'Readiness is all' can apply to him, who in the midst of suffering remains as if suffering nothing, to be as one in suffering all that suffers nothing. "Readiness is all" R.M. Frye finds that "the context of readiness is essentially and explicitly christian" 86. Luther's idea is similar:

"Christians should behave as those who are at every moment
ready for death." Calvin voices the same idea "... we should always be ready; we ought to live as if we were every moment about to depart from this life."

In the last scene, the conventional situation is reversed. Hamlet, the revenger enters the last scene not as an avenger but as a man with no set plans. Rather, the antagonist has worked out the ceremony of death.

Hamlet's last utterance 'The Rest Is Silence' has a happy poetic ambiguity. The Christian believers see in it an assertion of faith in God, which trustingly gives up all earthly activities and welcomes death; but the same utterance is also interpreted as the statement of an agnostic who accepts that he knows not what is after death. 'The Rest Is Silence' — spoken by the dying Hamlet is explained by R.M. Frye in the light of 16th Century theological interpretation

"as being at once words of faith in an afterlife and of regret for the cessation of work in the present life .... The reference to death as silence is common in scriptures and was interpreted by orthodox commentators as referring to the faithful man's inability to continue his vocation in this world after his death."
But R.M. Prye believes that "in terms of the XX Century connotation, it is natural to interpret 'The Rest Is Silence' agnostically." For Hamlet "The Rest Is Silence" is not the rest of the grave but of the peace in the Upanishad.

"Inspite of shipwreck, he reaches the haven of silence where he would be. What else could his world-weary flesh desire?" The mysterious words 'The Rest Is Silence' die upon his lips. Death comes as a silence after life's fitful fever. H.B. Charlatan interprets the phrase 'The Rest Is Silence' as "an implicit denial of immortality." George Seibel suggests that it represents "the epitaph of an agnostic" and Harry Levin thinks that

"for Hamlet, welcoming death when it comes unsought, felicity seems to loom ahead in the prospect of non-existence rather than the relish of the salvation."

True, Hamlet dies without the name of god on his lips, but he dies full of concern for his nation and discharges his duty at the dying moment. Hamlet of the last minutes is the perfect Dane who with his dying breath declares:

"I do prophesy the election lights
On Fortinbras: he has my dying voice".

Thus he orders the affairs of the state by giving his dying
voice to Fortinbras. He dies a true patriot, making arrangement for peaceful succession to the throne. He dies like a Renaissance man of honour.

"Hamlet is a Lord of the Renaissance and loves fame and fame. He dies young, dies in the moment of his triumph, dies with all this blood on his head. This is his triple tragedy."95

His wounded fame can be healed when truth is stated by Horatio. It is his dying wish that Horatio should render account of Hamlet's life. So like the Romans and the men of Renaissance, Hamlet's dying concern is about the fame that he will leave behind. Horatio does not wish to survive his friend but Hamlet requests him:

"Absent thee from felicity awhile
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,
To tell my story".

(V, ii, 361-363)

'The dread of something after death' has now become felicity. The life to come after death is bliss.

Struggling through the very centre of stormy events and hateful crimes, his noble heart cracks. But Hamlet does not die a pessimist. He hopes that Horatio will faithfully
report the truth of Hamlet and in that hope, he dies in peace. With his last breath, Hamlet gives his dying voice to young Fortinbras of Norway, whose father was killed in a duel by Hamlet's father. He survives Claudius but only for a few minutes and as the dying King, he names Fortinbras his successor to the throne. What an irony of fate! The command of the ghost for revenge ends ironically in the loss of all that the ghost had cherished when alive, even his throne which passes into the hands of Fortinbras.

Hamlet's mission is not to rule but to put out the evil. Even so he has been King for a few minutes and yet every inch a King. Hamlet dies at the very moment of fulfilment. Having cleansed the state of Denmark, he passes on to the felicity which is his due. Hamlet who had contemplated death as an unknown land and was bound by the fear of the unknown, comes to accept death as a felicity, a perfect bliss.

Hamlet has an eye on the future and so on the threshold of death, he sends a message into the future. Hamlet does not pass judgement on himself, but he asks through Horatio for the just verdict of the future. His death achieves the redemption of society and he dies reconciled to it. Terence Hawkes reflects on the essential Hamlet.
"In death, as be seem to know he would, he becomes the sort of 'man' he could never be in life, for in death, he combines the spiritual and the physical."

As the fell sergeant death tightens his grip on Hamlet, the turns to Horatio and repeats the word 'death' thrice:

"I am dead, Horatio." (V, ii, 346) "Horatio, I am dead."

"O! I die Horatio" (V, ii, 352). "O! I die Horatio" (V, ii, 366). The following is a Christian reflection on 'Hamlet'.

"This is symbolic of the threefold repetition of the Christian mourning rites at the burial service - thrice the guns are fired, thrice the trumpet wails and thrice pieces of earth are dropped into the grave by the mourners."

Horatio addresses the dead Hamlet:

"..... Good-night,
Sweet prince,
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest."

(V, ii, 373-374)

- where 'good night' refers to the conception of death as sleep. The parallel sentiment is found in the burial service among Christians:

"May the Angels lead thee into Paradise,
May the choir of Angels receive thee."
Though R.W. Frye quotes Calvin: "a soul unspeakably precious, it carried by angels to a blessed life." For 16th century England, these words were repeatedly used during burial rights. "Shakespeare’s words were merely a poetic synthesis of time - worn and virtually universal expressions." Shakespeare has not only placed Hamlet in a Christian society but has referred to Christian attitudes to death and burial.

Horatio’s farewell to Hamlet – 'Good-night' – makes the same equation of sleep and death as in Hamlet’s tormented soliloquy; but now at last Hamlet is at rest and that sleep will have no terrors.

As if to commemorate his achievement, Fortinbras pays him tribute and orders for him a soldier’s funeral:

"Let four Captains
Bear Hamlet, like a soldier, to the stage;
For he was likely, had he been put on,
To have prov’d most royally: and for his passage
The soldier’s music and the rites of war
Speak loudly for him."

(V, ii, 409-414)

There is irony in Fortinbras’ command to offer a soldier’s funeral to Hamlet who was a philosopher in the main.
The noble aspirations of Hamlet end in a soldier's funeral. The play which began with the preparation for war, ends with the booming of the gun in salute to the sweet Prince. For the philosopher—Prince, Fortinbras utters a tribute as to a soldier and offers him a soldier's funeral. It is a curious irony of fate that the last thought on Hamlet, thrice stressed, is that he was a soldier. The final word is 'shoot'. The last sounds are a dead march. "The sarcasm of Fate could go no further" as Goddard remarks. Here Shakespeare reflects the Christian attitude that death confirms life into destiny.

Shakespeare has also viewed life from a supernatural angle. The Ghost in orthodox suggestion is a symbol of death invading life. But

"neither death, in the ghost, nor life in Claudius, deserves his allegiance. He himself has intermittent glimpses of a higher state of being than either." 101

The Ghost belongs to the region of mystery which cannot be coped with by reason alone. It never appears to Claudius and when it appears before Gertrude, she cannot see it. From the Christian point of view, the Ghost
thirsting for revenge is evil. L.C. Knights remarks that the command of the Ghost has been for "a sterile concentration on death and evil".  

The Ghost illustrates Shakespeare's art of synthesis of popular beliefs, poetic possibility and religious doctrine. In terms of theatre, Ghost is a character from beyond death, it is proof of thing beyond death.

The Hamlet saga belongs to a Pre-Christian age but Shakespeare makes his ghost a Christian one by striking a Christian note in the opening scene in the words of Marcellus.

"It faded on the crowing of the cock
Some say that ever against that season comes
Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated,
The bird of dawning singeth all night long;
And then, they say, no spirit can walk abroad;
The nights are wholesome; then no planets strike,
No fairy tales, nor witch hath power to charm,
So hallow'd and so gracious is the time."

(I, 1, 157-164)

Dover Wilson quotes the Ghost's words "Unhousel'd, disappointed unanel'd" (I, v, 77) to show that
"the Ghost is Catholic. He comes from purgatory. The two students of Wittenberg are Protestants and share the Protestant philosophy of spiritualism.... Hamlet's utterances ... display a mind tossing between the medieval and the protestant points of view." 

Hamlet accepts it as a spirit but he doubts his identity (Catholic or Protestant) and his location (Purgatory or Hell).

As with the Weird Sisters in Macbeth, so with the ghost in Hamlet. Shakespeare has utilized a popular superstition with dramatic effectiveness and shaped it into symbolic significance. According to Dover Wilson

"Shakespeare took the conventional puppet, humanized it, Christianized it and made it a figure that his spectators would recognize as real, as something which might be encountered in any lonely graveyard at midnight." 

Dover Wilson finds the Ghost in Hamlet to be "a sublunary possibility."

The ghost is a proof that in a universe where divine justice rules, no man can fly from God; the murderer will be exposed, even where there is no one alive to accuse him. As a spirit Hamlet's father can visit airy regions which Hamlet
poetically calls "the glimpses of the moon", (I, iv, 53) but he cannot return to earth as a man among men. Hamlet justifiably describes the world of the dead as

"The undiscover'd country from whose bourn
No traveller returns."

(III, i, 79-80)

To Hamlet, the Ghost was a voice beyond the grave, a form both visible and audible. According to Catholic interpretation, the uncanny movements of the Ghost on and under the stage, symbolize the soul tortured after death.

The Ghost is a proof that death does not destroy everything. As Edith Sitwell observes: "The Ghost speaks - there is a pulse about his speech that death could not destroy." 106

The Ghost raises problems of Elizabethan Spiritua-

lism. Shakespeare has arranged the responses of four persons who witnessed the Ghost. The two officers of the guard are indifferent to philosophic speculation but the two students from the University of Wittenberg have a sophisticated response to the ghost. In presence of the ghost, Hamlet has intimation of a spiritual existence and he pulsates with the inner life of the soul. As the Ghost is
"not simply the apparition of a dead King who desires the accomplishment of his purposes but it is also the representative of the hidden ultimate power, the messenger of divine justice set upon the expiation of offences which it appeared impossible for man to discover and avenge." 107

The play opens with the visitation from the land of death. It introduces a Catholic ghost coming from purgatory. In this Saga of Pre-Christian Denmark, the purity of Christmas Eve is used to build up the atmosphere of the mystery of death which is bracketed with the sanctity of Christ. The opening of the play is all about the dark mystery of death and the bright promise of the Saviour. It is an incarnation of darkness. Unlike Christ resurrected from the tomb, the Ghost comes with the tale of crime and revenge. The Ghost belongs to the dark areas within the mind as also the dark areas in the Universe outside. It gives "that sense of a surrounding non-human that reverberates from the steeples." 108 Fredrick Turner looks at it from another angle: "The ghost is both outside time and also the disruptor of it." 109

The Ghost in the opening scene is a Prologue Ghost, in the sense that it narrates the past events; but it is
afire with a passion for revenge; in that sense it is a Revenge Ghost.

Hamlet has prophetic vision beyond the range of reason. He is death conscious and death tortured. Hamlet's communing with his self is treasured in his soliloquies. They are a monument to his lonely isolation. The human suffering through the Ages finds utterance in his soliloquies. He is lost in the labyrinths of death consciousness. His soliloquies, though the reflections of his character, are of universal nature. His soliloquies give us glimpses of his inner torture. When alone, he is self conscious of grief, he is either savagely reproachful in murderous excitement or in a suicidal despair. He thinks only in terms of death. His death consciousness blinds him to the calm understanding of life and poisons his affections. It even makes his will self destructive.

Hamlet's great soliloquies are windows on his soul. Here we have the key to Hamlet's tortured self comming. His first soliloquy is a heart cry. He is obsessed with suicide. His third soliloquy is a loud meditation. He has matured. He has become an ascetic of the mind. The soliloquy in Act IV marks the turning point of Hamlet's inaction. Now onwards he is more decisive.
In the first Soliloquy Hamlet interprets human life in the light of his own plight. His first soliloquy opens with the images of melting and yielding.

"O! that this too too sullied flesh would Melt, Thaw and resolve itself into a dew; Or that the Everlasting had not fix'd His Canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God! O God!"

(I, ii, 129-133).

He would just cease to be if only his flesh would melt and "dissolve into dew". He cannot attempt self slaughter because of the canon of Almighty; but afterwards he offers another reason against suicide - the cowardice of conscience. Hamlet is caught in a trap - the religious ban on the one hand and on the other is conscience 'some craven scruple'. This dilemma is linked up with metaphysical and ethical questions.

"The choice of death is forbidden by religion in the first soliloquy; later it is seen as a choice made impossible by our ignorance of what we choose in choosing death, so that the puzzled will cannot be absolute for life or death."
Ultimately he finds death at another's hand and not by choice. He soliloquizes, in the beginning, in a mood of doubt and melancholy and by the time he reaches death, he is drawing near self-realization. Hamlet in his early soliloquy refers to the religious taboo against suicide. The choice of death is forbidden by religion. "The gate of death is barred in Hamlet; man who has not chosen to be born cannot choose to die." 111

The desire to escape from the complexities of life is at the core of his soliloquies. His soliloquy expresses the essential difference between life and death. Life — "this mortal coil" (III, i, 67) is at best something which hampers and impedes imposing fardels. Death on the other hand is represented as a cessation of struggle and of tensions thereof.

"The reiterated 'sleep', the soothing 'quietus' and the smooth and weighted 'consummation' make plain why death is so ardently desired by a spirit which, whether, suffering or opposing feels itself continually on the defensive against a world conceived and as entirely hostile." 112

In his soliloquy "To be or not to be", he deliberates on the problem of suicide. It expresses basic aspect of
Hamlet's attitude to death. Death is shown as a relaxing of tension and an abandonment of the struggle.

"To die; to sleep; No more; and by a sleep to say we end The heart-ache and the thousand natural shocks That flesh is heir to, 'tis a consummation Devoutly to be wished."

(III, i, 60-64)

In this soliloquy he debates for and against existence.

To be, or not to be: that is the question: Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune Or to take arms against a sea of troubles; And by opposing end them?"

(III, i, 56-60)

Hamlet weighs all the pros and cons - 'To be' means for him to take revenge while 'not to be' means to give up the struggle. 'To be' is to be the avenger - he has no choice but to work vengeance. He ponders, what is nobler — endurance or action.

This soliloquy is an ethical, metaphysical inner dialogue. 'To be' does not merely mean to exist. It means to be what life calls upon you to be. 'To be' also means
L.C. Knights points out that the word 'to be' is used "absolutely to indicate essential being." He adds "what it means to be is the question of all questions." Hamlet is on the horns of a dilemma. Life is a load and therefore to be renounced; but on the other hand death or what may come after death is even more to be feared. There is fear of death because the hereafter is unknown.

"But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscover'd country from whose bourn
No traveller returns."

(III, i, 78-80)

For Hamlet, life is 'slings and arrows', 'a sea of troubles'; to die would be to be free from carrying the enormous burden of his own consciousness. To Hamlet, to die is to sleep, to dream, but to him to die is to fall into a world of nightmare. In his words: "To die, to sleep;

"To die, to sleep;
To sleep: perchance to dream: ay, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come."

(III, i, 64-65)

The image of death as sleep is also found in F. Fletcher.
"Why then, at death do weary mortals weep?
Sleep's but a shorter death, death's but a longer sleep"

Hamlet mentions three possibilities regarding death as sleep, death as journey or death as total destruction. These are known alternatives to the evil of life, so he returns to the other alternative — that 'the dread of something after death' makes death unacceptable. Hamlet argues that there can be no fear of death if it means destruction. But what comes in his way is the fear of the unknown, the thought of a life to come.

"If there were no after life, it would not matter or matter less which line he took, but he cannot here, upon this bank and shoal of time, jump the thought of a life to come. There is an ethical question; there is also a metaphysical and religious question, and to neither does he know the answer."

This soliloquy is an inner dialogue between logician and politician.

Hamlet questions whether life or death must be reckoned as the greater evil. In this central soliloquy every idea is negative. To live is to bear "the whips and scorns of time;" (III, 1, 70) to die is "to fly to other ills we
know not of." (III, i, 32). There is no possibility of joy and when life loses joy, it also loses meaning. For Hamlet, therefore, no solution is possible. There is no answer to that overriding question — To be or not to be. 'To be' is a complex of meanings. 'To be' is to live or to be a revenger, or it may refer to the realization of the total soul-self.

The content of this soliloquy runs counter to his early view on suicide in his first soliloquy. He does not now think of the dissolution of the flesh or the canon of the Everlasting. It is the insoluble metaphysical problem of taking or not taking arms against earthly ills. Suicide now is thought to be a remedy against all ills. Here, in this soliloquy, he has not thought in strictly Christian terms. He faces a dilemma that the Pagan - humanistic philosophers face — is greater nobility shown in enduring affliction or ending it by suicide? In this soliloquy on suicide, the objection to suicide is based neither on aesthetic dislike nor on religious taboo but it is due to the fear of the unknown. To be or not to be is what almost everyone has thought for himself, at one time or another and yet the question remains unanswered. Death and what comes after remain a profound mystery. We
do not know for certain whether we exist after death or not, and so we fear the unknown futurity. As J.M. Murry explains:

"Death is finally inevitable. The unknown futurity cannot be avoided by any rational refusal to hazard our lives which we can prolong but not perpetuate."\[117

This soliloquy has outgrown the subjective concern. Hamlet of the 'To be' soliloquy thinks in terms of universal human predicament. He has grown psychologically and philosophically, so that he can think of the problem more universally. It is not the predicament of Hamlet alone, but it includes all men. He reflects upon all humanity.

Hamlet cannot help lacerating the wound in his soul, which leaves behind a sick longing for death. The action imposed on Hamlet involves revenge - that is destruction, including self destruction. The dilemma for Hamlet is that if he acts against evil, he may die, whereas if he continues to live, he continues to suffer; but can that type of living be called life? He raises several questions which touch the mystery of life and death. What does 'to be' mean? action or suffering? What is more proper, resisting evil or enduring it? According to A.C. Bradley, what stands in the way of his
suicide

"is not any thought of a sacred unaccomplished duty but the doubt ..... whether it is not ignoble in the mind to end its misery and still more, whether death would end it."\(^{118}\)

For Hamlet, the central dilemma is to take revenge on his uncle or not; to kill or not to kill his own kith and kin, for the sake of justice; the same is the predicament of Arjun in the battle of Kurukshetra. To fight or not to fight is Arjuna's dilemma. Not to fight is against his code of conduct. To fight is to kill one's own kith and kin; blood would be on his hands. Both Arjuna and Hamlet are opposed to killing for a cause not sufficiently redeeming.

Hamlet's first soliloquy opens with the lament that the Almighty has 'fixed the canon against self-slaughter; and his last action is to snatch the poisoned cup from the lips of Horatio. Hamlet who has pondered over the pros and cons of suicide, does not die self slaughtered and he also prevents his friend from committing it.

The myth of Hamlet is that of a seeker and a doubter. Destiny has ordained a square peg for a round world in Hamlet. By instinct a philosopher, he is thrown
among the politicians. By choice a moralist, he is called upon to be a killer. The theatre presents the Hamlet of the actors. But Shakespeare has also offered a metaphysical Hamlet. All through the play, we get glimpses of the metaphysical mind.

Shakespeare's Hamlet has the soul of a poet. He is lost in his dreams and ill at ease in dealing with the real world. He is a genius, condemned to madness by unfavourable fortune. The poet in him has the courage to explore his inmost soul.

Hamlet dies young physically but spiritually he regains life by getting over the inherent mole of nature which was the source of his failures. His madness is a super-rational source of cognition. He lifts the veil from the horrid world of appearances. His prophetic soul knows beyond reason. In Hamlet, the man and the role are mutually contradictory. He fights life with the weapon of thought. He dares to look in the face the truth of the world as also the truth about himself. He rises against himself and fights against his own weaknesses. He has the will to overcome the contradictions of his age. He shares with his maker the capacity to overcome contradictions. He has known the pulse of the fevered world.
"In Hamlet, thousands of years of human suffering have created a true human conscience." He has also discovered himself. He comes to believe that 'There's a divinity that shapes our end'. (V, ii, 10) Man was meant for Heaven but was tempted and fell. All the wisdom he has found, is that 'Denmark's a prison', (II, ii, 253), the goodly frame of earth "a sterile promontory" (II, ii, 318) and man 'quintessence of dust' (II, ii, 329). H.G. Barker finds Hamlet's soul "a human soul adrift".

Hamlet is not only concerned with life and death, but also with salvation and damnation. His tragedy is that he can either act or contemplate and delay. In him we have a sensitive temperament shadowed by consciousness of death. He is to blame in his neurotic torturing of his mother and in his impulsive stabbing of Polonius in mistake for Claudius. Equally unpardonable is his treatment of Ophelia. He does not plot. He meditates but finds it difficult to turn his thoughts into action. Commenting on Hamlet's tragedy, Mark Van Doren observes:

"That scruples too fine could distort him into a dealer of coarse death, was both his tragedy and the world's."

The horror is not in Hamlet's death. It is more in
the desolation of his soul as he views the havoc around him—"accidental judgements and casual slaughter."

(V, ii, 39). Hamlet considers life to be a lost cause from the outset. He is tormented by thoughts of the absurdity of existence. He oscillates between melancholy contemplation and fits of violent passion. Though a moralist, he is confused about the demarcation between good and evil. But he discusses calmly about the art of the actors. He is quite at home in the world of thoughts. Art is his only link with life.

Hamlet’s idealism is a reflection of Renaissance Pagan humanist values:

"What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! how infinite in faculty! in form, in moving, how express and admirable, in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a God! the beauty of the world! the Paragon of animals!"

(II, ii, 323-328)

Hamlet, the philosopher finds existence to be a matter of doubt and Hamlet, the intellectual does not find sufficient reason for action. Hamlet’s madness was that of a philosopher. There was method in it. After a long chain of meditation, culminating in his musings on
mortality in the graveyard, Hamlet is a changed man. The man who leaps into the grave with the cry "This is I, Hamlet, the Dane" is an altogether different figure from the youth accused of inaction.

Hamlet is the central agonist and the chief reflector of the play. His father's ghost is at the heart of his tragedy. He adored his father this side idolatry and it is this great admiration for a father figure and the inadequacy of a father substitute which turn this idealist into a disillusioned man. Hamlet, who glories in the miracle of man, now finds fruitful earth 'a sterile promontory'; and man, 'a quintessence of dust'. He is thoughtsick, overwhelmingly preoccupied with death and alternating between thoughts of salvation and damnation. He is lost in the labyrinth of thought, meditating on the problems of existence and annihilation. He shows contempt for mere living.

Hamlet's sensitivity and ethical sensibility are exposed to the moral afflictions of the sophisticated court. What we are fascinated in Hamlet is an illusion within an illusion. - the suggestion of his former self, that Ophelia remembers: 'The observed of all observers' (III, 1, 163)
and after the excruciating experiences of the world, his brutality towards Ophelia and dead Polonius; and his Machiavellian delight in disposing off Rosencrantz and Guildenstern - so that we realize that

"a man's spirit may be superior not only to his fate but even to his own acts."^{122}

Hamlet's dilemma is that his wisdom does not admit vengeance. He is charged with the double task of executing judgment and showing mercy.

The Elizabethan concept of revenge left no option for Hamlet. It had to be vengeance or death. His mind is concentrated on death but the only thing that holds him back is 'the dread of something after death'. "Eternity has him in a trap which dwarfs the little traps of Claudius and Polonius to nothingness."^{123} Hamlet fears not dying, but his fear is of being dead. He doubts whether he can risk suicide when he is uncertain what awaits him beyond the grave. He points out that the lot of the living is "heart ache" and "a thousand natural shocks", then death is more pleasant than life.

"To consent to death then requires no particular courage and therefore it is not from
nobility that people consent to it and
not from lack of nobility that they seek
to escape it.

We are made cowards of by .... our
conscience and its attitude to the life
beyond the grave." 124

Ivan Askyonov traces the roots of Hamlet's dilemma
even to its ancient past:

"The Feudal view of the world ..... obliges
him to blood vengeance, a view from which
Hamlet recoils with all the forces of his
heart, of his mind and of his conscience."

Hamlet's argumentation goes back to the
Odyssey and to Oedepus at Colonus; to Homer
and Sophocles — and through them to the most
ancient times." 125

Other tragic heroes end in death, Hamlet begins with
dead. Death looms large over the action of the play.
Hamlet converses with the ghost, the symbol of death and
from then on we are never far away from death. His soli-
doquies are meditations on death.

There are two main concerns of the hero; death
and dramatic art, but even the latter underscores a murder.
Hamlet is not afraid of death but he is worried about what
happens after death. His anxiety is metaphysical. His victory lies in mastering his fear of the unknown futurity. It is the measure of his maturity after his return from exile. The Churchyard reverberates with the debate of death. Hamlet who returns to Denmark after his sea adventure is a changed man. He exhibits the spirit of resignation. There is a Biblical equanimity in his approach to death.

To him now, death is felicity compared with what life meant in Denmark. He counts life without any sense of values as death. From the moment he conversed with the ghost, the symbol of death, Hamlet was death infested, and all through no happy thought, word or action issues from him. He assumed madness that was his method of settling his accounts ironically with a world gone awry.

"We properly know Hamlet himself only when he is alone with Death; then he is lovable and gentle, then he is beautiful and noble and there being no trivial things of life to blur our mortal vision, our minds are tuned to the exquisite music of his soul."126

The last moments of his life are well spent. He snatches the poison cup from his friend and saves his life. He also clarifies the issue of succession by giving his
dying voice for Fortinbras and thus saves his country. Thus the sweet Prince, embittered by circumstances, transcends the circumstances and shows all his inherent qualities of nobility and gentility in the proximity of death.

"The last time we know Hamlet, emotionally he has transcended his own situation; he is no longer a victim of it. That is why we feel so moved, so, in a way, glorified by the inevitability of death."

In spite of Hamlet's longing of death his religious awe prevents him from suicide. Hamlet's apostrophe to man, who in action, is like an angel, and in apprehension like a God, ends with the thought that man is but quintessence of dust. But here 'dust' is not dusty. "It signifies actually the precious distillation of the spirit permeating all matter."

G. Wilson Knight observes:

"Hamlet is a superman among men. And he is a Superman because he has walked and held converse with death, and his consciousness works in terms of death and the negation of cynicism."

Hamlet, who began with the death-wish, comes to
maturity through suffering and dies meaningfully. He deserves rest. He has earned his rest. It is the sweet Prince who is manifest when he is in the grip of death. Death is a total fulfilment in Hamlet. After a long chain of meditation, finally he comes to the conclusion that "death transforms life into destiny." 130

Hamlet with the poisoned wound has almost reached the door of death. Then only is he free to fulfil his duty and to avenge his father. The poison let loose in Denmark destroys indiscriminately the good, the bad and the indifferent. H.D.F. Kitto describes the tragic plight of Hamlet:

"Confronted by what he sees in Denmark, he, the man of action has been reduced to impotence; he the man of reason has gone mad; the man of religion has been dragged down to knavery and has felt the contagions of Hell. The core of his tragedy is that such surpassing excellence is, like the beauty and virtue of Ophelia, brought to nothing by evil." 131

He fights evil and meets a noble death. His death is not in vain. He is, even in his last moments, every inch the gracious Prince. His nobility transforms
Laertes and even hostile Laertes dies contrite. Hamlet's sacrifice transforms the Queen and Laertes into self recognition and a new moral awareness. His good name remains his chief concern in his last moments and he restrains Horatio from suicide, assigning him the task of curing his wounded name. Inspite of his disillusionment and weariness of life, his attachment to Horatio remains unaltered. Though he is in the midst of melancholy and cynicism, he can display absolute faith in his constant friend who is ready to die because Hamlet is dying. Even in his last moments, his obligations towards the state of Denmark are uppermost in his mind and he dies a true patriot.

Though Hamlet meditated on death in a mood of doubt he dies on a note of certitude, when he compares death with felicity.

"Just as Odysseus is the myth character of the Traveller, Faust of the Seeker, ... so Hamlet has been made the myth character of the doubting self contemplating intellectual." 132

His is the tragedy of the intellectual who thinks but never acts. The task assigned to this philosopher is almost impossible for him.
"Hamlet's advocates say he cannot do his duty, his detractors say he will not; whereas the truth is that he cannot will."

T.S. Eliot observes: "Hamlet's incapacity for action stems largely from emotions which cannot be dragged out into the sunlight."

Hamlet dies without Holy Communion, without absolution and without extreme unction. Yet he scarcely regrets his dying for the world is harsh and death a felicity. Though for Hamlet, death is a mere negation, yet he is fascinated by it because he is repulsed by earthly corruption.

"By means of various psychological defensive mechanisms, the depression, doubt, despair and other manifestations of the conflict are transferred on to more tolerable topics — such as anxiety about ... immortality and the Salvation of the soul, philosophical considerations about the value of life the future of the world and so on."

Hamlet is reconverted to his own noble self in the end.

"He tends to become from a blind fatalist, an enlightened believer in a good God. He is a redeemed, regenerated and rejuvenated soul on its march to perfection."
Hamlet meets his death serenely and with equanimity. Single handed, Hamlet gets mastery over his fear of death.

"From 'the dread of something after death' to 'Absent thee from felicity awhile' is the utmost progress of which the human soul is capable."^{137}

Though all may be ill about his heart, Hamlet is ready and the 'readiness is all'. In Hamlet at the last moment, the personal, and the ritual roles, the active and the passive have combined. The mythological interpretation shows Hamlet as a sacrifice to cleanse the land of its corruption and to restore health to it.

The following query is raised by Robert Ornstein:

"Othello is damned to everlasting torments because he murdered innocence and did not, according to strict theology, repent. Hamlet does not strangle Ophelia but shocks and torments and humiliates her. ..... Then how shall Othello be damned and flights of angels sing Hamlet to his rest?"^{138}

In the end, death comes to the criminal as well as to the avenger. Claudius dies as a criminal - detected and detested - by everybody including Gertrude. The
infatuated Queen is killed by poison, even as her former husband was killed by the same agent. All die in their own way, consistent with their character. Gertrude dies in forgiveness and reconciliation. Claudius' last words show that he goes to death unchanged. Sweet Ophelia embraces flowery death. She speaks through flowers of memory, sorrow and grace. Her death too is flowery. She is hapless in the controversy about her suicide and the unfortunate maid's burial is marred by a squabble. All die in their own way. Gertrude is caught unawares, Ophelia embraces death almost unconsciously; whereas Hamlet is fully prepared for death. He is reconciled with death in advance. He almost feels the poetic rightness of his own death. He feels that a y catastrophe is marshalled by Providence and therefore it is inevitable. If it is to happen, it will happen.

"If 'there is a special Providence in the fall of a sparrow', there surely is in the fall of a Hamlet." 139

H.D.F. Kitto compares Hamlet with Orestes: "Hamlet may repent, Orestes may feel remorse at a dreadful act, but in each case Heaven was ordinant." 140

Though Horatio finds the course of events as
"accidental judgments, casual slaughters", the actions around the duel signify an unseen, unheard control of Providence. J.R. Brown has observed that Shakespeare has added

"a fourth dimension - psychological dimension in which the hidden and subconscious reactions of each character can be presented by movement as well as words. There is even a fifth dimension in which consequence and Providence or Fate play out their parts."

In the Duel Scene, revenge is subordinated to Providential design. It involves the sacrifice of Hamlet's life. In the death of Hamlet, there is the purgation of a soul and in the succession of Fortinbras, we find the promise of the purgation of a state. Thus it is Providence which has designed this double Catharsis. "The Providence in which Shakespeare believed is a moral order which includes man's highest exercise of foresight, energy and resolution." Providence had ordained that the land of Denmark should be cleansed by the sacrifice of Hamlet. As Francis Fergusson comments on the parallel between Oedipus and Hamlet.

"Because of his Oedipus complex he had a death wish all along. Or ..... rather his death was the only adequate expiation for the evil of Denmark, according to the ancient emotional logic of the scapegoat."
A double breach of human bonds had violated the bond of nature. Claudius had betrayed the bond of kinship (fractricide) as also the bond of political allegiance (regicide). The illness in the body politic is cured at the end at the cost of the life of Hamlet. In the Greek Tragedy Oedipus punished himself. Hamlet punishes and is punished. Both in ancient Oedipus and Elizabethan Hamlet, a sacrificial law is at work through accidents and choice. It results in the purgation of guilt. The killing of Claudius is the destruction of the whole corrupt moral and political world which he represents. When Claudius is destroyed the whole world of immoral politics is eliminated. The corrupt land of Denmark is purified by the sacrifice of Hamlet. In the light of anthropology, Hamlet embodies the winter myth. He is the slayer of winter, he nevertheless "has the notes of the winter about him". Throughout the play the contrast between good and evil is symbolical of that between life and death; nor can life and death be segregated the way good and evil cannot be either. They do not merely coexist, they are confused beyond any crystallisation.

Shakespeare has expressed the heinous offence of Claudius by a treble repetition of the attempts to poison.
The poison story narrated by the ghost is the climax of the Act I. The mousetrap—a dramatic performance of murder by poison is the climax of the Act III. The climax of the play is reached in multiple poisoning in the duel scene of the Act V. Poison sweeps through the play. Claudius murders his brother by poison; then a metaphysical poison sweeps through the court of Elsinor, rottenness corrupts the state of Denmark. "Things rank and gross in nature" meet us at every turn. Then in the final scene, it becomes literal poison once again—and that too in action, not by narration. Gertrude, Claudius, Laertes all are poisoned besides Hamlet. Besides actual poison, Sin has a poisonous effect all through the play. Sin pervades and corrodes the atmosphere of the play. Sin is the cardinal element in the play. Claudius is its chief agent, with Polonius and Gertrude by his side. Claudius, Polonius, Gertrude make a trio of evil.

"Both in Hamlet and in the Greek plays, crime leads to crime or disaster to disaster in linear fashion but in Hamlet.....it spreads from soul to soul as a contagion." 145

Evil destroys and is destroyed in the end. Like poison, evil attacks and overthrows the good and the bad alike. With the fall of Claudius, falls the protagonist of a world of evil and immorality.
Hamlet has several themes but nothing concerns the hero so much as death. Death is the central pivot of the play — for the hero is confronted with widespread mental, moral, and spiritual death. For him existence without essence is death. Death is his deepest concern in his central soliloquy, in his graveyard meditations and his utterances in the final scene. Either he is to be caught in a death trap or he traps others. There is a tragic conflict within; his conflict with the world is just a consequence — but it is all about death — suicide or murder. At the centre of the tragedy is the demand of the past (Ghost) over the present (Hamlet) — and that too is about revenge demanding murder. By the end of the play, the Ghost's demand is fulfilled. It all ends dramatically, but it is not a mere Revenge Play. It is more than that. So it not only ends with the destruction of the source of evil, but it brings the promise of the restored order.

Evil in Hamlet can be traced as a death activity invading life. Evil comes in the shape of death. The death force originated with the first crime of Claudius. From Claudius the death activity starts; it passes on to the Ghost. The contagion of death spreads from ghost to
Hamlet and from Hamlet to all who come in contact with him — to Polonius, to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, then to Gertrude and ultimately to Claudius, the death-activity spreads. The play begins with the murder of King Hamlet, committed by Claudius and it ends with Claudius' plot to kill Prince Hamlet. His last plot to kill Hamlet succeeds, but takes in its stride two more. As the beginning, so the end of the play is the plotting of Claudius. The Prince, who has been the observed of all observers is evil-obsessed. "The knowledge of evil in him disintegrates his life beauty. He has become a death-force. After the success of mousetrap, there is a rising curve of death activity — the sparing of Claudius with the cruel idea of damnation, the killing of Polonius and harshness to his mother — it reaches its highest point in Hamlet's death.

The death atmosphere has been there from the outset, when the Ghost beckons Hamlet and Horatio dissuades him.

"What if it Tempt you toward the flood, Or to the dreadful summit of the cliff That beetles o'er his base into the sea"

(I, iv, 69-71)
After meeting the ghost, the sea roars beneath. It is a deadly sea. The sea is the image in terms of spiritual and physical danger. Hamlet is in physical and spiritual danger. "Hamlet lives a life of death henceforth."146

This death theme attains its apex in the funeral march at the end. The soldier's music for Hamlet lends its own solemnity to the death atmosphere. There is no horror about death, no disharmony about it. Fear of death had died in Hamlet before his actual death. All the misgivings and apprehensions of death have died away. Death comes as a longed-for release. After life's struggle, death is a deep peace for Hamlet. His is a sacrificial death through which purification of the land is attained.

The life viewed through the eyes of Hamlet is a double vision - the majesty of life but also its futility. His life philosophy includes an intuitive realisation of a supreme power behind life. For Hamlet, who attains a total view of life, death comes as a total fulfilment.

The play is concerned with the story of three young men - Hamlet, Fortinbras and Laertes - each mourns his father's death and has to take revenge for the wrongs suffered by his father. In each case, grief is followed by
the desire for revenge, and each acts according to his own temperament. Fortinbras and Laertes are men of action, called upon for action — whereas Hamlet, contemplative by temperament, has to take recourse to action, and violent action at that. All the three take revenge simultaneously. Hamlet kills the King, Laertes kills Hamlet and Fortinbras fortuitously gains Denmark as a revenge for his father's death.

Shakespeare utilized the conventional Revenge theme by transforming it, almost ennobling it into an act of justice. Out of the sensational material of melodrama, Shakespeare made the most mysterious inward drama. There are a series of deaths — each death is connected with some act of commission or omission of Hamlet. The deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern do not inhere to the plot but appear the casual backlash of tragedy.

The Revenge Play originated in Pagan drama. It assumed revenge as an act of honour but the Christian tradition which was also a part of the Elizabethan Age, rejected the concept of revenge. Shakespeare dramatizes revenge by sublimating it into an act of divine justice. So he strikes a balance between the Pagan approval of revenge theme and the Christian disapproval.
The play has Christian overtones - the ghost's speech about purgatory, the description of miracles at Christmas, as narrated by Marcellus, Hamlet's allusions to Christian doctrine on suicide, the King at prayer and the burial controversy of Ophelia on religious ground are instances. Even Horatio sees Hamlet's soul being carried to Heaven by angels.

Hamlet is treated as a religious play by Kenneth Myrick in 'The Theme of Damnation in Shakespearean Tragedy'. In support of his conclusion, he cites

"Hamlet's fear of Hell, Claudius' would be prayer of repentance and the spirit of contrition manifested by Gertrude and Laertes at the moment of their deaths." 147

On the other hand, Curtis Watson picks out Horatio's moving farewell:

"Good night Sweet Prince  
And flights of angels sing thee to thy rest."

(V, ii, 373-374)

"as a typical Renaissance weaving of Christian and Pagan humanist strands." 148
The central theme of Hamlet's meditations is death — the inescapable fact of mortality. He meditates on this universal human condition and reaches the philosophic viewpoint, which attains maturity in the proximity of death. It is so universal that "shuffling off the mortal coil" matches word for word, a truth expressed in the Bhagvad Gita (Chapter 2; verse 22) which states that the soul leaves behind the old body even as men change old garments for new.
Othello dramatizes death through the corrupting of a great soul. The basic theme is the interplay between appearance and reality. Othello appears to be the perfect lover but in reality he is madly jealous of his innocent wife. Desdemona alone seems to be an angel and is one, yet she is believed to be a fallen woman by the man she loves beyond reason. The loss of handkerchief seems to be a trifle but it is volcanic enough to blow up his love for Desdemona. The handkerchief appears to be a valid proof of infidelity but it misleads.

Othello is the realistic tragedy of life on this earth thwarted by limitless evil. It is a clash between the primitive Othello and the sophisticated Iago, between the submissive innocence of Desdemona and vengeful honour of Othello. Iago is the agent of evil, he succeeds and fails, yet there is no repentance. At the centre of the tragedy are two hapless lovers -

"Desdemona, dead in obedience and acceptance, and Othello dying in protest against his destiny." 149
that Desdemona had deceived her father in her marriage and the old Senator had put his curse on her.

The fatal end of the romantic love of Othello and Desdemona has puzzled some critics but as Coleridge says:

"it is the very intensity of Othello's love for his wife which makes it impossible for him to accept patiently her apparent falseness." 151

The play begins with a self-assured Othello. His self-assurance is destroyed and his mind so shaken by Iago's poison that he falls in a trance. He is obsessed with sex hatred. His trance is a semi-death. It also anticipates Desdemona's murder.

There is a complete contrast between Iago and Desdemona. She thinks the best of everyone and is inclined to do good to everyone. All throughout Iago remains active, whereas Desdemona remains passive — "no action comes from her. All action is done to her." 152 Her goodness has a profound disturbing effect on Iago. In her he encounters a force more powerful than his own diabolic nature. He has discovered a suicidal property in Desdemona's virtue.
The contrast between Othello and Iago is dramatic in its effect. It is black face and fair-soul versus fair face and black soul. The forces of love and hate are in confrontation. Othello and Desdemona embody supreme values of romantic love. Iago is a devil denying all romantic values. At the core of tragic experience is the helplessness of gentle Desdemona.

"a symbol of woman in general daring the unknown seas of marriage with the mystery of man."^2

Othello can be interpreted on three levels—the personal, the social and the metaphysical. On the personal level we have a domestic tragedy; on the social level we have a clash between the new man of Renaissance culture and the traditional values of morality. On the metaphysical level, we see Othello and Iago exemplifying age-old repetition of the Adam and Satan in Eden myth.

Interpreting the play on the transcendental level, the play illustrates (a) nobility of man through Othello, (b) value of love through Desdemona and (c) corrosive cynicism of Iago denying all values.
The danger in the political world, like the danger in the physical world, is an important preliminary to the disaster in the psychological world for the lovers. The tempest in external nature is a prelude to an internal tempest within Othello. The play begins on a night of disturbances, as if sending danger signals. The lovers were parted by a physical tempest, then they were reunited and then parted by a moral tempest. Shakespeare plays upon the theme of death in the Cyprus meeting. In the Cyprus meeting, Othello greets Desdemona: "If it were now to die 'T were now to be most happy" (II, i, 192-193).

"What in its immediate context is a mere lover's hyperbole, the unfolding of events will convert into the literal truth."154

These words are ironically prophetic, casting a long shadow of death. It anticipates savage death around the corner. The storm in nature which G. Wilson Knight calls the tempest symbol, is the beginning of psychological storm which explodes the very foundation of the citadel of true love.

Othello's rapturous reunion at Cyprus was the
happiest moment in his life. "My soul hath her content so absolute that not another comfort like to this succeeds in unknown fate." (II, i, 194-196)

By that irony, Othello speaks but too truly. To Othello's cry at rapturous reunion, Desdemona responds:

"But that our loves and comforts should increase even as our days do grow!"

(II, i, 197-198)

But it is not to be. Destiny has willed it the other way.

Tempest and Death are associated in this play. Othello's reunion after the storm has the harmony of music.

There is the mystic interplay between forces of life and the destructive forces. These forces in Othello are the symbols of death in life. From the moment, the poisonous Iago begins to work on Othello, the fate of Desdemona is sealed. Othello's tragedy is that of an outsider. Venetian women deceive their husbands; she had deceived her father and might deceive her husband. With such fallacious logic, Iago incapacitates Othello of loving Desdemona. Iago uses intellect to destroy
their love, which being spiritual is intuitive and non-rational. It operates more on the level of the soul than of the body and it being a communion of two souls, is enveloped by mystery. As Desdemona confesses

"I saw Othello's visage in his mind,
And to his honours and his valiant parts
Did I my soul and fortunes consecrate."

(I, iii, 254-256)

The lovers dwell in the world of the soul. Othello's utterance on his reunion with Desdemona at Cyprus expresses a spiritual experience of perfect love

"O my soul's joy!
If after every tempest come such calms,
May the winds blow till they have waken'd death."

(II, ii, 187-189)

How ironic!

Such love, spiritual and mysterious is destroyed by Iago's evil method —

"the method by which he works his evil is the use of reasoning that is .... by traditionally devilish means."
Othello is caught in Iago's web. Othello's love is based on complete faith. When faith is betrayed the very purpose of life collapses. Iago supplies Othello with rational proof of a sort, valid rather than true. Othello's seeking for scraps of evidence against Desdemona shows how far he has fallen from his faith in love. His is a crisis in faith. Under such mental strain, the handkerchief, a ridiculous trifle becomes Desdemona's death warrant. The handkerchief, so casually dropped is magnified by the tortured mind till it becomes a fatal obsession with him, so much that he accepts it as a rational proof of her infidelity. This marks a sharp decline in the character of Othello. He is infected with the virus of Iago. With such a light trifle as the handkerchief, Iago engineers the fall of a noble soul. Iago who uses it knows that it is "trifle light as air" (III, iii, 323), but Othello seizes upon it as

"confirmations strong
As proofs of holy writ" (III, iii, 324-325)

and the trivial handkerchief thus acquires a terrific capacity for mischief. Othello ascribes mystic powers to the handkerchief.
“... there's magic in the web of it;
A sibyl, that had numbered in the world
The sun to course two hundred compasses,
In her prophetic fury sew'd the work.”

(III, iv, 70-72)

Worked up by Iago, he experiences deep shame and showers upon her abuses which her innocence cannot grasp. The loving husband of Desdemona has disappeared and instead appeared a savage barbarian given up to jealousy, cruelty, black magic. Resonant eloquence was at his command,

"The tyrant custom ......
Hath made the flinty and steel couch of war
My thrice-driven bed of down."

(I, iii, 230-232)

He loses his majesty of eloquence and echoes corrupt language of Iago. Othello debases his magnificent oratory by borrowing from Iago's lecherous vocabulary. After his encounter with Iago, Othello is a different man.

"Othello's imagination was infected with Iago's imagery. Jealousy burning in Iago is kindled in Othello" 156
His livid jealousy burns, breaks, destroys everything that lies in its path.

"Othello whom love had brought from pre-rational, pre-moral satisfaction and adjustment to life, to moral awareness and a higher form of 'content' is now taken from excessive complacency and illusory happiness to equally excessive despair and nihilism." 157

The soliloquies of Othello reveal the inferno of his tortured soul. As John Lawlor observes:

"The language of Iago's soliloquies is charged with diabolic hatred: 'hell', 'devil', 'damned', 'pit' -- these are terms which in due season colour Othello's thoughts." 158

Othello's degeneration is too agonising for words, He has lost his identity, and succumbed to hysteria. He has become unrecognizable. To him, the shame of her infidelity and his loss of honour are insufferable. As Coleridge comments:

"Othello does not kill Desdemona in jealousy, but in the belief that she, his angel had fallen from the Heaven of her native innocence." 159
His misguided resolve to kill her takes the form of a ritual taking a vow in the name of Heavens.

Othello is unable to understand Desdemona and that is his tragedy. At the root of this domestic tragedy is the incommunicability between innocent Desdemona and "Mad" Othello. The mainspring of their tragic doom is the incommunicability of human relationships. Their was a marriage of true minds which is on the rocks, but she does not question her lord. Their tragedy is that "the perfection of human love destroys itself." 160

In keeping with Renaissance philosophy of life, the tragedy of Othello is not fatalistic. It is a tragedy of wrong choice. Othello's tragedy is that he has to choose between "trusting" Iago and trusting Desdemona, between the seemingly honest Iago and the really honest Desdemona. By a strange irony she alone is accused of being what she is not. Othello is totally ignorant about his wife's inner life. He readily believes the charges against her. Another ironic fact is that he has idealized her as an angel and he now considers her as a fallen angel. Othello in the temptation scene is a stranger to himself. He suppresses his 'I'. He says 'Othello'. He begins to speak of himself in the
third person — as if dead. He is brought back to himself only by great anguish. "Farewell! Othello's occupation's gone!" (III, iii, 359).

Iago then onwards patiently and skilfully builds up the atmosphere of suspicion leading to insinuation. Desdemona finds her mood terribly changed. She is terrified as she cannot comprehend her transformed lord.

"My lord is not my lord; nor should I know him Were he in favour as in humour alter'd."

(III, iv, 123-124)

She seeks help and the hypocrit Iago pretends to help her. "All things shall be well" (IV, ii, 171). According to Harrison, Iago is "damned beyond forgiveness" in giving false hope to Desdemona.

Othello alters with alteration and a unique marriage of true minds is shattered. Othello, misled, moves the opposite way, away from love to the killing of love, believing it to be his sacred duty.
She swears "by this light of Heaven" (IV, ii, 150) that the accusations are false. She denies Othello's charges with religious vehemence. "By Heaven, you do me wrong". (IV, ii, 30). Her devotion to Othello remains firm and unshaken.

"Desdemona's love remains wholly uncontaminated by Iago's plots. Her innocence proves no mere flimsy thing but has a tough quality which will not yield. To kill it she must be murdered and even that cannot be easily done. Until the end, the holy atmosphere of her love remains undispelled."162

The shock of Othello's anger turns her thoughts to days of her girlhood. She remembers the willow and croons it in the chamber where she is to die a horrible death. It is a swan song, a dirge that anticipates her own death.

"it is as if some gentle echo of a maiden's sadness had fluttered down from earth to the gates of Hell."163

She has intimation of her death. Desdemona, a bride again, sings her own death song with all grace and submission.

"Desdemona seems strangely resigned and calm, and somewhere in the shadows of the mind,
she may come very near to an intuitive understanding and acceptance of the mysterious paradoxes of her fate."

She orders her wedding sheets, which suggest a ritual of self sacrifice. They are to be her shroud. She retires singing the willow song. Her song prepares a mood for tragedy; it is a premonition of death. For her, the willow song "assumes a quality of ominous inevitability." Her fidelity of love is proved in her death. She falls asleep, to awake to the ghastly reality of death at the hands of the man she loves.

When Othello enters the bed-chamber, his anger, has passed, a boundless sorrow has taken its place. His act of murder takes the outward form of a solemn religious sacrifice.

"The trumpet and drum, the fife and the banners were tokens of the metaphysical world in which Othello found his life's meaning." He has renounced them, his 'occupation' as a man renouncing life itself. At the final moment of murder, he attains the rapt calm of 'It is the cause' Othello is restored to his original stature for he is killing not for personal revenge.
but for the sake of justice as he understands justice.

The murder scene strikes balance between Othello's need for action and the impossibility of that action. Othello is at loggerheads. He considers himself not a murderer but an agent of justice and strangles her for honour for love, even for justice.

...... this sorrow's heavenly
It strikes where it doth love,"

(V, ii, 20-21)

he muses to himself. He asserts: "For nought did I in hate, but all in honour" (V, ii, 294). He carries out the murder as an act of sacrifice, of purgation.

While murdering

"Othello assumes the confused roles of advocate, prosecutor, judge and executioner."

— With religious zeal, he undertakes the task of killing, for he believes "Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men" (V, ii, 6). In the fond hope of saving the world from Desdemona, he usurps the functions of the Gods and attempts to remake the world. Her repeated assertion of
innocence and her tears of pity for Cassio turn the calm priest into a furious killer. Thinking her to be a liar he deems it his mission to murder her, which in his view is not murder but sacrifice.

Othello's mood is the mixture of animality and agonizing renunciation. "In Othello, the God-like is mingled with the brutal." Gods strike down men while loving them. So Othello's experience is God-like. It is a sacred vow. He will not shed her blood.

"Yet I'll not shed her blood
Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow
And smooth as monumental alabaster"

(V, ii, 3-5)

He commits this act of murder as a duty. He acts from inner necessity rather than from a sense of wisdom or judgment. At the time of murder, Othello enters carrying a lighted candle. In the dead of night, the taper suggests his impulse to offer prayer. It is also associated with the life and death of a pure Christian soul. It makes her death bed a sacrificial altar upon which his love and hope of Heaven are annihilated. Purged of all rage and bitterness, he considers himself as Justice avenging all manhood betrayed.
by the lust of women. Othello approaching Desdemona asleep is like a priest coming to do sacrifice, bearing light.

When he enters the bedroom to kill Desdemona, he shows poise and dignity.

"It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul. Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars."

He looks upon sleeping Desdemona and kisses her

"O balmy breath, that dost almost persuade Justice to break her sword."

(V, ii, 16-17)

Such passion compels man to play the part of God and to execute justice by private revenge.

"Othello sees his act as the expression of justice worked out in the most perfect balance of deed and punishment."

In this tragedy, crime and catastrophe coincide. In the murder scene, Othello's speech "it is the cause" has "a wonderful blend of the elegiac and the menacing."
The murder of Desdemona is intimately associated with the cosmic images — the Sun, the Moon, the stars and the earth — in the mind of her murderer. While murdering, Othello has a lover's vision in which the cosmic whirling of the Sun and Moon indicates the spiritual journey of Desdemona. As C. Wilson Knight remarks:

"His vast love has .... failed in a domestic world. But now symbols of the wide beauty of the universe enrich his thoughts: the chaste stars — while killing Desdemona as unchaste; the 'Sun and Moon', the 'affrighted globe'. To him the 'world of one entire chrysolite' may not buy Desdemona's love."171

Such poetic use of Heavenly bodies raises mysterious issues of misgiving of mortal men and death-defying immortality of perfect love — here and now. Here, death acquires cosmic significance in the context of nature.

The Renaissance concept of justice admitted retribution when the honour of the husband was concerned. Othello's action is comprehensible only in terms of Renaissance code of honour.

"As Morison points out, the Italians took private revenge for adultery upon just grounds of jealousy."172
In response to the question "What shall be said to thee?", he asserts "An honourable murderer ..... For nought did I in hate, but all in honour." (V, ii, 293-294). This makes sense only on the ground of ethics prevalent in Renaissance Italy. To Othello, the deed is committed to save Desdemona from sin, not in hate, but in honour and love.

Othello makes his stand explicit - "It is the cause" - he says. Othello sees things as he wishes them to be and not as they really are. He therefore does not define the cause. It is Othello's self deception and not, like Romeo, his ill luck. His repetition of 'the cause' proves that he is forcing himself to convince himself. When he turns to sleeping Desdemona, he becomes aware of her beauty and that confuses his idea of justice. Othello makes it explicit that he loves her and yet he kills her to save her from sin. Sexual impurity becomes his obsession.

"The word 'snow' .... suggests .... both chastity and coldness. The suggestion of coldness is reinforced by the monumental alabaster where the implication of the coldness of death becomes explicit." 173
Othello had murdered Desdemona as a sacred duty.
As Alexander Ostuzhev finds

"The death of Desdemona is a carefully considered plan of ideological revenge and of personal sacrifice, a part of Othello's where service of mankind."  

Othello's solemn reiteration 'it is the cause' is really ironic, because the cause does not exist. He specifies no particular cause. He believes: "She must die else she'll betray more men" (V, ii, 6). It only means that Othello has ceased to be lover, by a false chain of reasoning and has become a judge.

Othello repeats "it is the cause" three times. It seems, he finds total justice in Desdemona's murder on all the grounds - personal, social, religious. The passion that overpowers him is far more than jealousy of a wronged husband. He feels that he himself is contaminated by his wife's infidelity. He thinks that he owes expiation to the Gods by utterly wiping out the sin that has tainted him. Here Shakespeare has juxtaposed the world of love and the world of reason. Love is not a matter of logic and there are no proofs of love, nor is there strong
evidence of her innocences for "falseness can be proved, innocence can only be believed." Love cannot be subjected to evidence or testimony as Othello has subjected it. There is a similar juxtaposition between the value of love and of justice, though they are essentially incompatible. There is a tragic contention within the heart of Othello between the claims of love and justice. Desdemona's murder is the result of the tension of opposites in Othello, but at a deeper level, it is the result of the eternal opposition of justice and love. He acts both as a judge and an executioner.

"In him justice confounds itself by the concentration of all its persons in one." The killing itself is symbolic.

"The shedding of her blood is not revenge or murder. It is a terrible sacrifice by the Priest King to the Primal Gods, ordained and ineluctable." The murder is the result of pent up emotions within Othello. 'Put out the light' — as he wishes to cease seeing anything.
"This is an act of purely symbolic nature. ... The 'blackness of the act is matched by the blackness in which alone it can be performed." 178

In his mind murder has religious implication.

"To kill in love, to revenge by justice, to kill the guilty Desdemona for the honour of the innocent Desdemona or to sacrifice the innocent Desdemona to atone for her guilt." 179

The deep impress of Desdemona in our minds is of sweetness and of self surrender. She does not oppose, she only endures. Her love does not resist or resent. She who had the strength to oppose her father in the Senate is now passive. She could have left him and could have asked for the protection from her own countrymen and in so doing, she could have saved herself as also Othello from crime and death. But this sensible solution never occurred to her. She chose to remain with him since there is a comfort in the strength of love.

Othello approaches her as a priest approaches the altar, with a religious mission. Othello refers to Promethean heat. The heat that would bring Desdemona to life, must come from Heaven.
"He himself does not know where to find it. The desire to find this Promethean heat, the prohibition against find it and the impossibility of finding it are omnipresent." 180

Othello mentions 'light' five times in six lines. In playing with light, he is playing with life. He can re-light the candle but not the flame of life in Desdemona.

She dies in her innocence but that innocence itself is proof of her great love. Her passivity is an assertion of her total acceptance of death. In the course of her deathless love, she utters two lies - once about the missing handkerchief in a moment of childlike fear of the changed Othello; and then her last utterance when she says: "Nobody, I myself." (V, ii, 122) - both times she is herself.

Emilia's knocking brings Othello to his senses and makes him aware of the horrible deed he committed. The clamorous knocking of Emilia is a signal of the return of the normal world. It sounds like the outcry of the world against his deed. He thinks: "If she come in, she'll sure speak to my wife." (V, ii, 95). Then the
intimate word 'my wife' pierces him to the irrevocable fact. He cries out in agony: "My wife! my wife! what wife! I have no wife." (V, ii, 96). The voice of dying Desdemona "0 falsely, falsely murdered" (V, ii, 115) drags Emilia to her bed to hear "A guiltless death I die." (V, ii, 120). To Emilia's question "0 who hath done This deed?" (V, ii, 121) Desdemona breathes her last with a glorious lie. "Nobody - I myself" (V, ii, 122) and affirms her love with dying breath. She dies as she had lived "heavenly true" (V, ii, 134), truly an obedient lady.

"Her seemingly lifeless lips in a last flicker of vitality gasp out the glorious lie which makes her kind lord guiltless of her death." 181

There is a charge against her false dying declaration 'I myself' but Goddard finds in these two words "the whole mystery of atonement." 182 But Othello spurns the shelter of his wife's forgiveness. He calmly confesses his deeds.

The dying Desdemona's fidelity transfigures Emilia who voices the honest indignation of common humanity.
Transformed by her shocked realization of injustice to another woman, Emilia deals strongly with Iago. The sacrifice of obedient Desdemona makes Emilia disobedient to her husband. She comes as a nemesis for both husbands. Iago who deceived the world is deceived in his own wife. Emilia explores the calculated scheme of Iago. Iago's scheme is thrown into confusion through his wife. She, as it were, issues death warrant for Iago. He stabs her the next instant, and "so at last, but in a manner far different, he is evened with Othello, wife for wife." She braves death and dies with the song that Desdemona had sung, asserting the bond between the perfect Desdemona and the ordinary Emilia.

Othello comes to his senses with the white lie of Desdemona. He realizes that Desdemona's death is a stupendous cosmic event. Desdemona was capable of such great love which would survive the intense suffering, unjust recrimination and dreadful death. The light of her life could be put out; but the light of her love could not be put out.

Truth is re-asserted by Emilia who boldly faces the savage Moor and subtle Iago. Her choice of death to reassert truth is the nemesis for her husband. It is also
an assertion of the good inherent in ordinary humanity and a victory over death. In a sense, Emilia courageously choosing death, is a resurrection of Desdemona.

In Emilia the sound of fury breaks out as she realizes that Iago is the cause of Desdemona's murder. She is fearless and brutal in her speech:

"May his pernicious soul
Rot half a grain a day! he lies to the heart."

(V, ii, 153-154)

In division of loyalty, hers is for the dead mistress and for her own sex. The stolen handkerchief now becomes evidence of Desdemona's innocence. Living Desdemona could never have proved her innocence. Dead Desdemona inspires loyalty and devotion in Emilia who defiantly tells Othello: "She was too fond of her most filthy bargain." (V, ii, 153).

When Othello threatens her, she exclaims:

"Thou hast not half the power to do the harm
As I have to be hurt. O gull! O dolt!"

(V, ii, 160-162)

Shortly thereafter she adds: "I'll kill myself for grief". (V, ii, 190). Emilia was silent when Desdemona
lived but she is vocal at her death. Dead Desdemona has swept away all caution from Emilia. When Iago orders her to go home, she turns to others and says:

"'Tis proper I obey him, but not now
Perchance, Iago, I'll ne'er go home."

(V, ii, 194-195)

Through grief, the coarse-grained Emilia is purified. She is transformed into volcanic Emilia who beats back Othello's charges, blow for blow, word for word. She cries to the unhearing dead. "O mistress! villany hath made mocks with love." (V, ii, 149-150). Reckless of consequence she defies Othello, silences him and cries for his arraignment. She restores the honour and innocence of Desdemona. She faces her own doom for the sake of her mistress. She does not even minimize her own blind partnership in the villainy. She leaves nothing in doubt and exposes the fact inspite of her obvious peril. She admits her own unfortunate part in Iago's villainy. She does not shirk from her duty of exposing the villainy. She rallies strength to take "the death-witnessed never doubted oath".184
"Moor she was chaste; she loved thee, cruel Moor."
(V, ii, 247-248). Thus, she shows heroic disregard for death.

Ultimately Iago's plot was shattered by a blow from a quarter where he never dreamt of danger. From the moment of her entry in the last Act to her death, she is a transformed person. She has uttered our feelings. We share her indignation when she reminds Othello that "She was too fond of her most filthy bargain." (V, ii, 247). Her dying words "She was chaste" awake Othello to the recognition of his crime. Her role in the play is that of an agent of Nemesis, who has to sacrifice her life.

"If she lived longer, she never could soar a higher pitch and nothing in her life became her like the losing it." 185

She defies everybody and embraces death. The death of Desdemona has released Emilia from the bond of obedience. She knows the price she will have to pay for it, and yet for the honour of her dead mistress, she puts truth above obedience to her husband.
Emilia faces death courageously. She rather accepts it to vindicate the honour of her mistress. Emilia drags herself to Desdemona's side. Her mind wanders back to the willow refrain which was her mistress' last sad gift to her. Singing the willow song she is content to die by the side of her mistress. The willow, the emblem of sorrow, makes her one with her dead mistress. "Desdemona is the radiant angel who alchemises Emilia for ever." She plays the swan and dies in music. There is deep pathos in the dying speech of Desdemona and a little later of Emilia. Desdemona, as it were, gets a premonition of death and sings a willow song in the vicinity of death.

"Sing willow, willow willow
Sing all a green willow must be my garland
Let nobody blame him, his scorn I approve."

(IV, iii, 50-52)

Emilia dies with the same song on her lips:

"I will play the swan,
And die in music -
Willow, willow, willow."

(V, ii, 245-247)

With the true dying declaration on her lips, she dies;
"Moor, she was chaste, she loved thee, cruel Moor;"
(V, ii, 243). Thus she exonerates her mistress from false allegation and thus as she says:

"So come my soul to bliss as I speak true,
So speaking as I think, I die."

(V, ii, 249-250)

All the three — Barbara, Desdemona and Emilia are united by a swan song.

Iago who succeeds in making Othello doubt the loyalty of his wife, is defeated by the disloyalty to him of his own wife. In his motiveless malignity and a disinterested delight in the pain of others, Iago has suffered spiritual death. It is his own fall. He is caught in his own web and he cannot liberate himself even if he wishes and he never wishes to. There is not a trace of remorse after the crime. There is no ebb in his tide of villainy. He is destroyed as well as destroying. He is an image of death, revenging itself on life through destruction, as death cannot tolerate life. Iago is the death symbol in the play. He is the devil of hatred, remains unchanged and therefore unredeemed. In Iago we
find a union of intellect and hate. His is "The pure
intellect which as Emerson said, is the pure devil." In the final scene when he is exposed and wounded, he
enigmatically says: "I bleed, Sir; but not kill'd." (V, ii, 287). Othello's rejoinder offers us a glimpse into his philosophy.
"I am not sorry neither I'd live, / For in my sense, 'tis
happiness to die." (V, ii, 288-289). These last words
addressed to Iago are significant. His tragedy is that he
lives when it should be happiness to die. All unite in
grief for the dead Desdemona. Only Iago stands vigilantly
aloof.

Iago's punishment is as barren as his crime. He
remains at the end, alive. This has prompted the
Shakespearean critic H.G. Barker to assert "It is a tragedy
without meaning and that is the ultimate horror of it." For Othello, at the end, there is neither hope nor
fear. He stands self condemned. He has punished the inno-
cent. It remains only for him to punish the guilty. He
stands motionless, disarmed, imprisoned. He is alone with
dead Desdemona and dying Emilia. The visionless gaze
of Desdemona and Othello's unavailing words: "Cold, cold,
my girl! Even like thy chastity." (V, ii, 274-275) -
show the futility of their tragic communion. He is then
flung back upon his own maddening guilt:

"Whip me, ye devils
From the possession of this Heavenly sight!"

(V, ii, 276-277)

It subsides into the words of deep misery: "O Desdemona! Desdemona! dead!" (V, ii, 280). All that remains of him is dumb suffering and remorse. The Moor is redeemed by self sought death. He regains his self poise. He had been a false judge of his wife and now like a true judge passes sentence on himself. He had killed her savagely and then he expiates through self slaughter.

"The death of Desdemona is more the tragedy of Othello than the tragedy of Desdemona. Her tragedy here is more intimate, more personal, whereas for Othello, this is the collapse of the whole philosophy by which he lived." 189

The last moments of his death are the moments of his recognition of his error and his identification with his dead wife. His process of remorse and recovery follow. He views life in a retrospect at the dying moment. His savage rage is dissolved in savage grief. In anguished
remembrance, he soars

"If Heaven would make me such another world
Of one entire and perfect chrysolite,
I'd not have sold her for it."

(V, ii, 142-144)

He finds Desdemona dead and cold:

"... when I have pluck'd
the rose
I cannot give it vital growth again

(V, ii, 13-14)

He surveys

"The spiritual devastation that has been
wrought in him. Bit by bit, the noble
Moor who was all in a1 sufficient, is
revealed to himself and the others as
'a gull', 'a dolt', 'as ignorant as dirt',
the good Othello is a savage monster; and
the soldier, firm and renowned in action,
yet guilty of this action, is reduced to
futile gestures and inarticulate bellowings
of remorse." 190

His farewell speech before he kills himself, con-
vying his reasons for the murder of his wife is an echo
of his first speech in the Senate, giving an account of
his courtship with her. The farewell speech is a varia-
tion of Senate speech as also occupation speech. The
Renaissance ideal was passion controlled by reason. In
his final speech Othello establishes such control over his
emotions. He surveys in retrospect the events and the
errors objectively. He neither deceives himself nor sheds
tears of pity for himself. He reaches a final harmony
at last. As E.E. Stoll remarks: "This final movement
is an echo or reflux of that with which the play began."

T.S. Eliot commenting on the last speech accuses
Othello of "adopting an aesthetic and not a moral
attitude." T.S. Eliot charges Othello with "self-
idealization and self dramatization." T.S. Eliot also
accuses Othello that "he has ceased to think about
Desdemona and is thinking about himself." But unusual
self-awareness is an Elizabethan characteristic and not an
unusual mark of the last speech of Othello. Howard Baker
says in defence:

"Unusual self-awareness is an elemental
condition in Elizabethan tragic heroes.
For the self-identification is a means to
the definitely ethical end."
In his final speech, he retains his pride, tenderness, calm though hunted by the dart of chance.

"I have seen the day,  
That with this little arm, and this good sword  
I have made my way through more impediments  
Than twenty times your stop; but O vain boast  
Who can control his fate?"

(V, ii, 260-264)

Memory holds away as with the dying. He looks backward even as he looks forward to the memory that will be of him. He is aware that he has done remarkable service to the state. His reference to the killing of the turban'd Turk in Aleppo is a perfectly just reminder of the fact that

"I have done the state some service,  
and they know't"

(V, ii, 338)

He looks backward as he looks forward to the memory that will be of him. He offers an apology by claiming that he was "one that lov'd not wisely but too well."(V,ii,343). But we feel that he has loved neither wisely nor too well.

When he is nearing his end, he remembers his
heroic exploits. His thoughts are occupied with his martial glory. Having no other ties, Othello had necessarily to think about himself, once Desdemona was killed. He has no identity outside Venice and his death involves no national destiny.

Death by suicide is delineated by Shakespeare poetically and dramatically, not ethically or theologically. Othello in his last moments reviews his life, conceals nothing, compares himself to a savage or a Heathen. He recognises utter lack of wisdom -

"Like the base Indian threw a pearl away Richer than all his tribe."

(V, ii, 346-347)

Thus in the final anagnorisis he sees himself as a fool who was blind to the real behind the illusory. He admits the perfect beauty of the pearl - like Desdemona and stabs himself like 'the circumcised dog'. (V, ii, 354). This is a savage judgment but a rare assertion of love and a convincing apology for his error. He condemns himself as a barbarian and chooses self slaughter as his nemesis. Desdemona's murder is avenged by the self inflicted punishment of the man who murdered her. Dying Othello
declared that his great love forced him to kill his 
beloved. The same love forced him to complete his own 
punishment in suicide. All his glory and majesty emerge 
in the agony of his life in the end, as all her sweetness 
and nobility emerge in the agony of her life in the end. 
Othello and Desdemona are at their noblest before death. 
Death comes as an anagnorisis; with the snapping of life, 
the crust of illusion also breaks. Only in death is her 
lover restored to her. She falls asleep

"to wake to find her faith rewarded by 
death. But in death she does win her 
Lord again."196

Their love began as perfect love. She was subdued
"to the very quality" (I, iii, 235), of her lord and "Saw 
Othello's visage in his mind" (I, iii, 254). Othello was 
so happy in his love that he felt that chaos would come 
when he loved her not. ".... when I love thee not,
chaos is come again." (III, iii, 91-92). Caught in the 
net, his love proved to be an appearance and not a reality. 
It was death which liberated Othello from the snare of 
deception. After the murder of Desdemona Othello makes 
vain attempts to win back his former 
reality of a noble
warrior. But it is too late.

"Farewell the tranquil mind; farewell content!
Farewell the plumed troop and the big wars
That make ambition virtue! O, farewell!"

(III, iii, 349–351)

Farewell! Othello's occupation's gone!

(III, iii, 358)

He has become a beast and the only reality left to him
is death. He does not die as a jealous man. He is
restored to pure love and in his death, he does justice
on himself. His grief and worship express themselves
in his act of suicide.

Othello's suicide is an assertion that one "who
has lost his name is as good as dead." His last speech
testifies an affirmation of loyalty to Venice and his last
act is the execution of justice upon himself. Othello has
killed Desdemona for betraying their love; he kills himself
for the same reason. He surveys his own life, judges it and
condemns himself as a barbarian who, in his ignorance, has
thrown away a pearl. There is a link between the pearl,
the Venetian and Desdemona. The pearl is a symbol of the
beauty, the virtue, the spiritual richness and the refine-
ment of Desdemona. Like a base Indian or a malignant Turk,
Othello exemplifies a barbarian, unaware of the true value of his possession. When he suffers intense agony, an awful vision of the Judgment Day rises before him.

"When we shall meet at Compt,
This look of thine will hurl my soul from heaven."

(V, ii, 272-273)

But the lips that had pardoned him in this life, will pardon him in the next.

But when truth dawns upon him, too late, he becomes his own accuser, judge and executioner. Othello's death is consistent with life. From first to last, he is the judge. He obeys primitive rough justice and kills himself in the same spirit in which he had killed Desdemona.

Dante points out that "one cannot will a sin and simultaneously repent it." In this light Othello's suicide must be viewed as a deadly sin. But as Sylvan Barnet points out

"Shakespeare does not treat suicide in a consistent Christian manner."
But R.M. Frye in "Shakespeare and Christian Doctrine" asserts that "Othello acts for himself and by himself in such a way as to merit salvation." 

Irving Ribner observes:

"In Othello's last actions and words he undergoes remorse and penance. Finally by an act of will, he executes true justice upon himself. He dies in reunion with Desdemona and in his expiation for his sin, he merits divine mercy."

Thus critics like Irving Ribner are of the persuasion that Othello deserves salvation. The spirit of Othello and the loyalty of Desdemona deserve not the fire of hell but everlasting Bliss.

"The suggestion in the play that her soul has gone to Heaven and his to Hell, must, for most people, be of academic interest alone."

Othello has voyaged through agony of loss of identity and fury to remorse; and he has finally attained a new integrity and poise. He redeems himself when he sacrifices his own life in the realization of his renewed trust in Desdemona. His death ultimately balances Desdemona's death.
Othello's tragedy is centred around the collapse of his faith. The man of conscience is tormented by the confusion of conscience. He is trained for action, not for reflection. Losing ecstasy of love, he is extremely perplexed. Othello, the mighty voyager, has reached his journey's end. With the last proud thought of his services to the Venetian Republic and his last plea for himself as "one that lov'd not wisely but too well." (V, ii, 343), he stabs himself. Cassio comments:

"This did I fear, but thought he had no weapon; For he was great of heart."

(V, ii, 358-359)

"Shakespeare is no narrow moralist and Cassio finds the motive for Othello's suicide in his greatness of heart. .... But Shakespeare was no sentimentalist either: even the great of heart might commit irrevocable sin."

In the end, crime and catastrophe coincide. There is no chaos at the end. There is an atoning efficacy in his death. He is restored to a consciousness of himself. Othello has attained full consciousness of his barbarian nature in his last moments. He speaks his own epitaph before he dies. His final speech is the last echo of the
noble Moor that he was. Self willed all through his life, he remains self-willed in his last moment and takes his own life. Othello's suicide is the triumph of humanism and the reversal of misanthropic cynicism.

"No suicide was ever more dramatically inevitable than Othello's. He had given his world to Desdemona; she had apparently betrayed him; as a minister of justice, he had killed her. But .... the evil lay elsewhere - in the 'demi-devil' Iago. .... When Othello stabs himself, at the end, he is restoring for a final moment that lost self-respect which can only be reclaimed, since he has already killed his world in killing Desdemona, by killing himself." 

The great soldier is no more after temptation, and then after the murder, the great lover is no more. But after the painful realization of his error he dies as a true soldier and a true lover. In his death he remains a Colossus as he was in his career.

The fall of Othello, his degeneration due to poisoned mind shows a kind of moral and emotional death of Othello. It is the final dawning of truth which resurrects him during the last moments of his life.
Death, at times, is more powerful than life. Desdemona dead wields a more powerful influence on Othello. H.G. Barker has perceptively interpreted the dramatic significance of the dead Desdemona in the final scene:

"Shakespeare keeps Desdemona's murdered body the motionless magnetic centre of it, silently eloquent until the end."  

Innocent she lived and innocent she died. Innocence is her bane. Her frank trust in Othello, Cassio, Iago, leads her straight to death. Though he kills her, she saves him.

"Shakespeare made Desdemona perfect in innocence, the Moor perfect in nobility and both in love till he groaned under the pity of it."  

Desdemona meets her death without the enlightenment that comes at last to Othello, when he realises his error. But both in their deaths are made perfect. In the suicide of Othello, the crime of murder is lost in the sense of sacrifice.

Though Desdemona is the victim of a domestic
tragedy, Shakespeare has raised her status to that of a princess, by Emilia's loyalty to her, and Othello's realization of the cosmic loss of Desdemona. He suggests that her death should have been followed by earth-shaking phenomena.

"Methinks it should be now a huge eclipse
Of sun and moon, and that the affrighted globe
Should yawn at alteration."

(V, ii, 98-100)

It confirms that their love communion takes place on the level of the soul.

"If it fails," Hawkes feels, "the loss thereby takes on the universal proportions of perdition, for it will be a soul that will be lost." 207

As Othello exclaims:

"Excellent wretch! Perdition catch my soul
But I do love thee! and when I love thee not,
Chaos is come again."

(III, iii, 90-92)

Albert Gerard explains that their love upholds Neo-Platonic principles.
"The Neo-Platonic conceit that the lover's heart and soul have their dwelling in the person of the beloved, is used by Othello in a poignantly literal sense." 208

Othello: "But there, where I have garner'd up my heart where either I must live or bear no life, The fountain from the which my current runs Or else dries up; to be discarded thence.

(IV, ii, 56-59)

The love of Desdemona and Othello cannot be consummated in the world that Iago knows. It is consummated in the world beyond the reach of Iago. For these lovers, death is a gateway to love communion. "The beauties of the Othello world are not finally disintegrated. They make a swan-like end fading in music." 209

The conflict between good and evil extends to the soul of Othello, which is the battleground for good against evil. First Desdemona wins Othello; then Iago captures him; then Desdemona wins him back. Desdemona dies of her frank innocence, Othello dies of his love and of his folly in becoming the blind victim of an evil doer, and there is no explanation, no reason why such things happen in the world. The improbabilities in the play are so shocking and
the tragic experience so unaccountable that Shakespeare seems to believe in a world of irrational chance. Supporting this view, Stopford Brooke remarks:

"In Othello the noble, the good and the beautiful are sacrificed without any good arising from their sacrifice." 210

Murder and suicide in Othello raise a fundamental question — what kind of world is it in which innocence and true love are destroyed through their goodness. Iago is the mystic answer. Iago is an alien in the lovers' Paradise; by tragic irony, it is the lovers' goodness that provides him to blast their Paradise, and again by tragic irony, it is the goodness of his wife that unmasks and ruins him.

Iago is symbolic of the force of evil in life. He is a moral and metaphysical contrast to Othello and Desdemona. As J.M. Murry points out, Iago is a monster "with the awareness of the potentiality of death in human love — that awareness is Shakespeare's" 211 In this tragedy of love, Shakespeare has traced potentiality of death in love. Iago who delighted in other's pain is destroyed as well as destroying.
Othello destroys Desdemona under the impression that she is the source of evil but when he realizes his error, he kills himself as the source of error. Othello's suicide is the sign of strength and not the result of derangement. It is the triumph of his philosophy of humanism and the defeat of Iago's philosophy of misanthropy.

In the end, truth is restored, murder leads to revelation. Desdemona dead is more powerful than the Desdemona alive. Desdemona, in her death, raises and redeems such earthly souls as Emilia. She also brings about the final transformation in Othello. His preternatural calm is inspired by her. She restores him to his original greatness. She would not have asked for vengeance but Othello does not wait for justice. Her death is not left unavenged. He who killed her dies and her lover is restored to her in death. Her death reclaims her honour. It is a reclamation. Her innocence is widely acknowledged; his faith in her is re-established.

"Iago has killed this world for Othello but not the next. Othello has gone to join her in a world of which Iago's mind could have no conception."
Harold Goddard emphatically asserts about their reunion in the other world:

"The transcendental reunion of Othello and Desdemona is as irresistible as the completion of the geometrical diagram is to the eye."

Desdemona anticipates her death but her true love strengthens her against her death-consciousness.

"And his unkindness may defeat my life
But never taint my love."

(IV, ii, 160-161)

These final words of Desdemona in her interview with Iago are the reflection of Shakespeare's own confession of faith in the 116th Sonnet:

"Love is not love
Which alters when it alteration finds."

Sonnet CXXVI, 2-3)

Desdemona's grief is expressed in the death wish of the willow song. The dying Emilia whispers the willow song which is her swan song. The music of love is
in clash against the tempest of jealousy. The tempest in Othello's mind ends in murder and subsides with suicide, which is an ender of misery. Othello is a symbol of love that liberates the soul from bondage of lust and strives for a spiritual affinity. This striving is most prominent in the murder scene where 'Heaven' and 'Heavenly' are used seventeen times. Frequent references to Heaven and hell in Othello lead to a theological interpretation. That is why G. Wilson Knight finds a religious tone pervading the play.

"The death conclusions of Othello and King Lear throw the problem of the drama into relation with the mystery of eternity."

The most moving lines look beyond the grave:

"When we shall meet at compt
This look of thine will hurl my soul from Heaven."

(V, ii, 272-273).

But as Helen Gardner notes:

"Damnation and Salvation are outside the field of reference of a play in which the Last Day is so conceived, as the confrontation of two human beings."

The fact is, Othello-Desdemona love can reach perfect consummation in a world which is beyond the reach of Iago.
Desdemona leads the Moor to a revelation and does not demand vengeance from Heaven. "Like Judas, he has betrayed that which he should have loved." 216

So he ends his life with an act of suicidal daring — with his last wish that his cause be reported aright: That epitomizes his whole life, inspired by his chosen loyalty to Venice. In fact, Othello has failed to master the supreme art of living. He is already dead as it were

"Unable to cope effectively with the complicated business of living, he recalls his generous past and commit the simple act of suicide. But already the critical acid applied by Iago has destroyed the structure of his greatness." 217

The sense of tragic loss is finally balanced by a sense of completeness which Othello's suicide brings to non-Christian audience. His suicide may be un-Christian; but it is to be regarded according to Renaissance heroic valuation.

Death in Othello emerges as a consequence of intense love. The great Indian dramatist Kalidas expresses the same truth in 'Sākuntalam'. To him, great love is ever
suspicious of evil. The act of murder externalises the pain and anguish which lovers inevitably feel.

Suicide of Othello gives us a glimpse into the innermost survival of love in the heart of Othello. In the words of John Murry:

"Love is essentially a striving to be free of the condition of mortal existence. Love being a straining after the impossible, has within it the seed of its own death." 218

Shakespeare has transmuted the material of melodrama into a universal idea of tragedy.

"Othello is a tragedy of incomprehension at the very deepest level of human dealings." 219

At the same time it is also the confirmation of absolute. At it has been pointed out by Jan Kott,

"In Tragedy, the protagonists die but the moral order is preserved. Their death confirms the existence of absolute." 220
King Lear is a climax point in Shakespeare. It is an exploratory allegory. Shakespeare has unstripped all appearances to reveal the stark reality of man's mortal life on a cruel planet.

"More than any other tragedy King Lear presents an inner spiritual conflict in which the hero is fighting primarily the possibility of his own disintegration."

The theme of the play is the decay and fall of the world. King Lear is tragic in the Aristotelian sense, irresistible in its pity and awe. It portrays the pangs of the universe in travail. Spiritual upheaval is the centre of the play. Family problems are presented in a cosmic frame. The play shows a terrible confrontation between the protagonist and the unknowable cosmic forces.

Kenneth Muir examines the interaction between the new philosophy of the Age and Shakespeare's reaction to it in King Lear.

"Shakespeare goes back to a pre-Christian world and builds up from the nature of man himself
and not from revealed religion, those same moral and religious ideas that were being undermined.  

There is metaphysical freedom in *King Lear*, due to the presentation of a non-Christian era. Shakespeare has chosen a non-Christian era so that no doctrinal impediment should limit his probe.

In *King Lear* existence means nothing except the cruel earth where man goes on his journey from the cradle to the grave. Ruth New in her essay 'On Lear & Job' interprets the play as

"a Shakespearean version of the Book of Job raising the problem of undeserved suffering."  

Like Job, Lear on the heath symbolizes patience.

"Like Job, Lear takes his initial prosperity as a sign of Heavenly favour; like Job in affliction, he calls the Heavens themselves to Heavenly account.... Like Job, his natural system reaches beyond itself to embrace a universe of suffering creatures and returns to the bedrock reality of the suffering creature."
The play is a tale of two bad daughters and one good daughter. Lear begins in double pride - of a King and of a father. His pride as King and father is hurt by Cordelia's nothing:

Lear, blind egoist that he is, disowns Cordelia.

Thus he severs the bond of nature by rejecting the loving child and trusting the false children. He makes a wrong choice and then enters upon the dark night of suffering. He has denied the natural bond, resulting in a clash between paternal love and filial ingratitude. He banishes the only daughter who could have made his old age restful. The rejection of Cordelia is the initial error. His tragedy begins with it. Thereafter he is a passive sufferer. With this initial blunder, he is morally and physically tormented and maimed. The play offers a purgatorial philosophy through his suffering.

He chooses to be with Goneril and Regan and then discovers that his elder daughters are wholly false. They have broken all bonds - divine, natural, human. All human relationships are replaced by beastliness, and social order has crumbled into dust. The foundations of the family are brought crashing down. In the stormy night, the daughters drive their old father out,
where torrential rain is lashing and there is not
a bush for shelter. Old Lear goes on his knees to
beg "rain, rest, bed, and food." (II iv 158), but the
ingrateful daughter turns him out. All uniting bonds
of blood and loyalty snap. Only greed holds sway
while the storm thunders over the earth.

Ill-treated by his two daughters, his old heart
knows no peace. By his obstinacy and self-indulgence,
he has destroyed his happiness and happiness of everyone
else. He is sent to wander in a stormy night, which is
a symbol of disorder. The theme of Disorder in Nature
and Society finds its most overt expression in the
pathetic plaint of Old Lear:

"Hear, Nature, hear', dear goddess, hear!
Suspend thy purpose, if thou didst intend
To make this creature fruitful!
Into her womb convey sterility!
Dry up in her the organs of increase,
And from her defunct body never spring
A babe to honour her! If she must tear,
Create her child of spleen, that it may live
And be a thwart dianatur'd torment to her!
Let it stamp wrinkles in her brow of youth;
With sodent tears fret channels in her cheeks,
Turn all her mother's pains and benefits
To laughter and contempt, that she may feel
How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child! Away, away!"

( I iv 299-313 )

The immensity of the daughters is matched by
the tyranny of the stormy night. The cruelty of
the perverse daughters finds its anodyne in the
cruelty of nature. All conflicts tie up in the
catalysis of the storm on the heath. The storm within
Lear is more furious. Physical cruelties are symbols
of psychic cruelties. Storm is

"Lear's tempestuous Purgatory." 225

The storm within Lear results in the discord
of his tempestuous feelings. The shock to Lear is
so great that the whole moral order collapses. He
appeals to the Heavens asking for universal destruction.
The storm as destroyer is an instrument of death and
destruction.

"Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! rage! Blow!"

The storm is a turning point in Lear's spiritual
progress. He wishes that if things cannot change,
his passionate appeal is for total annihilation. The storm forces him to accept that man is but "a poor bare forked animal." (III iv lll).

Lear's life is threatened by the cruel daughters and equally cruel storm. The storm is a many-faceted phenomenon. It reflects an aspect of nature as also a state of the hero's mind. He talks to the storm and it is within him. It is all chaos - in his mind heart as also in society. He questions the thunder as to what it means and whether it means anything at all. He likes to know on whose side the thunder is. Lear in the storm is the universal sufferer and the universal judge.

The storm suggests that nature herself joins with the forces of evil in man to overpower the virtuous weak.

"The storm which ranges through the tragedy is a symbolic image of the break-up, the disintegration of the old order, the transformation of the monolithic into the fragmented." 226

Lear's tragedy begins with his offence against the natural order. He is reduced to a state between dream and delirium under a hail of blows. Stung by
the ingratitude of his evil daughters, Lear begins to question the integrity of all humanity. He passionately inquires into the nature of reality. The cruel daughters have destroyed Lear's integrity. The real horror does not lie in the fact that the wicked daughters have caused the death of their old father but the real cruelty is that they have destroyed his human integrity.

"The physical death of the hero is not really the tragic climax of this play. Lear, after all, is an old man, and the poignant question about him is not: 'Will he survive?' but rather 'What will happen to his mind?'" 227

He implores "I prithee, daughter, do not make me mad." (II iv 221). After all the unbearable mental torture, he puts the pertinent question: "Is there any cause in nature that makes these hard hearts?" (III vi 81-82) There is no final answer to his query.

Ingratitude of his daughters is a thorn in his flesh - flesh that knows, suffers, begets and is punished. Lear has betrayed natural bond and nature takes a terrible revenge. He reaches the nadir of his fortune, he goes mad. His titanic struggle ends
in madness but also in wisdom. He stumbles upon the realization of the lot of "unaccommodated man" (III iv 110) on earth.

"Poor naked wretches, whereso'er you are, That hide the pelting of this pitiless storm, How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides, Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you From seasons such as these?" (III iv 28-32)

Lear, Edgar and the fool are together in the storm the three mad men. Lear, maddened by his intense suffering, the fool, a professional mad man and poor Iea seeking security in a role of madness chatter in a hovel, under a hail of blows from incontinent nature. It is a bitter comment on man's lot that only in the grave, man finds peace and only in a hovel, can a king be protected. Lear's tormented mind finds protection in a hovel but it finds enrichment in humility and prayer for the common humanity.

"If I have ta'en Too little care of this. Take physic, pomp; Expose thyself to feel what wretches feel, That thou mayst shake the superflux to them, And show the heavens more just."

(III iv 32-36).
The suffering and madness of Lear have a creative aspect. Lear in his insanity has the wisdom of suffering and raises the questions to which silence is the only answer. Through suffering the good become better. Truth about the fundamental relationships and basic questions about life glimmer through his dark mind. The tormented Lear, like the persecuted Tom finds rest in the depths of the earth. In Tom's novel, there are no prisons, no hunger, no executioner and no entrance for the thoughts that cut through the brain. His madness is the birth agony of a new Lear.

The storm scenes exhibit

"The strength and beauty of Lear's nature; and in Kent, Edgar and the Fool the ideal of faithful devoted love." 255

Lear in madness, which is a genuine sickness, Edgar with his feigned madness and the Fool with his jest speak nonsense. Lear's mind cannot stand the strain. He becomes mad and he becomes wise.
These people overtaken by the storm are not only agonised by the rain and the cold, in each of them spiritual storms are raging no less violently than in the elements about them. For on the heath, where for many miles around, there is scarcely a bush for shelter, only those are met together whom life has cast out and deprived of name and hope. Here all are fugitives under sentence of death.  

The education of Lear begins with his wanderings in the storm. Lear is supported on either side by the Fool, a visionary simpleton and by Edgar feigning to be mad. The three represent three kinds of madness. The storm of rage threatens the weakening mind of the aged King. He suffers inner holocaust.

"At the height of the storm, madness comes upon him, a black cloud lit with sudden flashes of a truer vision of the world and himself."  

It is on the heath that the outlawed Edgar meets the banished Kent. It is on the heath that a mad man talks philosophy with a man feigning madness and the fool joins them. It is difficult to make out who is truly wise and who is out of his mind. The unheeding of Lear at the entrance of Tom's novel is symbolic.
So far he knew only the external appearance of things and relationships. In the court world, the greatness was in the garment. It is only through suffering that he realizes its cruelty.

Lear, Edgar and the Fool behave as mad men but their madness is a philosophy. Like Biblical parables, the blind man sees clearly and the mad man tells the truth. Only the Fool has no illusions. He does not believe in the ethical order that evil is punished and good is rewarded. He knows that the world is not rational. He is Lear's faithful follower, even in adversity but his death is not mourned, it is almost unnoticed.

The madness of Lear was a blessing to be desired.

Lear's first step towards truth is his meeting with the hovel. His second step towards truth is his meeting with blind Gloucester. The doom of Lear is reflected in the fate of Gloucester. In his madness, the disorder of tempestuous feelings, Lear learns the truth of mortality. On Gloucester's request: "let me kiss that hand" (IV, vi, 136). Lear's reply is: "Let me wipe it first; it smells of mortality." (IV, vi, 137). Lear has braved the storm, not yielded. The Lear story
is paralleled by the Gloucester story. Gloucester suffers the horror of physical torment whereas Lear is a grand tragic figure. Gloucester is helpless and pathetic. They both have flouted pietas and suffer for that. Lear is driven to frenzy through mental torture, Gloucester is blinded. Gloucester blind accuses Gods of irresponsible killing of man.

"As flies to wanton boys, are we to the Gods;
They kill us for their sport."

(IV, 1, 36-37)

Thus suffering urges Gloucester to philosophize about unjust Gods.

Lear and Gloucester meet in the course of their wanderings in purgatory. The mad Lear and the blind Gloucester complete each other's sufferings. With Lear, mental suffering precedes physical suffering; with Gloucester, physical suffering—blinding, precedes the mental agony of the wrong done by him to Edgar. Harry Levin compares Gloucester with Oedipus:

"As with Oedipus, blind and dying at Colonus, so with Gloucester at Dover.
In each case, the passion of a Patriarch
has met with compassion on the part of a
filial survivor, be it Edgar or
Antigone. 231

Guided by Edgar, Gloucester jumps to suicide
not from the Dover Cliff but from the stone on a
sandy ground. So it is only the symbol of suicide.
As Jan Kott remarks: "Here death is only a
performance, a parable, a symbol." 232 It is only an
illusion of suicide. It is only symbolic

"A leap from appearance to reality. It
becomes a ritual act of withdrawal from
the world of appearances." 233

When Gloucester is fully purged, he encounters
Lear again. The victim of appearance meets the victim
of reason; the blind meets the mad. The merry
Epicurean is transformed into a sorrowful majestic
old man. It is a staggering metamorphosis "I stumbled
when I saw" (IV, i, 19), he realizes. "Having eyes,
Gloucester was blind; eyeless he perceived." 234

The blind Gloucester confesses: "I have no way and
therefore want no eyes." (IV, i, 18). "It is the
first hint of the birth within him of Insight." 235
His suicide is a protest against injustice. Edgar
exorcises the demon of self destruction in Gloucester. The father is, as it were, converted by the son. Edgar expresses his philosophic point of view to blind Gloucester. He holds that "the momentous irrational event of death overshadows it." According to Jan Kott:

"Gloucester's suicide does not solve or alter anything. It is only a somersault on an empty stage. It is deceptive and unsuccessful on the factual as well as on the metaphysical plane."

G. Wilson Knight views Gloucester's suicide as a bathos of tragedy: "The grotesque merged into the ridiculous reaches a consummation in this bathos of tragedy." Gloucester's suicide is a symbol of his desperate state of mind. It is Edgar who heals the inward despair of his father like a priest and sustains him physically and mentally.

Cordelia's camp at Dover is the end of Lear's journey. It becomes a place of holiness and sanctity, she brings for him 'restoration' and 'medicine' and begs: "hold your hands in benediction o'er me." (IV, vii, 58). As the Doctor notices a significant change
"the great rage,
You see, is kill'd in him."

(IV, vii, 78)

At last, the soul, that is bound upon a "wheel of fire" (IV, vii, 47) finds peace. As Terence Hawkes points out: "The camp presents Heaven on the stage" 239 His pride is purged, purified by suffering. He has repented and is forgiven. His reunion with Cordelia asserts the supremacy of love over egoism.

Before entering prison, Lear has completed the cycle from spiritual blindness through purgative suffering to humility and spiritual vision. Lear wakes to music, like a mortal soul waking to immortality, to find Cordelia bright as 'a soul in bliss'. "She symbolizes the goal of Lear's purgatorial struggle." 240 Suffering has sacramental efficacy on Lear. He has undergone a discipline of humility and is disillusioned with worldly things. He realizes that prison and pain are nothing before love. Even the mystery of the world is solved by it. "Come, let's away to prison" (V, iii, 8) -- it is his last hour of happiness.

In the reunion of Lear and Cordelia, their mutual love is purged of all taints. If in the storm
scenes. Lear goes through Hell and Purgatory; in the Reconciliation scene, it is Cordelia who brings about Lear's final redemption. When Lear opens his eyes in Cordelia's tent, the cure begins to work. He thinks that this is a dream. He had known the false world of flattery and greed but he had not known the world of humanity. Now he sees before his eyes brimming with kindly tears. With Lear's recovery in the tent, the theme of harmony enters the tragedy. His eyes re-open on a divine vision. Cordelia appears to him to be a blessed soul. Now he finds Paradise in the Prison, as he is happy within.

Then King is defeated and imprisoned with his daughter; but for the resurrected Lear, the Prison is his paradise. He is reunited with Cordelia. It is not then imprisonment, it is fulfilment.

There is a Christian transformation in Lear. Intense suffering beats this proud King to his knees before the daughter he had exiled. The sin has punished the sinner. There is both recognition and reunion between Lear and Cordelia. "You must bear with me. Pray you now, forget and forgive: I am old and foolish." (IV, vii, 84-85). It is like a Christian redemption on this side of death. It is a Christian transformation, but it is something more. It is also
universal transformation. It is Lear, the man that Shakespeare is interested in. The basic theme of the play is illusion vs. reality. Lear is surrounded by hard heartedness and cruelty in which the image of Cordelia shines like a little candle, though the ray of light is short-lived. It is destined to be extinguished. Lear on his arrival at Dover asks: "You are a spirit, I know; when did you die"? (IV, vii, 49).

The theatrical suicide at the Dover cliff and the wonderful camp at Dover are focal points for healing the suffering minds and for removing appearance and revealing reality. A parody of suicide reconciles Gloucester to an acceptance of fate.

"henceforth I'll bear
Affliction till it do cry out itself
'Enough, enough', and die."

(IV, vi, 75-78)

Gloucester's ridiculous attempt at suicide is poetically significant. Under the impression that he is saved by miracle, he learns the lesson of endurance. Edgar teaches Gloucester to accept death even as birth. He points out that men should not desire death. They must merely be prepared to encounter death. It is here
that Shakespeare's most pregnant thought on death
is voiced by Edgar: "Ripeness is all" (V, ii, 11) -
where 'ripeness' is meant not only in the sense of
readiness but also in the sense of mellowness,
maturity — even in the sense of wisdom as the best
approach to death. Injustice of a father has been
returned with tender affection by the son and the
blind father sees with his heart — it is death in
ripeness.

When Edgar makes himself known, relates his
story and implores his father's blessings, Gloucester
wishes to see Edgar in his touch; when his wish is
granted, his stricken heart breaks in a conflict of
joy and grief and he dies resigned and smiling. That
is Gloucester's Katharsis. Edgar describes Gloucester's
death on a sudden inrush of joy with a smile of
happiness on his lips. Edgar's description of the
actual death of Gloucester is poetic, as his whole
character demands —

—-"but his flaw'd heart —
Alack! too weak the conflict to support;
'Twixt two extremes of passion, joy and grief,
Burst smilingly"

(V, iii, 198-200)
All the wicked characters have rebelled against their elders. Edmund, the illegitimate child of Gloucester is the legitimate child of the New Age. Nothing is sacred to him -- God, King or father. To him, nature means the law of anarchy and of aggressive self will. Says he:

"Let me, if not by birth, have lands by wit;
All with me's meet that I can fashion fit."

(1, ii, 205-206)

His is the world of stony hearts. He is the image of erosion of all social relationships. Edmund's philosophy is distilled in his remark: "....

"know thou this, that men
Are as the time is"

(V, iii, 31-32)

Edgar suggests to Edmund: "Let's exchange charity" (V, iii, 168) and that evokes a favourable response from the confirmed villain. Edmund even shows a positive desire to redeem himself.

"Some good I mean to do
Despite of mine own nature...."

(V, iii, 245-246)
He learns mercy through the deaths of Goneril and Regan who loved him. He is the most villainous of all, yet he is touched by the deaths of Goneril and Regan who died in the cause of their love for him.

"Yet Edmund was belov'd;
The one the other poison'd for my sake,
And after slew herself."

(IV, iii, 241-243)

A confirmed villain all through his life, Edmund is given a noble and an essentially tragic end. His death is better than his life. He, like Oswald, is destroyed by a representative of noble values, he has defied all through his life. But with a difference; Oswald dies, unrepentant, and at the moment of sin; Edmund gets reprieve before he dies; he is touched and transformed by the deaths of Goneril and Regan who die for their love for him— and that works a miracle on him. So dying Edmund resolves to do a good deed of cancelling his own order of the executions of Cordelia and Lear; but delay thwarts his one humane impulse. Accident plays its part; the message of release comes too late and Cordelia is hanged but that is the hideous irony of destiny. At last Edmund in his dying moments means to do some good.
Edmund is moved by the deaths of the wicked sisters, but not Albany. To Albany, the death of General and Regan were

"This judgment of the heavens, that makes us tremble,
Touches us not with pity."

( V, iii, 222-223)

Albany sees justice in their deaths. He believes that if life has to continue it must rely on retributive justice.

Albany also greets the news of Cornwall's death: "This shows you are above, / You justicers, that these our nether crimes, / So speedily can venge venge. " (IV, ii, 78-80)

The deaths of the wicked people prove that "the world is convulsed by evil and rejects it."

Whatever might have happened to General or Regan, Edmund or Gloucester, at least they deserve punishment in greater or less degree, but Cordelia to be hanged like a criminal is the most cruel jolt to sensitivity. The execution of Cordelia through the order of Edmund, the bastard, the destruction of
the good through the evil is the most tragic event in Shakespearean tragedy. Why should she die? — we ask in protest — but there is no answer to it. That is the tragedy of life. The death of one so good and so young remains inexplicable — that is the tragic fact. Her death deeply touches us, as she is deeply wronged, though she is wholly right.

A. C. Bradley interprets Cordelia's death as a sudden stroke of chance.

"Her death following on the deaths of all the evil characters and brought about by an unexplained delay in Edmund's effort to save her comes on us ..... as the sudden stroke of mere fate or chance." 248

Cordelia's death raises doubts about universal justice. It assumes a universal disorder with no hope for peace or redemption. Aghast at such an end of her goodness, Kent asks: "Is this the promised end? (V, iii, 235) Albany implores Heavens "to fall and cease" (V, iii, 267). When the father receives sudden news of the death of his child,

"there is at first wild incredulity, a refusal to believe but in a while this
emotion succumbs to reason and then
follows a black darkness of the soul
which expresses itself almost in Lear's
words: "Thou'lt come no more,
Never, never, never, never, never," 243

Lear's last words are not triumphant but it
is a cry of a heart-broken old man, a cry of utter
despair:

"Howl, howl, howl! howl, O: you are
men of stones:
Had I your tongues and eyes, I'd use them so
That heaven's vaults should crack

( V, iii, 359-361)

Hence R.C. Goddard rightly asserts:
"This is indeed Shakespeare's version of the Last
Judgement" 244

The stunned Lear murmers in a feeble voice:
"And my poor fool is hang'd!" (V, iii, 307). Goddard
adds cogently:

"Hundreds of other words have
been written about those six,
Do they refer to the fool or to Cordelia?" 245
Goddard states:

"Lear is referring to both Cordelia and the fool. What a divine confusion! How the fool loved his master! How he adored Cordelia and pined away. After she went to France! Surely this is the main reason for Shakespeare's banishing the Fool from the play— that he might reappear united to Cordelia on his dear master's lips where dead men meet on lips of living men."

This is an interesting illumination of Shakespeare's poetic insight as also his concept of true immortality. On the lips of the dying old man, truth finds utterance.

"Cordelia lives after death in the imagination of her father; and, as William Blake saw, imagination is another word for eternity."

Thus Shakespeare asserts the reality of a celestial being in Cordelia. Lear is reunited with Cordelia. He has regained his Paradise in prison with her, but she is cruelly snatched from him. This world has struck the final blow, but there is another world
where he may join her. There is no hint that they will be united in the next life; if Shakespeare had meant it, he would have hinted it.

Cordelia's death seems both pointless and cruel, even irrational. As Lear asks:

"Why should a dog, a horse a rat have life, And thou no breath at all."

(V, iii, 308-309)

The question assumes God's world to be man's world. Cordelia's end has to be understood as the Divine Irrational.

"She is a creature with divine qualities, a divine irrationality destroys her. Like Christ's death Cordelia's stoning for the sins of man." 248

Hawkes explains: "The ways of God are above reason to be accepted, not questioned." 249

It is the final irrational event with which Lear has to come to terms. Cordelia's corpse represents the price paid for
The victory of reality and intuition
over appearance and reason.....
Cordelia's body has been the sacrifice
with which it has been bought. Good
has triumphed, Right has been restored. 250

Far from its sacrificial quality, the death of
Cordelia is the most irrational event. The ultimate
irrationality is that even the innocent suffer.

There is terror of the potential evil because
Gods are ruthless and man is powerless.

"The tragic truth about life to the
Shakespeare that wrote King Lear
included its capricious cruelty.
All his world..... is narrowed now
to Cordelia, and She is dead in his
arms. Here is human tragedy brought to
its simplest terms." 251

Oscar Campbell in his article on 'The
Salvation of Lear' suggests that "Cordelia, like
Christ, is hanged so that Mankind might be saved" 252
but as Sylvan Barnet rightly points out
"he fails to explain just how her death saves the King and why it is necessary when her mere presence had already restored health of soul to the King. Lear's agonized ravings over the dead Cordelia are explained away as mere preludes to his blessed discovery that Cordelia is not dead after all, that the breath of life still trembles on her lips. In the joy of this discovery the old man's heart breaks in a spasm of ecstasy, for only to earthbound intelligence is Lear pathetically deceived in thinking poor Cordelia alive."

Another insight about Cordelia's death is to recognize that she is sacrificed in the storm of errors and guilt of others.

In the prison, he has glimpses of celestial bliss but that intimation of immortality is snatched away from him. Cordelia is most hideously hanged. That Lear lives to see her die is a gruesome joke of destiny. Under this final deprivation, Lear is isolated.
Why was Cordelia not saved? Many answers are offered to this question. A cynical reply would be that Cordelia was in such a bad world that it was best for her to die. But to Edward Dowden,

"that which brings us strength and consolation is .... that Cordelia existed ..... Cordelia has strengthened the bonds of humanity; she has enriched the tradition of human goodness."  

Another interpretation is that she falls as a sacrifice to her own nature. True interpretation is that she is too celestial for this earthly existence. She has outwardly restored and inwardly saved her father. She has done her duty which earns well-deserved tribute from her father. "Upon such sacrifice the Gods themselves throw incense." (V, iii, 30-31).

Lear recognizes in her the martyr and the saviour, the precursor of a better time—that is Shakespeare's version of her life and meaning in her death.

When Lear is redeemed and Cordelia has fulfilled her role, the only possible end for her is crucifixion as a redeemer. There is no point in Cordelia remaining alive in the world where injustice has supreme way, and power is evil.
After Cordelia's death, Lear is plunged into gigantic agony, which links him with great tragic heroes like Oedipus and Prometheus.

Cordelia's slaughter at the hands of a common soldier is a wanton outrage against our feelings.

"The death—the least heroic and picturesque or rather the most hideous and degrading—this is the fate that grips the white innocence and resplendent love-strength of Cordelia. To be hanged after the death of her enemies, in the midst of friends. It is the last hideous joke of destiny. The death of Cordelia is the last and most horrible of all the horrible incongruities."

Some critics interpret Cordelia's death by hanging as crucifixion. Lear wakes in Cordelia's arms and Cordelia dies in Lear's arms. It has allegorical significance. They are the martyr and the saviour. For Lear, the earth is dead. There is no regeneration but upon Cordelia's sacrifice, the Gods throw increase. Lear at Dover waking in the arms of Cordelia and Lear with the dead Cordelia in
his arms complete the allegory of the mystery of death in this play. Some critics are convinced that Cordelia's death is the universal accusation against the Divine powers that doom innocence to death.

Some critics compare Cordelia with Christ, Dead daughter in the arms of old father has a parallel in dead son Jesus in the arms of mother Mary. Like Christ, Cordelia provides salvation, if not for all mankind, atleast for Lear,

"the redemption of Lear for Heaven, a redemption analogous to the redemption of mankind, for which the son of God had come down to earth."266

Lear knows that Cordelia has no life at all yet he refuses to accept final separation. His mind, slipping under this blow knows, she is dead as earth. This mind knows that the Heaven on earth is illusory. His heart rebels against such savage dispensation, He strains his ears for her speech. He is sure, she must have a message for him. Earlier, he had not understood her speech and so lost her. He is determined not to repeat this error again. He feels
that he understands the movement of her lips. "Look her lips" (V, iii, 312) - these words show just his wishful thinking. The tests of the looking glass and feather are tests in futility. In a momentary thrill of hope, Lear bends down to hear murmur of Cordelia's still small voice. The silence on her lips is a blow too painful for him. Lear's faith in the Gods is belied. His frantic cry 'No, no, no life' (V, iii, 307) is a protest against the dispensation of whatever Gods there may be.

This illusion that Cordelia lives
"is the underlying tension in Lear until his death. This tension lies between an absolute knowledge that Cordelia is dead and an absolute inability to accept it. 'She's gone for ever' - he repeats over and over. This is the one reality that sears him whenever he attempts to grasp it."gs7

- hence the tests of the looking glass and the feather in spite of his knowledge of her death, he is oblivious to all reality, he puts his ear to her lips in the thought that she might be speaking. This is a wilder self deception than the thought that she
has breathed. He struggles for the belief that she lives under the strain of this psychic need, his agony erupts in a howl. And yet he struggles for sanity. "I know when one is dead, and when one lives." (V, iii, 231). The final point of Lear's sanity is voiced in his recognition "She's gone for ever." (V, iii, 231). In the midst of self deception, he struggles for sanity; that is his other psychic need. Oscillating between these two psychic needs, he collapses.

After the terrible mental agony of her death, Lear has a sense of suffocation. Speech is torn from him and we hear his half human cry: "howl, howl, howl." He does not recognize nor does he care for those around him.

Lear intently looks at her lips, trying to catch her breath. Nicholas Brookes offers an interpretation: "Lear sees her soul issuing from her lips to Heaven in the way of many Renaissance Paintings." 258 Lear clings to this illusion that he has seen her soul issuing from her lips and reaching Heaven. His is a terrible concentration upon the unconquerable fact of death, Cordelia was alive. She is now dead - and that is human tragedy in its simplest terms.
"From power of intellect and will, from
the imaginative sweep of madness, Shakespeare
finally brings Lear to this - to no moralizing
nor high thoughts but just to 'She's gone for ever...'
She's dead as earth." 359

He alternates between believing that the
reality is death and also believing that it is life.
He deceives himself that she lives because the harsh
reality is too unbearable. He makes himself believe
that there is breath, the feather stirs, as "It is a
chance which does redeem all sorrows", (V, iii, 263).
He cannot persuade himself to believe that 'She's
gone for ever' - he cannot tolerate the injustice of
it that she has no life when every insignificant
creature - a horse, a dog, a rat has life. He cannot
understand the incongruity. The very irrationality
repels him. 'And then no breath at all? Then' It
come no more, Never, never, never, never, never.
(V, iii, 308-310).

'The repeated cries of 'never' are
the steady hammering of truth on a
mind unable to endure it... Then
against the unendurable pressure of
reality, the counterbalancing illusion that
Cordelia lives, rushes forth once more." 360
Commenting on Lear's "never, never, never, never," Dorothy Macardle notes that

"the natural iambic flow of the verse is turned backwards, like the ebbing of the tide of life." 261

Lear cannot believe that this is the reality. We knew that she is dead but Lear does not. He thinks she lives. According to Theodore Spencer,

"It is the discovery that Cordelia is alive, ...... that the reality is good - it is this that breaks his heart at last." 262

Lear dies, as he had lived, in illusion he is reunited with his daughter in prison but the happiness is ephemeral. He had found love, only to lose for ever. He dies in agony. Though A.C. Bradley interprets Lear's death as

"Though he is killed by an agony of pain, the agony in which he actually dies is not one of pain, but of ecstasy." 263
"She lives! if it be so, it is a chance which

does redeem all sorrows that ever I have felt"  
(V, iii, 257-260) He thinks, she lives, though

in his knowledge, he is deceived. Some critics

consider Lear's end as a vision of salvation.

Edward Dowden views this end in a different manner.

"Why is it that Gloucester whose suffering

is the retribution for past misdeeds... 

should pass away in a rapture of mingled

gladness and grief, which Lear, a man more

sinned against than sinning, should be

robbed off the comfort of Cordelia's love,

should be stretched to the last moment upon

'the rack of this tough world'?"  

Lear's death is a glorious illustration of

the ambiguity of the great art which offers a wide

liberty of interpretation. J. Stamper contrasts

the deaths of Lear and Gloucester. According to

J. Stamper Gloucester's death, which precedes

Lear's death "is the model for understanding Lear's

deach." 263 Edgar reports his father's death: "Not

sure, though hoping of this good success I ask'd

his blessing and from first to last Told him our

pilgrimage; but his flower'd heart Alack, too weak the
conflict to support" (V, iii, 184-185) Lear's heart too breaks. Says Kent: "Break heart, I prithee, break." (V, iii, 213) This is an indication of excruciating torment beyond belief. Gloucester dies from the exultation of joy; and if Lear dies in ecstasy, it is through self deception.

"Lear holds a dead Cordelia in his arms, Gloucester had acquired a living son. The tragedy leads both to death and to life", 936

One has gained his true child, the other has lost the true child. Lear dies pointing out "Do you see this? Look on her". (V, iii, 218)

G. Wilson Knight wonders "What smiling destiny is this he sees at the last instant of racked mortality?" 957 Though love and music may temporarily heal the racked consciousness of Lear, there is no hope for the broken heart except death. He is stretched upon a wheel of fire "I am bound, / Upon a wheel of fire that mine own tears / Do scald like molten lead." (V, vii, 45-47) Only death ends his agony. His heart must break to deliver him from the rack of this tough world.
A. C. Bradley views Lear's death as a transfiguration of joy to counterbalance all that has preceded it. A. C. Bradley believes that Lear's death counterbalances the unendurable suffering. But as J. Stampfer points out:

"There is no mitigation in Lear's death. It is only by giving Lear's death a fleeting ecstatic joy that Bradley can read some sort of reconciliation into the ending, some renewed synthesis of cosmic goodness to follow an antithesis of pure evil. Without it, this is simply, as Lear recognized, a universe where dogs, horses and rats live, and Cordelias are butchered."268

According to J. Stampfer, "Lear's death, in spite of its regeneration in Act III is a problem of Catharsis."268

Lear is caught in the cycle of despair and the illusion of hope - who can say at what point of the cycle Lear expires? Some critics have interpreted that he dies in a happy illusion. It is ironic that Lear who had illusions about everybody should relapse into illusion at the end. The response of the loyal Kent shows that Lear's heart has cracked
at the cruel visage of life that ordains the death of the most valuable person; yet Lear's illusion of her moving lips is an indication that he dies, not in despair, but in hope. Though Irwin Claxton is of the opinion that "..... by his bitter sufferings at the full realisation of his folly, Lear dies." But Theodore Spencer believes that Lear dies in delusion.

"Lear's purgation came too late to bring about the resurrection of the Cordelia whom he loved, and his deluded belief in the living movement of her lips was a delusion that killed him." 271

On the heath and in the bough he has suffered, suffering has brought out his inner nobility. Upto the last moment he remains a titanic symbol of the inner suffering and torment. The death agony of Lear is crowned with the peace of death. It is pain which imparts serenity to his death. It is the pain of strangled beauty.

This is the absolute peace of death, nothingness where consciousness was ... .... hideousity drawn out beyond endurance
on the rack of life whose cruelty brings
beauty to birth, whose beauty is its most
agonising cruelty wherein shall we seek our
revelation in that deathless dream of love
or in this death?" 372

Lear's death is a release from sufferings; it is an
escape from extreme distress;

"a kind of euthanasia at a moment when
perhaps for a fleeting second, he thinks
Cordelia is not dead." 373

Lear sorrowing at Cordelia's death, has an unexpected
glimpse of her ascent to Heaven 'Do you see this?
Look'. (V, ii, 312) - and so he dies in divine bliss.
It is believed that men breathing their last, see the
dead departed before their eyes. He sees the ascent
of her soul,

He has the glimpse of immortality and in that
frenzied state he passes to eternity. As K. G.
Luraiswami feels

"The death of Lear is not only artistically
inevitable but comes as a remission and
release, 'the last and yet sweet consolation' -
as Coleridge puts it." 374
In spite of physical and mental torment, Lear has never bent down. Whatever his sufferings, Lear, unlike Gloucester, never for a moment thinks of suicide as an escape from agony. Though Man, Nature and Gods seem to conspire against this old man, he never lapses into the thought of self-sought end. There is a basic difference between their attitudes to life as also in their deaths. Gloucester's heart bursts with extreme joy at the knowledge that his son is miraculously restored to him. Lear's heart bursts in extreme despair when his daughter is hanged. His noble heart cracks at the excruciating tragic fact of his eternal separation from her. Death is the only way to ease the unbearable pain of the wounded.

The last words of Lear are 'Uprose this button'. (V, iii, 311) They come very near the utterance of Lord Krishna in Bhagvad Gita, interpreting death as a release from the outworn life. Death is like the undoing of a button - casting away the rags of mortality. In his last moments Lear stands isolated - old and feeble but titanic in spirit. In his deep anguish he defies Gods and remains indifferent to society. What can be expected of the mind strained
and tortured? He partially catches at the truth and then lapses into obliviousness — it is the most heart-touching stroke when he fails to recognize and forgets after half-recognition his loyal follower Kent. The news of the deaths does not touch him. When Kent informs him “Your eldest daughters have forborne themselves, and desperately are dead.” (V, iii, 292-294). “Ay, so I think” is his cursory remark. After the most hideous cruel jolt of Cordelia dead before him, nothing moves him to pity or tears now. His response to his most sympathetic followers is of sheer indifference and high-minded carelessness.

This final underlining of the cruelty and anguish of Lear is in contrast to the utmost fidelity of those around him at his death. The Renaissance humanists always point out that it is in adverse circumstances that friendship, fidelity and nobility can best show their worth. Here the Pagan ethics comes very close to Christian ethics in its cardinal virtues of humility, pity, fidelity — as are exemplified in the loyal followers of Lear at the time of his decline and death. Lear retains the loyalty of Kent even after his death. It is then
that Kent resolves to follow his master in death:
"I have a journey, sir, shortly to go. My master calls me, I must not say no." (V, iii, 222-224)
His loyalty is stretched even to the after life.
The reaction of Kent to the catastrophe of Lear is interpreted by Stephen Booth. Kent says: "I am come to bid my King and master also good-night." (V, iii, 236-237)

"Where 'master' fits both Lear and God, conflates the separated finite world and infinite world - the promise of an afterlife acts upon the audience." 278

Inspite of excruciating harshness of fate, there is one silver lining at the death of Lear. The loyal followers of Lear have either pined away in sympathy for the master or wish to follow him after his death. If the fool has died beyond the stage; Kent the other loyal follower confesses that he will follow his master in death. Gods may be unjust, but in the loyalty of the divine Cordelia, the fool and Kent, the play has revealed the gold of humanity on this dead earth.

The Lear story is a saga of tragic evolution.
Lear begins at the apex of society as a King and
passes through the searing experience on a stormy
night to emerge as a figure of suffering and
renunciation. Suffering leads to his regeneration.
His authority yields to humility, his egotism
yields to sympathy and wisdom. It is at the end
of his long life that he discovers true wealth.
The anguish of others is now his. The King becomes
a man.

"It is now, not at the beginning, that he
is every inch a king, for he has taken
the first steps toward self conquest." 276

He has braved the storms of life and not
yielded. He has questioned his infallibility. He
has known the sufferings of others and found
salvation in it, he has moved towards mercy and
forgiveness.

"Like the flashes of lightning that
momentarily illuminate the landscape for
the lost traveller, there is a spiritual
lightning that illuminates the lost soul." 277

He is like some white haired ancient rebel denouncing
injustice. He cries prophetically "Things should
change or cease."
Lear's is the world of the soul. It is metaphysical.

From the vantage point of the play, Lear appears to be the maker of his destiny not so much by his acts as by the questions that he raises. He debates the problem of guilt. He is preoccupied with the flesh the flesh that suffers.

His dialogue with the storm is his confrontation with the Gods. Pitting himself against the Gods, Lear challenges them to reveal their nature and his own. He asks a fundamental question: 'Who is it that can tell me who I am? (I, iv, 252). Man's knowledge about himself is a metaphysical question but that knowledge is purchased at a terrible price, having passed through tortures, madness and illness. His last question is why life is possible for some and denied to others. Lear challenges Gods - is man the slave of Gods or are Heavenly powers themselves servile?

"But yet I call you servile ministers, that have with two pomicious daughters join'd your high-engender'd battle 'gainst a head so old and white as this." (III, ii, 21-24).
Thus Lear's confrontation with his evil daughters raises deeper questions of man's existence and his relation with God. Does nature take side of the wicked? Why does nature torture the Good? When Lear descends on the level with common man, he comes nearer man. He leaves the truth: "though art the thing itself, unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare, forked animal as thou art." (III, iv, 108-111). The stark truth comes out when he loses the crown. Lear understands the truth when he goes mad. Wisdom dawns upon him when his mind breaks into lunacy, when his mind is "crucified on the cross beams of love and disillusion." 378 His purgatory is "a purgatory of the mind - of madness." 379 Q. Wilson Knight rightly analyses: "Lear is mentally a child; in passion a Titan." 380

Lear undergoes tortures and torments. Though this titanic protagonist is crushed by adversity through his own weakness or the maliciousness of fate, he endures all catastrophes with tremendous spirit and fortitude and through inner nobility. This heroic protagonist fails in his judgment. Due to his feeble old age his mind falters but his instincts are noble. Q. Wilson Knight rightly assesses the incongruity in Lear's personality.
"A tremendous soul is incongruously geared to a puerile intellect."

Lear sane is exiled from the truth. Egotism and lack of sympathy are his blinkers. He banishes Cordelia and Kent; but when his mind gives way, truth begins to break in. Lear at the extremest moment sees the truth. Having undergone the ordeal of suffering, he gains spiritual vision. He is crowned with the wisdom of simplicity and misery. Ultimately he attains self-knowledge.

"In his dizzying fluctuations between contradictory meanings Lear reenacts the intense shifting between demystification and remystification of the self." 282

During the course of his ordeal he develops remarkably from a vain hot-tempered tyrant to a man aware of the omnipresence of social wrong. In his encounter with blind Gloucester near Dover, and Lear reveals a surprising awareness of the corruption in his Kingdom. As Annette Rubenstein notes,

"Exposed to the pitiless storm, Lear does not express remorse for having misjudged
his children, but compunction at having ignored the needs of his subjects." 283

His ordeal completes his education as well as his regeneration. From the defiant Lear of the Act I the play leads us to the redeemed Lear of the Last Act. His titanic spirit fights to the last, his death in defeat endorses the truth of the tragic-terror, mentioned in the definition of tragedy by Aristotle.

"He recovers sanity with Cordelia but is shocked back again into merciful insanity by Cordelia's death." 284

He dies in the illusion of control over his destiny

"Shakespeare's subject is illusion, and in Lear, it is shown as an incurable condition." 285

Yet Lear is the most heroic and titanic Protagonist; he is not a passive sufferer only. His long journey ends in intuitive self-knowledge, Lear depicts;

"through his life and death, a universe in which even those who
have fully repented, done penance
and risen to the tender regard of
Sainthood can be hunted down, driven
insane, and killed by the most agonizing
extremes of passion."

Mark Van Doren comments:

"The great wheel of Fortune which
comes full circle for Edmund and
which grinds remorselessly for
Edgar ..... must grow for Lear
into a wheel of Fire that turns
with him down into a hell of his
own making."

Lear with Cordelia, dead in his arms,
dominates the stage. His titanic emotions break
forth in high anger at gross injustice. All others
are reduced to mere whisper. Inspite of his
infirmitiy, he kills Cordelia's hangman. His frenzy
can reach such delirious fury!

Lear reaches the nadir of annihilation with
his sharp reaction "never, never, never, never,
never." (V, iii, 310) just as he reaches the nadir
of revenge with his words of revenge "kill, kill, kill, kill, kill, kill," (IV, v, 168). Death of one so dear and noble is no matter of rhetoric.
The vision and wisdom of misery are added to the vision and wisdom of old age. Wisdom of old age is strengthened by the wisdom of misery. As Edith Sitwell observes:

"Man going bare to death unrolls before us the history of a great King powerful and ancient as the Heavens who must learn that his hands 'smelle of mortalitie' and who through the darkness of the mind reaches the night of the soul and through the night of the soul reaches the light." 288

To John Mary:

"The positive theme is no less than the death of the self and the birth of divine love." 289

The plot of King Lear offers a purposeful working out of a philosophy of Katharsis.

"In King Lear the suffering of mankind is sublimated into a noble stoic destiny. Lear, Gloucester Cordelia, Kent, Edgar, The Fool
endure their lot and eye surfeited with the halo of suffering. All are brought by their own pain to a noble and exquisite apprehension of the pain of other. "290

The Lear universe, compared with the world of Greek drama is found to be more cruel. Edmund dooms his father to death. He is ready to execute his brother Edgar; Corny and Regan drive out their old father in a stormy night, then hate each other and one kills the other; still more painful is the fact that no Gods intervene to save Cordelia. Evil has the sway, though good is not missing. Nicholas Brooke points out:

"Good' dominates with Cordelia, 'right' with Albany; 'wrong' with Edmund, 'evil' with Corny; these successive dominations ironically balance each other. "291

Rather the two main themes of King Lear are the cruelty of man and the wanton cruelty of Heaven. Yet there is a ray of hope in the darkness of cruelty and misery. Shakespeare shows that average humanity is not corrupted. Shakespeare has highlighted the
the revolt of Cornwall's anonymous servant as also the merciful attitude of the equally anonymous old man who leads blind Gloucester to Edgar. As Bradley points out here "good grows side by side with evil." If Goneril and Regan personify cruelty, Cordelia is nobility personified. She is the hope of humanity. In this stark tragedy it is a consolation that such a gentle person like Cordelia existed.

"The theme of Cordelia expresses not only a daughter's love for the father but something far more: the struggle of man against inhumanity. Lear's youngest daughter is not only the heir of the King; she is the inheritor of a far greater treasure. She is a guardian of those treasures which man has won for man." So, in this play, we have, on one hand, a glimpse of universal evil but we also have a realization that good does co-exist with evil.

Terence Hawkes has well analysed the plot of the play.
"The Lear plot treats the disjunction of reason and intuition as the Gloucester plot treats its analogue, that of appearance and reality." 294

At the end, Lear goes mad to achieve higher sanity; Gloucester is blinded to see properly. Both Lear and Cordelia have achieved the spiritual reality of true love, away from the butterflies of the court.

"So we'll live....
And pray and sing, and tell old tales, and laugh
At gilded butterflies."

(V, iii, 11-13)

What comes after death is anticipated in the Paradise that Lear and Cordelia find in prison.

"In this story of a great offence expiated by a great suffering, we end at a higher point than we began. Lear, as he staggers in carrying the body of Cordelia, is blessed by comparison with the savagely limited figure we see at the beginning; he knows, at least, what love means." 295
Even the supreme powers of the universe humble themselves before men and bow to him for

"Upon such sacrifices, my Cordelia,
The God themselves throw incense."

(V, iii, 20-21)

During the course of the play the good are purified by adversity; the bad are demoralized and brutalized by success. The evil people degenerate swiftly, growing from bad to worse. The wicked appear unnatural, whereas the good, on their purgatorial pilgrimage, attain spiritual harmony.

"Three persons stand out with more vivid life than the rest - Edmund,
Lear, Cordelia. They correspond to three periods in man's evolution -
the Primitive, the Civilised and the Ideal." 188

The end of Lear as of Gloucester is centred round filial obligation and paternal love. Three eminent critics Profes., R.W. Chambers, L.G. Knights and Q. Wilson Knight interpret the end of the play as the victory of love.
"We may frame it, with Prof. Chambers, as 'the victory of Cordelia and of love', or with Prof. Knights as 'the complete endorsement of love as a quality of being', or with Prof. Wilson Knight as 'the primary persons, good and bad, die into love." [287]

It is better to interpret the play thus than as an embodiment of despair.

The impact of Cordelia's death on Lear bears out the view that destructive powers seem to rule human life yet it does not lead to a nihilistic denial of human values. That Cordelia did exist is in itself a guarantee to assert highest values. It is a pity that the weakness of Lear proves as ruinous as the ruthlessness of Edmund.

Maynard Mack offers another view of the play that the ultimate uncertainty in King Lear is the question of man's fate. He enters a world in which existence is itself tragic....

"because existence is inseparable from relation. We are born from and to it. It envelopes us in our lives." [298]
The dead Cordelia makes a visionary of Lear. He projects an inspired vision - vision of insanity and death. Here he puts metaphysical vision. Insight is superior to physical sight. He sees Cordelia alive even after her death.

The play reflects two modes of evil

(1) animalism of the wicked daughters and
(2) atheism of Edmund. As is pointed out by Margaret Webster

"the evil in Lear's world is a force liberated by mankind to destroy itself." 299

Evil mankind is self-slaughterous:

"Humanity must perform prey on itself, like monsters of the deep."

(IV, ii, 48-49)

General and Regan in their powerful evil are self-degrading and self-destructive

"The warm castle is a morn in hell, the storm swept heath a sanctuary. The judgment of this world is a lie;"
its goods which we covet, corrupt us;
its ills which break our bodies, set
our souls free."300

But even the evil sisters Goneril and Regan, however
wicked and cruel, die in the cause of love. The
evil does destroy much good but they end by
destroying themselves. Goneril is evil incarnate.
Ruthlessly cruel, Goneril plots against her husband's
life, poisons her sister and then commits suicide.

King Lear is Shakespeare's dramatic vision
of two inter-related themes - deception and self
deception.

"Shakespeare dramatized the tragedy
of men's fragmentation, self deception
and renunciation which leads to personal
and social chaos."301

Edith Sitwell's observation is a revealing one.

"Goethe said that 'Time is an element'.
Time may be said to be the other element
in Lear, or when Coleridge said, 'Old
age is a character'. But in King Lear,
the character is more than old age; it
is time itself."302
King Lear is interpreted in several ways. It is a study in evil. It is a study in triple relationship: Children-parent relationship, man-state relationship, and man-God relationship. The play has a double theme (1) Bond between man and society (2) Bond between man and nature. Cordelia represents the bond of sympathy, Edmund repudiates the human bond. Edmund dies as isolated as he lived. It seems man must live by the bond of love or be destroyed. Cordelia and Kent are the glowing examples of the bond of love and the play is a justification of that bond, though there is no providential justice. Lear himself has broken the natural bond and that starts his tragedy. Penance can purify and restore the bond but in King Lear, penance is of no avail. The penultimate tragedy of Lear is not the tragedy of imbris but the tragedy of penance. Retributive justice is the foundation of society but corruption within and without, shakes the foundation. So here, though the wicked are destroyed, the good are not rewarded. Lear universe presents humanity working at cross purposes tormenting, judging, condemning, pitying; helping each other.

The Morality Play of the Middle Ages presented a true companion, willing to suffer death with a loved
one Cordelia's unselfish God-like love is capable of accompanying her father even unto the Mercy Seat of God. As Sylvan Barnet remarks

Lear has discovered in her unselfish God-like love, the one companion who is willing to go with him through Death unto the throne of the Everlasting Judge. 304

The Elizabethan theatre bore the impress of the traditional morality play and the classics made familiar by the Renaissance. King Lear in a sense is a sublime morality play depicting the road from sin to salvation. Oscar Campbell sees King Lear as a Christian picture of regeneration. 305 Lear is not wholly redeemed as is reflected in his boastful assertion of having killed Cordelia's hangman, "I kill'd the slave that was a hanging thee" (V, iii, 276). So not redemption, but exhaustion and relief characterize his death. E.K. Chambers comments

"there is Nemesis in plenty for the wicked, who are taken in the web of their own devising; but this carries with it no salvation for Lear and for Cordelia,"
Cordelia is murdered and the tale of Lear's disaster is full. 306.

The play seems to invalidate all moral structures - Christian or natural (Pagan) by the sheer evidence of experience, Theodore Spencer reflects on the ethical conundrum in King Lear.

"Everything is not evil in King Lear ....

... yet, .... in the world of Lear, goodness has to hide. Cordelia is banished, Kent has to disguise himself, Edgar not merely pretends to be mad but unnecessarily conceals himself from his father in several other ways. And evil seems to conquer crushingly when Lear enters with Cordelia dead in his arms. But if we look more closely at this last scene, we shall find that for Lear himself evil does not conquer after all." 307

King Lear may be interpreted as a bitter attack upon humanity itself, a terrible cry against the overwhelming power of the Gods. In the Lear World, the guilty are all punished, wickedness
destroys itself, but help comes too late and
Virtues are overmatched by cunning and malice.

J. Stampfer analyses the plot-

"Almost every possible point of view on
the Gods and cosmic justice is expressed
from a malevolent wanton polytheism
(IV, i, 38-39), to an astrological
determinism (Iv, iii, 34-35), from an
amoral personified nature-Goddess
(I, ii, 1) to high judging Jove (II, iv, 231)
The very multitude do not cancel each other out
but rather show how precarious is the concept
of cosmic justice. .... The justification of God's
way with man is invoked by so many characters
and with such concern, that it emerges as
a key issue in the play.* 308

Reviewing the totality of the play Margaret
Webster states:

"Every character makes some reference to
the Gods, the Heavens, the eternal
and
vengeance, the justicers above the
stars which govern our conditions. But
it is the wheel of human action which
comes a full and terrible circle." 309
Margaret Webster further adds: "Everyone of their actions brings retribution - not exact or just but magnified to a vast and horrible doom." 310

In *King Lear* there is the Christian concept of Retributive justice, but its Pagan world excludes Christian doctrine of salvation. Some find Senecan fatalism in *King Lear*. There is greatness in the pain and solemnity in the unfathomed mystery. The play is great "in a positive and purposeful working out of a Purgatorial philosophy." 311

The action in *King Lear* is metaphysical, Lear raises the metaphysical question of his identity. He finds the answer through suffering torture, pain and illness. He raises the other question of nature of Gods and men. Through the darkness of his madness, flashes the truth. The final question that Lear asks is the unreason of death itself - which allows some to live and kills others. The answers embodied in the play reveal a Pagan humanist attitude but the lesson learnt by Lear points towards Christian humility and resignation; and in the character of Cordelia and in her hanging we find an allegory of the passion of Christ and his ascent to Heaven. Sylvan Barnett is of this view.
"Lear is calmly receptive to the healing power of Christian love. Her love is specifically Christian in a play set in Pre-Christian days." 212

According to Frank Kermode

"Shakespeare offers intimations of Christian apocalypse but frustrates them .... denies his divine compensations. Lear's sufferings seem to end, and are then renewed. Lear speaks of life as beginning in misery only to continue and end in it." 213

Frank Kermode even ascribes religious colouring to the storm by describing it as "the wrath of a Christian God meting out justice." 314

In this play, both the Medieval and the Renaissance values disintegrate. In King Lear, everyone dies or is killed. Edgar, Albany and Kent, have survived but as just ruined pieces of nature, Lear and Gloucester invoke Gods and appeal to forces of nature, but of no avail; events take their own course.
John Dennis takes the play to be
"one profound expression of an essentially
Christian element on man's world
and his society. ... King Lear is at
least as Christian as The Divine Comedy."

C.L. Barber stresses the inverted parallel
between the Christian pietas and reversed pietas
of the Pagan world.

"Lear with Cordelia in his arms is a
pieta with the roles reversed, not Holy
Mother with Her dead Son, but Father with
his dead daughter whom he looked to for
the Divine in the human."

But according to Jan Kott, the secularism
of the Renaissance finds expression in King Lear.

"King Lear is an inquiry into the meaning
of this journey, into the existence or
non-existence of Heaven and Hell. . . .

... there is neither Christian Heaven
nor the Heaven predicted and believed
in by humanists. King Lear makes a
tragic mockery of all eschatalogies of
the Heaven promised on earth and the
Heaven promised after death; - in fact,
of both Christian and secular theodicies;
of cosmogony and of the rational view
of history; of the Gods and natural
goodness, of man made in the 'image
and likeness'"[317]

The poet's imagination while invalidating
ethical or Christian doctrines, has revealed a
man's existence as nothing but his spirit as
heroic on this cruel earth. Death remains an
irrational mystery while the spirit of man remains
a challenging miracle. Neither the ethics of
reward and punishment, nor the Christian doctrine of
suffering and salvation can offer an adequate answer
to the metaphysical question - why Condeila should
die, while inferior creatures are permitted to live.

The wisest observation about death is
'ripeness is all' -- the rare few face death with
equanimity and calm - happy in the thought that
their time has come.
This sentence of Edgar is a statement of the essential meaning of the play. It indicates a responsiveness to life. The 'I' in the individual now ceases to be in the centre, and personal action is now transformed into the impersonal. Edgar is Pre-Christian.

"Men must endure
Their going hence, even as their coming hither:
Ripeness is all."

( V, 11, 9-11)

His philosophy of 'Ripeness' is stoic wisdom which is universal and to that extent not irrelevant to Christianity. Though George Orwell refers to it as "an un-Christian sentiment" and George Seibel regards it as "no more appropriate to a Christian than to Omar Khayyam," R.M. Frye comes to conclusion that "this remark of Edgar remains more nearly stoic than Christian." 'Ripeness is all' is the expression of the spirit of resignation. Passive at the hour of birth, we must be passive at the hour of death. We must endure our going hence,
since the hour of our death is in the hands of Providence. Nicholas Brooke interprets "Ripeness is all" as "readiness" —

That men must be prepared to die; but its remarkable creative power . . . . already clearly involves more than that - in contrast to Gloucester's word "rot" it suggests the perfect maturity of fruit -- a point of achievement at which death may be more appropriate than decay. In a play so persistently concerned both with old age and with nature, this phrase has such powerful reverberations. .... This might be the final judgment of a stoic tragedy marking the point at which regret for the hero's death gives place to satisfaction at his achievement. 321

Shakespeare's dramatization of death is not confined only to what is said about death, but is evoked through imagery and context. In King Lear he has viewed death from the East and the West.
Edmund, Goneril and Regan meet retributive punishment in their deaths. After the victory of the King's forces, Cordelia dies the worst of deaths by hanging - not only men have hard hearts, but even Gods. Under this blow the King asks an accusing question about the injustice of mortality. The death of Lear is an act of mercy shown to a tortured and tottering man. The deaths of Cornwall, Goneril and Regan endorse the terrible vision of humanity praying upon itself

"Humanity must perforce prey on itself,
Like monsters of the deep."

(IV, ii, 49-50)

Shakespeare discriminates between death which comes to all and the understanding and wisdom which come to some through intense suffering before they die. Pain leads to death but it rewards man with recognition of Truth and reunion with a supreme value before death.

The types of deaths of the women in King Lear justify the play as a tragedy of three women. Cordelia is hanged, Regan is poisoned and Goneril
commits suicide. All three embrace hideous death. But who can deny that far more painful than this physical torment has been the mental agony of Lear? It is the mighty confrontation of that titanic spirit which lends sublimity to the play.

In this play there is a greater acceptance of death than its defiance. 'Ripeness is all' sums up Shakespeare's attitude to death. In all cases here, no matter who dies, death seems to come as a release rather than annihilation. In an apparently pagan world, the attitude to death reflects Christian doctrine. All good characters who die, at once tend to be martyrs; whereas the evil doers die in a way where death seems to be a sort of nemesis.
Macbeth

Hardly any other play reeks so much with death as 'Macbeth'. Death struts about as a protagonist in Shakespearean tragedy, but more so here. Death in Macbeth is a sort of protagonist, sneaking in from all sorts of corners of darkness. Death ranges between the King and the Kids - taking a heavy toll of lives including that of the killers. The plot reminds us, rather remotely, of the fall of Adam. Macbeth is a criminal Adam with Lady Macbeth playing a fiendish Eve. Like Eve, it is Lady Macbeth who prompts Macbeth and even abets him by igniting his passion overthrowing his reason. It depicts the age-old conflict that brought about the fall of Man.

Macbeth is the saga of a waste land. The play has only one theme - murder. The characters kill or are killed. Ambition has only one meaning in Macbeth, the intention and planning of murder. Terror in this play means memory of murders and fear of inevitable new crimes. It starts with the murder of a King, then one just has to kill the Killer is himself killed.

"The huge steam roller of history has been put in motion and crushes everybody in turn. In Macbeth this murder-cycle does not possess the logic of a mechanism but reminds one of a frighteningly growing nightmare."
Macbeth structures up some fundamental moral problems in a way that its pattern approximates to that of a morality play. Here the conflict is between duty and lust of ambition, reason and passion. When lust and passion triumph over duty and reason, the result is death. The way death is structured up, it makes Macbeth a morality play; rather it is a topsy-turvy morality play.

In Macbeth, first and last scenes are those of war. First two acts dramatize murder; third and fourth acts are about tyranny and murder, and the last describes the holocaust of war. It is a terrible tragedy of ambition, of wrong, of crime and retribution. In Macbeth's beginning is his end. It is a Shakespearean insight that courage turns into ambition and yields to temptation and treads the primrose path to the everlasting bonfire.

The briefly reported history of Cawdor's rebellion and punishment is a preview of Macbeth, the play. The play begins with Cawdor's death. Cawdor is stoic and Senecan in his death. In the hour of death, he retains a noble attitude and dignity. He died repentant, as is reported by Malcolm to King Duncan:

"That very frankly he confess'd his treasons, Implor'd your highness pardon and set forth, A deep repentence. Nothing in his life Became him like the leaving it; he died, As one that had been studied in his death To throw away the dearest thing he ow'd, As 'twere a careless trifle."

(I, iv, 5-11)
Cowdor's death in the beginning has a parallel with Macbeth's death in the end. But Macbeth dies unrepentant. Cowdor's death is the starting point of Macbeth's journey of martial glory, which is in fact, a road to death.

Macbeth in the beginning had won glory on the battlefield as a maker of "strange images of death." (I, iii, 97). But the honour that he won in war changes into criminality as he proceeds on the path of ambition. The witches prepare the mind for what follows. The play has an atmosphere of mystery the prophecy of the witches, the airy dagger and the dreaming grooms. There is an unearthly deadness in the night of the murder. It is alive with preternatural phenomena in the world of physical events. Most scenes occur at night -- at midnight and at the hours before dawn. It is night from which sleep is banished. Here the night symbolizes death.

The witches burst on Macbeth at a moment of mental conflict. He was vacillating between the impulse for order and the impulse to destroy order. The witches meet under conditions of disorder -- rain, thunder, lighting. The witches are a reversal of the normal order. "Foul is fair, fair is foul." (I, i, 11). They mystify and horrify. They communicate equivocal prophecies of uncertain meanings. They register the triumph of appearance over reality. Hence witches and daggers
which appear to be real are not real. The witches underline the hallucinatory nature of all that surrounds Macbeth up to the final hallucination of Birnam Wood which causes his death. The witches scatter seeds of temptation in Macbeth as he has the fault of ambition, which is the determining passion in the play. Guilty ambition, aided by diabolic malice results in murder. The supernatural malice of the witches tempts Macbeth and he yields. They tempt Banquo but he does not yield. This supernatural agency can conspire against Macbeth's virtue and his loyalty because his soul is prepared for the witches.

The world of the witches is deceptive. It is a contrast to Duncan's world of heroic reality. The Witches can be interpreted in terms of modern psychology. They symbolize the murky unexplored areas of the mind. They appeal to the indecision and error in Macbeth which are their elements. So Macbeth is responsive to them, but Banquo is coolly wary.

Marlowe received Mephistopheles, and the devils from Morality plays. Shakespeare derived the Witches from folklore but transformed them into weird sisters, symbols of the environmental evil. These weird sisters have the gift of foreknowledge but they are not fates. They are the instruments of metaphysical darkness. They
are personified forces of disorder and disintegration. Their power to vanish makes them "death symbols." They are associated with the dark elements of human nature. They are symbols of evil in the heart of man yet they are outside him. They are powerless over those who do not meet them half way, hence they fail to instigate Banquo. At first mere bubbles they grow into external forces co-operating with the malignity in human soul as in the case of Macbeth.

Their appearance synchronizes with the tide of temptation in Macbeth's heart. As A. Smirnov points out:

"A contraposition of 'fair' and 'foul' marks Shakespeare's attitude to the inner life of Man. It rather expresses the antithesis between the life giving and the death-dealing principles: life, existence, blossoming-petrefaction, decay, death. Shakespeare does not assert that the abyss dividing fair from foul is unpasable." He feels that when two truths are told, the third is sure to happen. He wisely thinks:

"If chance will have me King,
why, chance may crown me,
Without my stir."

(I,iii,142-143)
The influence of the Witches along with the external influence of Lady Macbeth push the hesitating Macbeth to the brink of murder. She succeeds in crushing all that is kindly and merciful in him. It is she who tempts him with Golden opportunities. He is as much instigated by his wife as by the prophecies of the witches.

Macbeth's conscience worries him. He is aware of the horror of the deed. Even its contemplation makes him a neurotic. But Lady Macbeth overrides his conscience by accusing him of lack of valour and manhood. His response is immediate—may become a man; "I dare do all that who dares do more is none."
(I, vii, 45-46).

Lady Macbeth is confident that

"The sleeping and the dead
Are but as pictures; 'tis the eye of childhood that fears a painted devil."

(II, ii, 54-56)

Yet in spite of her prayer to the contrary, she has not lost her femininity. — She is struck by the resemblance of Duncan with her father.

"......... Had he not resembled
My father as he slept I had done't."

(II, ii, 14-15)
She demands murder from Macbeth as an act of love.

"......... From this time
Such I account thy love. Art thou afraid
To be the same in thine own act and valour
As thou art in desire? Wouldst thou have that
Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life,
And live a coward in thine own esteem,
Letting 'I dare not wait upon 'I would"

(I, vii, 38-44)

In their world, there is no margin left for love or friendship. In this world "murder is being imposed as Fate, compulsion, and Inner necessity." 325

Lady Macbeth equates "the milk of human kindness" (I, v, 18) with cowardice, and thereby she makes a monster of him. Their partnership becomes a deadly tie. They plan a rising ascent, but it becomes a rapid descent. Their marriage ends as an appearance.

In the first half of the play, Lady Macbeth exerts the ultimate deciding influence on the action. She ignores the future consequences.
"Moral distinctions do not in this exaltation exist for her or rather they are inverted. 'Good' means to her the crown and whatever is required to obtain it, 'Evil' whatever stands in the way of its attainment." 326

In this respect, she is the fourth witch. She has no communion with nature, the noises before the murder have no effect on her.

Lady Macbeth is strong enough of will to quell her husband's cowardly conscience. Lady Macbeth's aggressive character is his tragedy, but stifled conscience is her tragedy. She can plot but she cannot act. She must leave the actual act of murder to Macbeth. She nags her husband to murder because she cannot see beyond her commonplace ambition. "She is content to ask Heaven to look the other way". 327 She knows no moral order. To her guilt is something like gilt that we can paint and wash off.

"I'll gild the faces of the grooms withal; For it must seem their guilt."

(II, ii, 57-58)
Lady Macbeth is bent on her purpose. For her, everything ends in that achievement.

"Up to it, hers has been the tiger nature, ..... tense on the purpose, on the prey; her husband but a half hearted accomplice." 328

According to Lady Macbeth an ambitious man ought not to be concerned with 'oughts' and 'ought nots'. Macbeth's wishes clash with his sense of moral duty. In the words of his dearest partner "thou wouldst not play false." (I, v, 22). But in her opinion, Macbeth ought to seize the future at the present time, by "the nearest way." (I, v, 19).

Macbeth is ambitious but he is tortured by his conscience.

"The Eye wink at the hand; yet let that be Which the eye fears, when it is done, to see".

(I, iv, 52-53)

Francis Berry comments on this disintegration of Macbeth's personality.
"Macbeth hopes that the instrumental organ of indicative action (his hand) should perform in isolation from the organ of perception which must 'winke' so that his conscience does not have to sanction the deed of his hand •••••• He must translate subjunctive desire into indicative possession and yet keep himself pure and innocent within his subjective realm."

By linguistic manipulation he tries to shield himself by using the passive voice.

"If it were done when 'tis done then 'twere well It were done quickly."

(I, vii, 1-2)

He does not accept the responsibility of doing that hideous deed. Rather he avoids it by saying "it is done".

(II, i, 62).
In murdering Duncan, Macbeth violates the bond as a kinsman, host, subject. He is therefore totally isolated from society and nature. It is a deed, most monstrous. It is not murder simply. It is much more, it is murder, most foul, strange, unnatural.

Here is murder that is not merely a crime or even regicide. It is above all the betrayal of solemn trust, a heresy against the orderly working of creation.

"He's here in double trust: First as I am his kinsman and his subject, strong both against the deed; then, as his host who should against his murderer shut the door, Not bear the knife myself."

(I, vii, 12-16)

Thus the murder they have planned, is impious. It is a violation of all natural bonds. It is a breach of sacrosanct loyalties between kinsmen, between King and subject, between guest and host. Macbeth was aware of it and yet he murdered Duncan.

Prof. Kott explains Macbeth's dilemma.
"Macbeth has killed the king, because he could not accept a Macbeth who would be afraid to kill a king. But Macbeth, who has killed, cannot accept the Macbeth who has killed. Macbeth has killed in order to get rid of a nightmare. But it is the necessity of murder that makes the nightmare."

Macbeth commits murder, inspite of his horror of the deed. But the crown brings him no peace. He has been aware that it is a desecration of a "double trust" (I, vii, 12) a desecration of hospitality, loyalty, even life itself

"The wine of life is drawn, and the mere less Is left this vault to brag of."

(II, iii, 102-103)

The deed is done, not without anguish and remorse. He sees a dagger in the air, with the handle toward his hand yet when he tries to clutch it, he cannot.

He rightly apprehends that it is a "fatal vision"

(II, i, 36).

"A dagger of the mind, a false creation Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?"

(II, i, 38-39)
But Macbeth does not murder Duncan because he sees a dagger in the air, rather he sees the dagger because he is about to murder Duncan. In his own words:

"It is the bloody business which informs
Thus to mine eyes."

(II, i, 48-49)

Macbeth's dagger has cut out the strands of the sanctity of life and of relationship.

"The crime of Macbeth is a shockingly multiple violation of pietas." 331

After the murder therefore his spiritual desolation is complete. It is the desolation of a man who has given his eternal jewel to the enemy of man.

Duncan's murder is a dark act in a dark world. Everything that he says after the murder of Duncan shows that the meaning of this gruesome deed is not lost on him.
"The climactic act, which sets its scene on Macbeth's life, the murder of Duncan, takes place in terms which suggest an 'unreal' area of experience." 332

He is acutely aware of the emptiness of his achievement. He did it under the goadings of his wife. It was his downfall. Macbeth who was aware of the vileness of his deed even before he committed it. Soon after the deed, he is aware of its sheer futility. It seems that Duncan bled to incarnadine the mind and the vision of the murderer. From that moment, Macbeth becomes the victim of fear and suspicion. He is aware of the blood on his hand. He cries in despair:

"Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood Clear from my hand? No, this my hand will rather The multitudinous seas incarnadine Making the green one red."

(II, ii, 61-64)
Here "incarnadine" suggests that

"Duncan's blood is colouring everything
as in a metaphysical sense, it is
to 'colour' Macbeth's life from now on." 333

With this horrible deed, Macbeth's castle becomes
a place of death, "Hell Gate itself." 334

Macbeth confesses his guilt in a striking image:
'O, full of scorpions is my mind" (III, ii, 36). Similar
sentiment is expressed by Richard Hooker: "the remorse of
sin is ... as the deadly sting of a serpent." 335 Lady
Macbeth responds in despair: "Our desire is got without
content." (III, ii, 5). Luther questions in a similar
tone "Is there an evil more cruel than the unrest caused
by a mordant conscience?" 336 Lady Macbeth, after the
hineous murder feels "This safer to be that which we
destroy" (III, ii, 6-7)

Hooker preaches in the sermon "no wicked man's estate
is prosperous, fortunate or happy" 337 Macbeth
declares in a similar vein "Better be with the dead,
Whom we, to gain out peace, have sent to peace,
Than on the torture of the mind to lie In restless
ecstasy." (III, ii, 19-22)
Once the murder is committed, Macbeth realizes its consequences for him, which are inseparable from the moral.

"........ from this instant,
There's nothing serious in mortality,
All is but toys; renown and grace is dead".

(II, iii, 99-101)

In killing Duncan, he has killed the best part of himself. "Macbeth's real victim is himself." He is obviously appalled by the deed. There is sincerity when he says: "Had I but died an hour before this chance

I had liv'd a blessed time."

(II, iii, 98-99)

From the moment of Duncan's murder Macbeth is damned. The crime is appalling. It is more than killing a king. It is the exile of reality from Macbeth's world. Now onwards he owes loyalty to the world of appearance. Macbeth's crime is no longer a private crime. The Kingdom of Scotland is contaminated by Macbeth's crime. The metaphysical aspect of the
murder of Duncan is the abjuring of values. Chaos invades the land and death alone exists.

It is noticeable that Macbeth loses some of his eloquence after the murder and whispers in monosyllables. The practical wife is confident: "A little water clears us of this deed" (II, ii, 68). Macbeth knows better; all great Neptune's ocean will never wash the blood clean from his hands. He is terrorized by the thought of failure to conceal murder. It is fear that terrorizes Macbeth into more murders after Duncan's murder. His guilty soul is in the grip of fear, so the killing of Duncan's grooms. Fear haunts him, he envies the dead. "Better be with the dead", (III, ii, 19) he says. His thoughts are of black night. His invocation to night closes with the vain hope "Things bad begun make strong themselves by ill" (III, ii, 55).

Macbeth is aware that by murdering the king, he has upset the entire social and moral order.

"The spring, the head, the fountain of your blood is stopped; The very source of it is stopped."

(II, iii, 106-107)
Not only is Macbeth cut off but entire Scotland is cut off from the very source of life.

Shakespeare has involved the concept of time with Macbeth's crime. His blessed time is over, his accursed time begins. There is a change in the nature of time as he experiences it. "Methought I heard a voice cry 'sleep, no more!' "Macbeth does murder sleep", the innocent sleep, Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleave of care, The death of each day's life, sore labour's bath, Balm of hurt minds, great nature's second course, Chief nourisher in life's feast" (II, ii, 36-41)

These are terrible murders -

"infinitely terrible by the potency with which Shakespeare's art invests them..... We are straightway plunged into an abyss of metaphysical horror. He has murdered sleep, that is the death of each day's life -the daily death of time which makes Time human. He has murdered that." 339
Macbeth interferes with time when he muses the midnight bell as a signal for foul murder. He has realized that he who has murdered sleep has murdered death. "Glames bath murder'd sleep, and There fore, Cawdor Shall sleep no more, Macbeth shall sleep no more!"

(II, ii, 42-44)

From this condition, there is no escape in death.

"He is the victim of uninterrupted and unending time, chained to the Wheel of an Everlasting Now". Macbeth has become a tortured criminal "not in the physical, but the metaphysical realm". 340

The protest of his conscience is expressed in his "Sleep no more". (II, ii, 42) He was free to choose evil but he could not escape the consequences of the choice. As a warrior, he is aware that he has violated nature's armistice. Murder exiles Macbeth from the Kingdom of God. The murder is followed uncannily by knocking at the gate. The knocking at the gate reminds Macbeth that he has become an outcast beyond the reach of divine
blessing. It is the first note of retribution.
Macduff knocking at the door is symbolic as it will
be his mission to avenge. It is like knocking at the
conscience of Macbeth, from that moment, he knows
that he is alone for ever, This results in the
weariness of his soul. He is worn out with fear
and is dragged on the new murders.

"Macbeth is a prisoner bound for ever to
his first hell-born deed, and he must go
where his deed drags him." 341

With his first evil decision to murder Duncan, he
is tied to a stake, thus in his beginning is
his end. When the knocking commences, we realize
how alive his conscience is "To know my deed 'twere,
best not know myself." (II, ii, 74).

With the knocking at the gate, the moral order
asserts itself. The movement is now towards conse-
quence of the action. Duncan's murder scene reaches
its culmination with the sudden knocking on the
castle gate. "The outside world breaks in loudly
on this world of whispering horror." 342
The knocking affects Macbeth and Lady Macbeth differently. Hearing the knocking Macbeth realizes what he has done.

"To know my deed 'twere best not know myself.

Wake Duncan with thy knocking! I would thou couldst!"

(II, ii, 74-75)

But to Lady Macbeth it is a warning to remove the traces of murder quickly and be alert.

".... show us to be watchers. Be not lost so poorly in your thoughts."

(II, ii, 72-73)

Thus Shakespeare has dramatized the psychological consequences of murder on the murderers.

"What Macbeth hears, is not Macduff and Lennox, trying to awaken the porter but all the powers of Hell and Heaven knocking simultaneously at his heart."
Shakespeare throws all the effect of this knocking upon the soul within. It is curious that he heard the knocking even before it reached him. It merely shows that nemesis is at the door. Macbeth is deeply perturbed by it but the knocking has no mystery for her. She cannot foresee the inward consequences of murder. She had no idea that the murder would bring about their own ruin. Though Macbeth commits the crime, the architect of the deed is Lady Macbeth. She is the drama's "painted devil." (II, ii, 56). The porter who attends the gate seems to belong to the nether-world, the keeper of the hell gate. To Hawkes, the porter guards the gate of hell, "she operates within it." The identity of the husband and wife is deeply disturbed.

"There is no contact between them any more, only the feel of the blood between their hands." 344

This episode of knocking is Shakespeare's master-stroke of registering the impact of murder on the conscience of the murderer, as also the lack of response of the insensitive guilty one. About the knocking at the door soon after the murder, L.P. Smith points out that "the most eminent murder-dilettantes acknowledged the felicity of the occurrence." 346
The witches are blamed by Hecate for having traded and trafficked with Macbeth in affairs of death, the real choosers is Macbeth. They have only filled him with promise of false security. It was Macbeth who interpreted their prophecies as incitaments to murder. The witches give him the knowledge of the future but to Banquo, they give the real future. He fears Banquo who according to the witches' prophecy is to be the ancestor of many future Kings. As Banquo was informed by the witches, "Thou shalt get kings, though thou be none." (I, iii, 67). As Banquo knows the secret, he is a threat to Macbeth. It is this threat as also the prophecy of the Witches regarding the children of Banquo that Macbeth decides to kill him. The witches show him visions in which Banquo's descendants are "symbols of the God appointed creative scheme." 347

In the hope that the murder of Banquo, if done by hirelings may not weigh on his conscience, as the murder of Duncan did, Macbeth hires murderers. The Witches, the instruments of darkness, have tempted Macbeth away from the human world. Macbeth had provided two hirelings to murder Banquo, but a third murderer joins them—may be, he is a supernatural agent.
The untempted Banquo is like a constant reproach to the fallen Macbeth. By murdering Banquo, Macbeth hopes to remove the very thought of loyalty and measure of decency. So “Banquo! becomes naturally the first sacrifice to be paid to a guilty conscience.”

The horror of the first murder returns. His agitation before Duncan’s murder had conjured up the bloody dagger. It is after Banquo’s murder that Macbeth sees the bloody phantom of Banquo. His deed is thrown in his teeth by the ghost, and his “half murdered conscience rises.”

After Duncan’s murder, Macbeth recognizes that his existence is apparent rather than real. Banquo’s murder is the next step on the slippery path of sin; and consequently Banquo’s ghost is its inevitable retribution. It is a long, long way of dark nightmare. The royal banquet is a false appearance; Banquo’s ghost lends reality to it. As E. Jones remarks: “Death at the Feast — that is the underlying contradiction.”

Macbeth has planned the murder of Banquo and his son because he
fears that his progeny will be future kings. Banquo's murder is Macbeth's attempt to cut off this creative destiny at the roots, but Providence cannot be cheated; Banquo's son escapes. In murdering Banquo, Macbeth has taken the road to disaster. Macbeth henceforth endures an awareness of nothingness—which is synonymous with death consciousness and goes on producing acts of nihilism. Now he has to fear the judgment of the heart. Banquo's ghost is visible only to him, it is his retribution, the reproach of his own guilty heart. He alone can see the ghost, not Lady Macbeth, as

"Lady Macbeth sees nothing beyond the fleshly. The ghost does not exist for her, as reality does not." 351

During the Banquet she puts the sternest control upon her nerves to save him from crucial predicament.

Before Macbeth meets the Witches the second time and breaks the bond of humanity, he has already broken away from his wife. Lady Macbeth is ignorant about this new horror that haunts Macbeth. It is from this moment that "she sinks slowly downward." 352 After Banquo's ghost, Macbeth's isolation is complete. From then onwards, communication between Macbeth and his Queen is over; each retires into a separate world, both
are isolated and both are in pain. Her unique trait is that she helps her husband unstintingly but fights her battles alone. On the other hand, Macbeth also is uncomfortable with the robes stolen from Duncan. His new honours do not sit well upon him, His true punishment is in his terrible loneliness.

In fact soon after Duncan's murder, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth drift apart from each other, almost ensiled as it were. Both of them set out on journeys that take them into the tunnels of death. They can never pluck out the rooted crime of Duncan's murder, that sprawls around in the haunting phantoms of death. Death divides Macbeth and Lady Macbeth as much as ambition unites them.

He visits the witches. His second meeting with the Witches makes him a spectator of the three Apparitions. They represent the theme of destruction versus construction. Three Apparitions - the Armed Head, the Bloody Child, the Crowned and Tree Bearing Child --

"They exist metaphysically as a compressed miniature of the total drama showing (1) death, destructive and self destructive
(II) Life born-out of death and
(iii) human life backed by nature and
raised by the crown to a yet higher status. 353

The Three Apparitions present the whole drama in a
miniature, based on the conflict of destruction and
creation, death and life. First Apparition: an armed
Head is a death symbol. There is no use to arm a head
that is separated from its body.

"From blood and death is born the bloody
child of life's revenging force. Second
Apparition: This child is a symbol of Life
born-out of Death. From death, its own
antagonist, life is born." 354

Third Apparition is the tree-bearing child - which is

"the symbol of life victorious, its baby
brow imperially crowned with the golden
circllet of Nature's innocence, its little
hand sceptred with the Tree of life." 355

In contrast to the nightmarish horror of Scotland, the
visions that the Witches show, in particular the
procession attended by music, reveal the creative harmony
of life.
Macbeth's life is the life of nightmare. The nightmare is terrifying just because it has no end. "The night is long that never finds the day" (IV, iii, 239). The night envelopes him deeper and deeper. Macbeth has murdered for ambition, but then goes on murdering for fear. For him, life is bereft of all values. He merely exists. He has died spiritually much before he dies physically.

"He is immersed in the world as if in nothingness; he exists only potentially." 356

According to John Calvin, the sinner is always tuming anxiously in all directions and can have no peace of mind. "Once a sinner falls, he is immediately forced to go from bad to worse." 357 These words aptly describe the plight of Macbeth, whose conscience dies, and the sense of horror with it. He takes the decision to butcher Macduff's family with no hint of inward struggle. The butchered family of Macduff is an exposition of the sterile world of Macbeth. The pathetic mother and child are proof that mercy and justice have fled. Real values are banished or are perverted in Macbeth's Scotland. Macduff and his wife represent
loyalty and domestic affection. Her stand against
the murderers makes her admirable. To the
murderer's question 'where is your husband?'
(IV, ii, 79), Lady Macduff's answer is remarkable:

"I hope in no place so unsanctified
Where such as thou mayst find him".

(IV, ii, 78-79)

Even the little Macduff dies in defence of his father's
name. Hearing the murderers dubbing his father as
a traitor, the helpless, defenceless child defies
the murderers "Thou liest thou shag-hair'd villain"
(IV, ii, 81). Its fearless defiance indicates the
force which is a threat to Macbeth and which Macbeth
cannot destroy. "The babe signifies not only the
Future, it symbolises all those enlarging purposes
which make life meaningful." 358 Both the mother and
the son die heroically without surrendering their
integrity.

"There is much more in the death
of young Macduff than 'pathos',
the violation of the natural order
is completed by the murder." 359
When Macduff hears the news of the slaughter of his family, he utters the dreadful cry: "He has no children." (IV, iii, 216) O.B. Harrison interprets the meaning that

""since Macbeth is childless, the account can never be evened - wife for wife, child for child." 360

In these simple words, there is no suggestion that his grief is shallow. Here we see the gulf between Macbeth and the ordinary man who loves and is loved. Here Shakespeare has put fathomless sorrow on the lips of the bereaved. According to Coleridge, Macduff's is a manly pathos "it rends, not dissolves the heart." 361 Macduff feels responsibility of his dear ones' death:

"Sinful Macduff!
They were all struck for thee.
Naught that I am,
Not for their own demerits, but for mine,
Fell slaughter on their souls, Heaven rest them now!"

(IV, iii, 223–226)

The massacre of the innocent family has anthropological
import. They are the sacrificial victims for the purification of Scotland, which is polluted by Macbeth's deed. Macduff's suffering makes him another sacrificial victim.

The slaughter of innocent women and children shows Macbeth's criminality in its extreme. After the slaughter of Macduffs, Macbeth accelerates his journey to damnation.

"I cannot but remember such things were That were most precious to me."

(IV, iii, 221-222)

Scotland is contaminated by his criminal deeds.

"Alas! poor country,
Almost afraid to know itself. It cannot be call'd our mother, but our grave, where nothing, But who knows nothing, is once seen to smile, Where sighs and groans and shrieks that rent the air Are made, not mark'd; where violent sorrow seems A modern ecstasy; the dead men's knoll Is there scarce ask'd for who; and good men's lives, Expire before the flowers in their caps, Dying or ere they sicken."

(IV, iii, 164-173)
It is commonly known that Macbeth is the Tragedy of Ambition but his tragedy is due to fear as well. Fear leads to murder. Fear has not only infected the mind of Macbeth, but it has contaminated each and every soul; it has polluted the entire land where "All is the fear and nothing is the love". (IV, ii, 12). Macbeth, with his cursed touch of death has made his land cursed where

"each new morn
New widows howl, new orphans cry, new sorrows
Strike Heaven on the face."

(IV, iii, 4-5)

The first murder was a joint effort but from Banquo's murder onwards, it is Macbeth's crime alone. From then onwards

"Macbeth has gone beyond her, obsessed, blinded, bound to the treadmill on which she had first set his feet." 362

They both had planned the initial murder jointly but then they suffer in isolation. There is no
Communion between them. For them both, life is an insufferable nightmare

"If hers is a retrospective and nocturnal, his is a diurnal and dramatic nightmare. If she is transported to an underworld he transforms his own life into hell."363

Lily Campbell has analysed Macbeth as a study in fear. In both Macbeth and Lady Macbeth,

"there is seen the gradual dissolution of fear - the one being led to final self-destruction, the other to the final fury of despair."364

She has been the brain behind the first murder. But after having achieved the end, in the most obnoxious way, the spring of action somehow breaks within her. She almost fades out. For her, everything ends in the achievement of the crown. In a series of murders after the first murder, she has been in the dark. It is without her consent, nay, without her knowledge that Macbeth has proceeded recklessly on the path of violence and bloodshed. He commits the crime and she suffers for it. She is sunk in her own despair. Her heart has withered away under the
influence of the evil in Macbeth, but she never accuses him. True, she urged Macbeth for a practical end, but it is equally true that she has not approved a purposeless atrocity.

At the early stage, she shows gross insensitiveness. She was confident:

"A little water cleans us of this deed
How easy is it, then!"

(II, ii, 68-69)

But in her final moments, she is blood - obsessed.

"Out, damned spot! ....... who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him", (V, i, 38-43, 44). The curse on her is not fear but remorse; remorse for the blood unnecessarily spilt. She exclaims

"Here's the smell of the blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand." (V, i, 55-56). Macbeth's sins speak out through his dearest partner: "Banquo's buried; he cannot come out on's grave." (V, i, 69). The Lady who skilfully manouevred at the Banquet to shield her husband, collapses in her last moments. She saves her husband
at least from open disclosure. Though there has been no communion between them, she feels intuitively all the atrocities perpetrated by her husband. She makes all his crimes known to the world. She asks the Doctor: "The Thane of Fife had a wife: where is she now? What! Will these hands ne'er be clean". (V, i, 46-48).

She shares the sins committed by her husband, though in the sleep walking scene, Macbeth shows no intensity of anxiety for his wife. The secrets of the past find vent in a disorder of sleep. The sleep walking shows Lady Macbeth suffering from the metaphysical aspects of murder. Every word of hers implies that Macbeth is by her side. Her sleep walking reveals the corrosive griefs haunting below the conscious levels of the mind.

Here

"Shakespeare is portraying the Christian sense of sinful guilt rather than the Pagan sense of shame." 365

Alas! too late she sees the true nature of the action and being unable to bear it, she collapses. Her last despairing sentence is significant. "What's done cannot be undone" (V, i, 74). She realises that "she has thrown away everything and gained nothing." 366
"Nought's had, all's spent,
Where our desire is got without content
'Tis safer to be that which we destroy
Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy"

(III, ii, 4-7)

Lady Macbeth of the sleep walking scene is already spiritually dead. Her physical death has very little importance but Macbeth's cold indifference towards her in her final moments, is her true death. The essential tragedy of these partners in greatness is that the life within them ebbs away while they are still alive. His tragedy is his insensitivity which is spiritual death, her tragedy is the reversal of her mind, which is a type of death. The dramatist has emphasized the terrible punishment of the Macbeths. Both are sleepless. Lady Macbeth walks and talks when asleep and does not 'die holily' (V, e, 66) in her bed. Macbeth lacks sleep "the season of all natures" (III, iv, 141). Under the stress of this torture either the inward or the outward world must be shattered. The woman is driven the former way, the man the latter. She collapses, he endures."
The sleep walking gives evidence that she is a totally burnt out personality. She cannot bear darkness, she walks with a lighted taper and keeps the light by her continually - Her eyes are wide open but their sense is shut. She walks and talks in her sleep, betraying the guilt. She has hand only in the first murder but it is curious that the germs of fear broke out in Macbeth on the night of the murder, but they did not develop in him, they developed in the Queen, He had hallucination before the crime but afterwards, she falls victim to mental disorder. Sanguinophobia is her trouble. Blood, the sight of blood, the hallucination of blood breaks her mind. She cannot endure the sight of blood. She dwells on it most persistently and pathetically. From the moment of Duncan's murder, Lady Macbeth is at last the Queen of Scotland, but the glory of her dream has faded. She merely exists. Life has ebbed away from her. She lives the life of death - of mental and spiritual death.

"The last part of Lady Macbeth is filled with echoes, ironic echoes, terrible echoes, inescapable, even through the thick haunted nights, from which sleep has
Forever gone..... Fear is in the 
ascendant, fear and hate, under 
whose banners evil has always 
triumphed." 368

In her sleep walking, she is in a kind of hell. The 
Doctor's comment is apt:

"Unnatural deeds 
Do breed unnatural troubles". (V, i, 78-79)

She is spiritually possessed of the devil rather than 
physically sick. She needs the 'divine' rather than the 
physician. The pressure of evil has shattered her. 
G. Wilson Knight describes her as

"a human wreck who mutters over 
again in sleep the hideous memories 
of her former Satanic hour of 
pride." 369

Frederick Boas describes her pitiable plight

"The woman of royal will reduced 
to an automaton helplessly babbling 
its secrets to all who have ears 
to hear - such is Lady Macbeth 
in her last state whence death 
is a self sought release." 370

The sleep walking scene unfolds the fate of 
the sinner who is punished through remorse.
In her sleep, she talks of extreme moments of terror—blood on her hands, the old man bleeding, Banquo's ghost, the knocking at the gate, even Lady Macduff. She smells blood.

"That Shakespeare chose to manifest Lady Macbeth's melancholy as a disturbance in her sleep, shows that he was a student of the moral philosophy of the time." 371

It is a scene of Lady Macbeth's incriminatory actions and speeches, as she walks about with wide open eyes. She has lost rational control and her actions and speeches are a confession of crimes. She is in the net of deeds and happenings unnatural, and supernatural.

After the first murder Macbeth laments that "all great Neptune's ocean" (II, ii, 61) will not wash his hands clear, while she comforts him—"A little water clears us of this deed" (II, ii, 68) but later she continually washes her hands and cannot remove the blood's taints: "all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand" (V, i, 56)

By a dramatic irony, his words become her experience.

"What he feared in his pangs of conscience, is fulfilled in her, she becomes all remorse and he all defiance." 372

Lady Macbeth knew nothing about Lady Macduff's murder. Her murder gave a mortal wound to Lady Macbeth and her irreparably wounded heart parts company with her husband.
When she says "A little water cleans us of this deed." (II, ii, 68) She is unconsciously avoiding a peep into the depths of her guilty soul. Lady Macbeth, living silently in nightmare is most afraid of darkness and hell, "Hell is murky" (V, i, 39) are the words of her tortured soul. In her final collapse, all that lies in the deepest recesses of her mind is brought to the surface. She mutters in her Somnabulism and there the truth is out. The Doctor's diagnosis about Lady Macbeth is apt. Her mental illness requires, "the powerful plasters of the scriptures" 373 and the word of "God - forgive us all" (V, i, 82). The central act of the play is a hideous murder of sleep. Throughout we have the agony of sleep - consciousness climaxing in Lady Macbeth's sleep-walking.

Lady Macbeth was ambitious and with a view to achieve the crown, she instigated her husband to commit the King's murder but a chain of murders after the first murder is beyond her control and beyond her understanding. Macbeth's inhumanity, almost for its own sake is incomprehensible to his wife and she takes refuge in death. Her tragedy is of self destruction as also the destruction of the man she loves. Her final act is consistent with her character. Even at the weakest hour of her life, she has the determination to cast away the agony of her life by one stroke of a knife. Being a self willed person, she
wills her own death. The lady who had planned to take the life of an innocent old man, ultimately brings an end to her own life, by the same violent means. She, who had spilt innocent blood, is tortured by blood obsession and finally spils her own blood.

Lady Macbeth's death completes their alienation from each other. He receives this news callously, after all what has this loneliness to add to the spiritual isolation, which has been for long tormenting him? He receives news of her death coldly. For long the husband and wife had faced the nightmare singly. Macbeth has imagination and his wife lacks imagination. So both suffer on a different plane, and meet different tragic ends. The downfall of Macbeth takes place on the battlefield of the mind.

Conscience in Macbeth, though subdued, is not silenced. It has produced a creeping sense of irrevocable commitment. His life is withered like a yellow leaf. He finds that his life has fallen into the sear. It is in this mood that he hears the death of his wife and the news does not touch him, as it ought to; and he is conscious of that. He has lost the capacity for feeling. He just makes a passing reference to her death: "She should have died hereafter,
There would have been a time for such a word" (V. v, 17-18)
This is the most perfunctory tribute ever paid to the
dear departed. In his present mood of sheer
callousness he considers her death as a part of the
inevitable. The loss of his wife, his dearest partner
in greatness, merely leads him to a bare generalisation
that it would have happened, if not now, sometime
later, His indifferent response to her death clearly
indicates that he now dwells in the icy land of
loneliness and darkness, as he has cut off all human bonds.
Lady Macbeth's death destroys all taste for life in
Macbeth. He pictures life itself as a slow creeping
march towards death.

When she dies, Macbeth fully understands his
punishment. He is enfolded in pessimism - everything
in life is futile, to him. He fumbles to find meaning
when death itself has become meaningless. Her death,
to him, is "a piece of mistiming" 374. He sees himself
as unfortunate one, when all the odds go against.
Thus the exit of his 'dearest partner of greatness'
(I, v, 12) is one more unfairness of life.

Dr. Bradley interprets Macbeth's casual
reference to Lady Macbeth's death.
"Neither can I agree with those who find in his reception of the news of his wife's death proof of utter carelessness. These words are spoken by a man, already in some measure prepared for such news and transported by the frenzy of his last fight for life." 375

Some critics find pity in every word and they feel that the words are uttered at the right moment. Edith Sitwell explains in depth the pathos:

"The words 'She should have died hereafter' in their very quietness, their slowness seem tears shed in the soul by those lidless eyes." 376

With the death of Lady Macbeth, the last hope dies in the life of Macbeth. For his life is a sterile wasteland. But the passing reference makes it clear that his love for her does not remain what it was. From Macbeth's response to the Queen's death, it seems that his heart has died at some moment between Duncan's murder and her death.

"The sadness is not that the bereaved man has no one to comfort him but that he needs no one." 377
He has killed his own humanity that he has to live in the barren world of isolation is punishment greater than his death at Macduff's hand. Death divides Lord and Lady Macbeth as much as ambition unites them. Macbeth's cold response to the news of her death reflects the spiritual dissolution of Macbeth himself. For Shakespeare, insensitivity is a kind of death. Lady Macbeth is dead and Macbeth feels nothing! It completes the process of debasement and death of the spirit in Macbeth. The lamentation of gentlevoment does not touch him. In his own words:

"I have almost forgot the taste of fears, The time has been my senses would have cool'd To hear a night shriek, and my feel of hair Would at a dismal treatise rouse and stir As life were in't. I have sup'd full with horrors, Direness, familiar to my slaughterous thoughts, Cannot once start me." (V, v, 9-15)

He realizes the futility of power. The awareness of his destroyed potentialities is registered in his confession. "Seyton! I am sick at heart". (V, iii, 19) His old age, in its unnatural emptiness is now ready for dissolution.

He has lost all taste for life since mere power without "honour, love, obedience, troops of
friends' (V, iii, 25) provides no satisfaction. All that he has gained is the sear yellow leaf.

"I have liv'd long enough: My way of life
Is fall'n into the sear, the yellow leaf."

As Cleanth Brooks interprets:

"Macbeth sees himself as the winter-stricken tree: the plant symbolism, then, supplements the child-symbolism." 378

The effect of Lady Macbeth's death is echoed in the famous soliloquy which reflects the materialistic void in which extant Macbeth finds himself. There is no future for him but only a succession of meaningless tomorrows.

"To-morrow and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day,
To the last syllable of recorded time;
And all our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death." (V, v, 19-23)

To-morrow soliloquy seems to J.H. Murry, to be

"The inspired utterance of one who lies upon the torture of the mind inrestless ecstasy." 379
The to-morrow speech is Macbeth's retrospect on life. There is a suggestion of slow and tedious journey, where time is holding a torch to light fools their way to dusty death. Macbeth, in trusting the witches, has betrayed himself to the equivocal and the illusory. He is lured by the illusory and so the real eludes him. He lives in the mood of death. What is yesterday but the death of the previous day? Allured by the equivocal prophecies for the future, he wishes to jump the life to come, but time cannot be cheated. Time takes its own revenge. The Time in which he is caught, is "to-morrow and to-morrow, and to-morrow" (V, v, 19) — one infinite sameness in which "yesterdays have lighted fools The way to dusty death"

(V, v, 22-23)

"Dusty death" is an echo of the burial service — 'ashes to ashes and dust to dust' — "the dust of the well trodden track of the mortal journey." 380

S.L. Bethell remarks:

"Tomorrow speech expresses directly Macbeth's reaction to his wife's death and merely implies the atheism — dusty death signifying nothing, — which has resulted from his gradual hardening in crime." 381
"Out, out, brief candle!" (V, v, 23) is dramatically appropriate to the despair in Macbeth who had sustained a conflict with his own conscience. This utterance is the expression of his awareness of his failure, it is something more than that. It also expresses his awareness of his guilt. He reaches the final understanding of life in the vicinity of death.

"Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
And then is heard no more."

(V, v, 24-26)

He sees life as deceitful. Deceived by the illusory prophecies, he now sees life as a shadow, as an appearance.

L.C. Knights comments,

"Macbeth sees life as deceitful ..... 
... as though Shakespeare is expressing his own philosophy in the lines." 382

To Macbeth, in his final vision, life is but a shadow, and man, a poor player. He now realizes that life is an appearance, not a reality. The victim of appearance all throughout, realizes that life itself is but an appearance. He who has destroyed all values in his blind race after the mirage of power,
now finds, at the end of his life that life has neither meaning nor significance.

"it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing."

(V, v, 26-28)

To him, life is meaningless, and so also death.

"For his wife's death to have meaning, there needs some total change - a plunge across a new abyss into a Hereafter." 283

Macbeth attains dignity by reflecting on the universal conditions of human life. He identifies his own plight with the lot of mankind. He reflects on the general situation of life; and as he finds his own life futile, he reflects on the futility of life. His final soliloquy is more like a philosophic statement on life and death.

In this mood of utter pessimism news reaches him that Birnam Wood is coming to Dunsane. His last soliloquy conveying meaninglessness of life culminates in death. As he ends his mournful comment on life, he receives the news "The Wood began to move." (V, v, 35) Even that prophecy of the witches - that his life is secure, that he will not have to fear death "Till
Birnam Forest comes to Dunsinane. (V, iii, 60) —
has duped him. He realizes that Life has deceived him.
He has degenerated from the saviour of Scotland, even
from a hesitating sensitive murderer to a butcher of
Scotland. He had trusted the prophecies which have
led him to spiritual ruin. In the end, fate having
cheated Macbeth destroys him. But he is not disarmed.
All considerations give way with the clarion call
of the bugle. "There is nor flying hence, nor
starrying here." (V, v, 48). Even when he realizes
that he was being deceived by the equivocal prophecies,
he lives and fights to the last, as a man of action
"Arm, arm, and cut" (V, v, 46) is his command. He does
not yield, he does not escape. He takes up the roll of
man of action. The sound and fury are a call to arms.
When his first trust in the witches has gone, he neither
shows fear nor yields, but acts as the former Macbeth,
the great warrior. When the English army moves against
him, he resumes some of his former qualities of courage
and manliness. His tragic fall is emphasized in his
final attempt to resume his old way of life as a warrior.
In the vicinity of death, Macbeth remains heroic. He
fights unafraid and pays his score. Macbeth began as a
victor in war and his life ends on the battlefield. He
dies fighting. He dies, as he has lived, as a warrior.
The movement of Birnam Wood and Macduff's unnatural birth
Macbeth has to drag out a solitary sombre existence. The rhythm of life is a meaningless monotone. He fights with fury and courage—animal courage rather than human. It is part of Macbeth’s nemesis that Lady Macbeth has left him alone by her death. Now he has to face his doom alone. The evil and horror of Macbeth’s acts leave their taints even on nature. Says Macbeth:

"Good things of day begin to droop and frown."

Macbeth has become conscious of the mortality of nature. At the end of his long wading through blood, all that remains for him is to fight with the courage of the animal.

"They have tied me to a stake; I cannot fly,
But bear-like I must fight the course.
What’s he
That was not born of woman? Such a one
Am I to fear, or none."

(V, vii, 1-4)

He fights with the courage of the beast, to be slaughtered like a beast. The Sanguin images incarnadine the play as it were a slaughter-house. He still possesses courage because still he believes in the equivocal promise.
of illusory security that no man of a woman born can
do him any harm. He challenges as if he were invincible.

"Thou wast born of woman:
But swords I smile at, weapons laugh to scorn,
Brandish'd by man that's of a woman born."

(V, vii, 11-13)

— and so he fights fearlessly. Macbeth declines to
fight with Macduff not from fear but from a consciousness
of the wrongs he had done to him.

"Of all men else I have avoided these:
But get thee back, my sol is too much charg'd,
With blood of thine already."

(V, vii, 33-35)

He even informs Macduff not to waste his energies on
him as

"I bear a charmed life, which must not yield
To one of woman born."

(V, vii, 42-42)

But to his utter dismay Macbeth learns "Macduff was from
his mother's womb Untimely ripp'd." (V, vii, 44-45).

But Macbeth decides to fight to the last.

"Though Birnam Wood be come to Dunsinane,
And thou oppos'd, being of no woman born
Yet I will try the last."

(V, vii, 59-61)
When Macbeth comes to know about the unnatural birth of Macduff, he realizes that the child who was to be the sovereign in the future now confronts him as an avenging angel.

"The future cannot be trammelled up. The naked babe confronts Macbeth to pronounce his doom." 385

As Macduff was born out of death, so Macbeth has to confront both the natural and the supernatural on the battlefield.

Unlike other Shakespearean heroes, Macbeth dies unmourned. Malcolm and Macduff dub Macbeth as a "dead butcher." No one pity's him, no one mourns his end. In fact, there is general rejoicing at his death. Lady Macbeth dies unlamented by her husband, with signs of reprobation. The same is the lot of Macbeth who also meets death without honour. The difference is that she escapes from life by seeking a self sought end, whereas Macbeth dies fighting like a hero on the battlefield. At least the sleepless agony finds rest in the vaster sleep of death.

On his death, Malcolm reflects not on a world lost but on a world restored. Natural order is restored by supernatural sanctions. Now the 'Grace of grace' takes control. The good triumphs with the divine aid.
"What began as a blast from Hell is here concluded with the promise of Heaven's nectarine airs." 386

L.C. Knights feels that for Macbeth, there is nothing grand or heroic in death: "it is simply a crumbling away into insignificance." 387 Some critics feel that Macbeth is ignominious in death, while others feel for the downfall of a man with potentiality for greatness.

Even young Siward's death is part of a meaningful struggle to create the rebirth of Scotland. In contrast, Macbeth's death is an end to a life that has become meaningless.

"Nature herself, decked in all her greenness is marching across the stage to drive out the bloody tyrant and reassert her power. And indeed, Nature achieves her victory, but not without two deaths, Macbeth's and young Siward's." 388

The blood image is thus reassuring. The sick land is renewed. Order is restored by rightful succession. Macbeth has voluntarily put himself in a world devoid of significant relations. So L.C. Knights concludes that Macbeth's end "is a fitting close for a play in which moral law has been made present to us not as convention of command, but as the Law of Life." 389 A heinous offence, murder most foul, involves the forces of the universe as nemesis.
When the old Siward learns that his son died like a brave man with wounds on his front, the proud father feels that his son has become "God's Soldier" (V, vii, 76) and no one can wish him a fairer death.

"Had I as many sons as I have hairs, I would not wish them to a fairer death; And so, his knell is knoll'd."

(V, vii, 77-79)

He thinks that his son has lived a blessed life and now sleeps well; so he does not grieve. Young Siward retains nobility and courage till the last moment and dies, like a true soldier. In Ross' words, Young Siward "has paid a soldier's debt" (V, vii, 68). The young Siward wins even in defeat all that Macbeth has lost. "But like a man he died." (V, vii, 71) — is the tribute he gains! To what greater height can a soldier aspire?

Old Siward, whose son was killed by Macbeth, greets the tyrant's death with the remarks "Here comes newer comfort." (V, vii, 82) The death of a tyrant is ever a source of comfort. As Young Siward knows how to face death bravely, Old Siward knows how to face the loss of his son. As Macbeth retains the calm of despair, Young Siward retains calm of courage and Old Siward retains calm of faith at the crisis.
Macbeth suffers for his crimes. Crime and punishment grow out of one stem. His tragedy is not so much his condemnation by society as his own agony in destroying his own humanity. His tragedy is that crime cannot be undone. Murderer as he is, he is a man of blood living in arid and dusty wilderness. In a sense his sin become its own punishment "Macbeth is a brilliant ethical and psychological exposure of the Machiavellian ... achieved from the inside." 390 Insurrection and murder have given the crown to Macbeth, Ultimately he falls by the same rules.

"From the Christian point of view, Macbeth is not a sympathetic character. Machiavellian villain-usurper, sinner, superman, sick king Macbeth reaches his full stature when, cast out by men and by God and rejected by Satan." 391

The paradox of Macbeth's imagination is that it reveals to him the truth and at the same time conceals the truth from him. The tragedy of Macbeth is Shakespeare's artistic triumph over a difficult problem. Sir Arthur Quiller Couch elucidates: How could Shakespeare

"Make a tragic hero of this Macbeth—traitor to his king, murderer of his sleeping guest, breaker of most sacred trust, ingrave self seeker, false kinsman perjured soldier"  

.................
How could Shakespeare make his audience feel pity or terror for such a man? Not for Duncan, but for Macbeth, doer or the deed?"

Macbeth is a study in moral degeneration. Sympathy and pity do not attach to such a theme, but Shakespeare has achieved the impossible by making Macbeth a tragic hero. In the soliloquy before murder, Macbeth considers the political consequences of his act and moral values involved in the act. Even before others condemn him, Macbeth himself confesses the wickedness of the proposed deed.

"But in these cases
We still have judgment here, that we but teach
Bloody instruction, which, being taught, return
To plague the inventor; this even-handed justice
Commends the ingredients of out poison'd chalice
To our own lips."

(I, vii, 7-12)

He chooses his course painfully. His struggle with his conscience wins our sympathy.

"And pity, like a naked new-born babe,
Striding the bl st, or Heaven's cherubin hors'd
Upon the sightless carriers of the air,
Shall blow the horrid deed in every eye,
That tears shall drown the wind."

(I, vii, 21-25)
His response to the knocking at the gate after Duncan's murder shows how alive is his conscience. "Wake Duncan with thy knocking! I would thou couldst!"

(II, ii, 75) — this is the wish of a good man. He still thinks and feels as a good man. By nature, he is not evil. He has the potentiality for good. The tragedy is that Macbeth's potentiality is destroyed by his actions. We pity the moral decline of a hero who has known goodness. His vast sensitivity makes him rich in despair.

Macbeth's conscience is like that of Dr. Jekyll but his deeds are those of Mr. Hyde. In him are worked out the issues of Temptation and Conscience. Macbeth's tragedy is that the Jekyll in him is destroyed along with the Hyde in him. Macbeth's very first crime separates him from Scotland, from humanity, from life.

To those who believe in predestination Macbeth is a tragic victim, but interpreted in terms of free will, he is an unpardonable murderer. When Duncan is murdered, his conscience is bruised and so it becomes easy for him to take away the lives of Banquo, Lady and Master Macduff. Even nature herself has caught the contagion from the human world.

"The dark night strangles the travelling lamp
The darkness does the face of earthen tomb
When living light should kiss it."

(II, iv, 7)
Shakespeare has dramatized terrible inner conflict between the noble and the vicious in Macbeth. He never loses his greatness of soul, which is the very spring of his ambition. Curtis Watson probes the nature of Macbeth’s tragedy.

"The essence of Macbeth’s tragedy lies in that nobler self which never entirely vanished and which is constantly evaluating and condemning those acts which his ambition and his wife’s accusation of cowardice lead him to commit."  

The enormity of his crime leaves no room for any redemption. "He has trod the whole way up and down the grand staircase of history." His three soliloquies precede each of his three murders. In them, we find him at odds with his conscience before undertaking a dreadful act. He is not by nature remorseless, but by necessity he becomes such. By the time it becomes necessary to murder Banquo Macbeth has already made progress into hardness. By the time he orders the slaughters of Macduff’s, the agony of decision-making is over. He now has to live with his destiny, which he sees as endless vistas of blood and hatred. "He set out to be a ‘man’; he has become a dwarf." His feelings are atrophied. He reached spiritual death, He has ceased to live much before Macduff finishes him off. This insensitivity is his curse. It is a kind of death. Nothing any longer has the power to move him or even to horrify him.
Macbeth's world is turned into hell, from which he wishes to free himself, but he cannot. The reward for which the sin is committed itself becomes the punishment. Though Macbeth succeeds in becoming the King, the joy of success is denied to him. He is plunged into an abyss of metaphysical horror. As Jan Kott remarks "Macbeth is unable to blow the world up. But he can go on murdering till the end." Macbeth tries to define himself in the language of the existentialists ".... and nothing is But what is not." Commenting on this, Kott says ".... all that is within him, does condemn itself for being there. As Jan Kott explains:

"To be' has for Macbeth an ambiguous .... meaning; it is a contradiction between being 'for itself' and being 'in itself'." 

"The formulas by which Macbeth tries to define himself are amazingly similar to the language of the existentialists." 'To be' for Macbeth means to escape to live in another world. He has dreamt of a final murder to end all murders. Now he knows that no murder is final. He hopes that the dead will not rise, but the dead do rise. The dead even return, as Banquo's ghost at the Banquet. There is no escape from nightmare. "All he can do, before he dies, is to drag with him into nothingness as many living
beings as possible." — with the result that Macbeth is hounded to death by a whole nation. He is hounded from his honoured status. He dies disillusioned and unloved. He realizes too late, ther there is no way back to goodness. There is in Macbeth a conscience which witnesses with disapproval the misdeeds of Macbeth the murderer. Macbeth's soliloquies show his awareness that crime isolates. There is horror in his soul at the thought that he is eternally lost. There is tumult and disorder within and without his mind. His stimulated ambition is not controlled by reason. He is in the double-thrall of his passions and his evil destiny. Loss of all joy in living is his punishment. He grows "aweary of the Sun". (V, v, 49) His sensitive soul is a prey to every trick of imagination. He is like an aeolian harp responsive to all vibrations around him.

"At the beginning of the play he is both fair and foul - neither one nor the other, and with potentialities for either." 400

When cheated of his last hope, he fights heroically. The defiance with which he faces Earth, Hell and Heaven, is akin to sublime. He knows that the path he has chosen, has taken him away from all that makes life worth living. In his attempt 'to jump the life to come' he has dislocated the cycle of Time. Wertheim has commented on Macbeth's state.
"Macbeth is cut off from cyclical eternal time and left only with the time of his own making, the clock time of human mortality." 401

As G. Wilson Knight points out:

"He wants all time to be his and so gets none of it .... He wrongs the majestic pace of time." 402

Macbeth attempts to inflict the future on the present, consequently time takes its own revenge. He becomes time-obsessed. In this soliloquy we see the echoes of the theme of time, mutability and death, which is central to the sonnets also. The soliloquy has the inner, if not the outer structure of a sonnet.

"Tommorow and tomorrow and tomorrow Creeps in this petty pace from day to day."

(V, v, 19-20)

Wertheim's observation on this time obsession of Macbeth is revealing

"Certainly for those who measure past, present and future only in terms of mortality, yesterdays and tomorrows mark a petty pace, become way stations on the road to inevitable annihilation. Seen without a connection to some larger ongoing life, individual human existence is a walking shadow. .... the tragedy of Macbeth is that he has made both his life and his death meaningless by severing them
By wrenching the future into the present, he gains the crown but he is not the master of Time, he is not the master of his own fate also. He has murdered sleep, in return he loses peaceful sleep. He has violated social bonds to attain his goal. The goal is attained, but he has become a curse on society. He is an outcast at whose death there is rejoicing. His last word is a curse "And damn'd be him that first ories, 'Hold, enough!'" (V, vii, 63). No other tragic hero perishes in this way. He dies with a curse on his lips, that is consistent with his life which has been a curse to him and he has made life a curse for all surrounding him. As he cannot conquer the evil in his soul, he lives in spiritual darkness and spreads it all over Scotland.

John Lawlor explains Macbeth's dilemma:

"the whole universe has narrowed to a single choice -- to have the crown or ... the impossible alternative -- to cease to desire it. Macbeth .... cannot cease to desire, for with him to cease to desire is to cease to be." 404

After Duncan's murder, nothing is left for Macbeth but to lie upon the torture of the mind and to
realize the uselessness of his cruel deeds. Jan Kott outlines the world of Macbeth:

"In Macbeth's world, the most obsessive of all worlds created by Shakespeare - murder, thoughts of murder and fear of murder pervade everything." 405

The area around Macbeth is now a dead zone. In such a world there is no scope either for love or friendship. Like T.S. Eliot's Hollow Man, Macbeth goes round and round in a pathless waste. As his position worsens his cruelty increases till he stops at nothing.

Macbeth seems to live in what Richard Hooker calls that pit "wherein Souls destitute of all hope are plunged." 406 - where they have made league with death. According to John Calvin, "when we set aside the fear of God, a mere nothing fills us with trepidation" 407 as Macbeth finds "every noise appals me" (II, ii, 58). Macbeth enters a world of loneliness, unloved and unable to love. Macbeth longs for his lost humanity but he has reached a point of no return. His violation of life is too monstrous to permit any reconciliation with society. But till the end, Macbeth retains a conscience, however severely damaged. Not out of fear, but out of remorse, he tells Macduff:
"My soul is too much charg'd
with blood of thine already."

(V, vii, 34-35)

Macbeth falls both because he is over ambitious and under scrupulous. He sacrifices his moral beliefs to his ambition yet neither Macbeth's confidence nor his despair succeeds in silencing his conscience. His mind is "full of scorpions." (III, ii, 36) Says He:

"It will have blood, they say; blood will have blood; stones have been known to move and trees to speak"

(III, iv, 122-123)

He faces his own conscience desperately. Through fear of retaliation, he passes through sleepless torture. He kills Banquo, or rather gets him killed to appease his fear but his fear does not die with Banquo and after the massacre of the Macduff family the whole flood of evil is let loose. In trying to be superhuman, he becomes inhuman. His own terrors drive him into deeper and deeper guilt. He is never a true King. He is the king of the nightmare world. In the words of G. Wilson Knight: "Macbeth is the Apocalypse of Evil." Though he is doubly condemned, self condemned and condemned by society, he dies like a
true soldier. He dies fighting. His end reveals both –
his guilt and his integrity. He dies in his occupa-
tion – that is his integrity.

In 'Macbeth', there is a juxtaposition between
evil is contrasted with England of the good King Edward.
Macbeth is associated with devilish and false prophecies
while the English King has the Heavenly gift of
prophecies. The evil that Macbeth inflicted, was
absolute. Equally absolute is the loneliness of the
evil doer. By contrast Duncan was gracious even in
his death "renown and grace is dead" (II, iii, 101).
By that 'grace of grace' (V, vii, 101) Malcolm restores
health to Scotland.

G. Wilson Knight explains metaphysics of the
birth of evil in Macbeth:

"The poet's mind is at grips with the
problems of spiritual evil – the inner
state of disintegration, disharmony and
fear from which is born an act of crime
and destruction." 409

In Macbeth, there is an interlinking of three realities–
the chaos in the state of man preceding the act of
murder, the act of murder and the consequent
suffering. He is inflicted with spiritual loneliness
and loss of sleep, and the entire society is inflicted with chaos and gloom. Spiritual loneliness is the bane on Macbeth as sleeplessness is the curse on Lady Macbeth. The first murder was joint effort of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Thereafter Macbeth alone takes charge. They are parted with averted faces, "each passes to an uncompanioned doom." They are spiritually dead much before their actual death. There is not a word of contrition from his lips as from hers.

At the end of the play

"these two, once human beings pass into that subhuman realm of disintegration where the Witches are at home. One is pushed into the abyss, as it were, by her memories. The other leaps into it fanatically as if embracing it." 411

After the crime Lady Macbeth is pursued by the furies of memories. She cannot forget "who would have thought the old man to have had so much blood in him"?

(V, i, 42-43)

She is obsessed with the murder of Lady Macduff:
"The Thane of Fife had a wife; where is she now"?
(V, i, 46-47). She cannot forget "Banquo's buried, he cannot come out on's grave." (V, i, 70).

"Macbeth's punishment takes the form of a fury of deeds." 412
"Ring the alarum-bell! Blow, wind! come, wrack! At least we'll die with harness on our back."

(V, v, 51-52)

Harold Goddard has a revealing remark.

"If Macbeth is Shakespeare's Descent into Hell, it is also his Spring Myth." Macbeth is the winter that comes between the Spring of Duncan and of Malcolm. The legend of Birnam Wood symbolizes the process of rejuvenation. Edward, the pious King of England, Master Marcellus, the good Doctor and young Siward — all of them have contributed to the process of rejuvenation.

'Macbeth' is an assertion of moral and spiritual order in human life, the violation of which brings disaster and death on the individual. There is no escape from what is done, for the past memories confront them. They are the partners in the initial crime and that sin separates them, though they are under the same roof. They are alienated from each other — divided by the depth of their souls. "She will love him for ever but he has gone beyond love." Their crime becomes their punishment. They gain what they aspired but they have lost each other. They have sown the seeds of violence and reaped fruits thereof. The difference between criminology and creative art is
borne out in Macbeth's hyper-sensitive conscience, which very few murderers in actual life display, according to criminological data. Macbeth succeeded in deceiving the trusting King Duncan but he himself is the victim of deception. As Terence Hawkes comments on the downfall of Macbeth:

"He has based his life on the principle that the witches revealed reality to him and that the material world which they offered as a prize was worth having. But nothing, the play argues, could be further from the truth and from reality. Life has no meaning for Macbeth at the end of the play and neither has time nor eternity." 415

Seen superficially, the play ends with Macbeth's defeat - but it is much more than that; it ends with nature's victory and the restoration of natural order. In the conclusion Macduff says, "The Time is free" (V, vii, 94) and Malcolm promises that the deeds of justice

"which would be planted newly with the time" (V, vii, 94)

"We will perform in measure, time and place" (V, vii, 102)

Malcolm brings the promise of the new age where

"blood will cease to flow, movement will recommence, fear will be forgotten."
And that way lies the triumph of life over death. The play illustrates the themes of Natural Order and Christian Grace, Metaphusic of Evil and a new Winter - Spring myth.

Macbeth is a play of opposites - fair and foul, darkness and light, night and day, life and death. Macbeth is the picture of a universal conflict between Grace and Sin.

Macbeth finds that life involves more than matter. It has its non-physical, non-rational side represented by the Witches. Macbeth is evil tormented. The root of evil in him is the criminal urge to usurp power. Here we find evil as a mysterious force, sending his victim from one act of blood to another. He disintegrates. He knows what he has done and knows that other people know it too.

The atmosphere of the play is charged with a mood of questioning and uncertainty. Mrs. Campbell has examined Macbeth as a study in fear and courage. It begins with the courage that is not real courage and ends with the courage that is not real courage.
"It pictures in turn the military courage of Macbeth, the drunken courage of Lady Macbeth, the fury of despair and the courage of desperation. It pictures superstitious fear, melancholy fear, the fear of those who share our secrets, the fear of those who are our rivals, the fear of those whom we have harmed, all the fears lead to murder after murder - fears that destroy peace and happiness, honour and hope; fears that make ambition fruitless and success a mockery."

The atmosphere of terror pervades the play - sounds, images, incantation of the witches, the bell, the tolls, the cries of victims, the owl, the raven, the knocking at the gate, the storm and the earthquake are part of the impact of the play. Like other Shakespearean Tragedies, Macbeth also has tempests. They are violent, indicating chaos, disintegration and death. The play begins with thunder and lightning. The chaos in nature on the day following Duncan's murder finds expression in the conversation between Ross and Old Man

"Is't night's predominance, or the day's shame,
That darkness does the face of earth entomb,
When living light should kiss it?"

(II, iv 8-10)
Nature has become unnatural after the unnatural deed of murder. The night of Banquo's murder is full of images of evil and of death. Macbeth prays for 'Seeling night' to mask the dreadful murder of Banquo.

"Come, seeling night,
Scarf up the tender eye of pitiful day;
And with thy bloody and invisible hand
Cancel and tear to pieces that great bond
Which keeps me pale! — Light thickens; and
the crow
Makes wing to the rooky wood;
Good things of day begin to droop and drowse;
Whiles night's black agents to their prey do rouse."

(III, ii, 46-53)

Evil actions thus lead to sickness in nature.

Macbeth has to fight against the evil ambition within himself and the pressure of evil from outside. As the deed is dark, darkness, rather blackness pervades the atmosphere.

John Lawlor explains Macbeth's tragedy:

"In Macbeth where the metaphysical is fully deployed, the true centre of interest is realistic. Equivocation by the Witches answers to equivocation, first in the
heart than in the act of man." The questions raised in our minds by Macbeth are metaphysical. Christian morality is exemplified by Banquo in his uprightness. Emrys Jones has indicated a Christian parallel to Macbeth:

"Death makes his appearance in Herod's banqueting hall as Banquo's ghost and stands there unnoticed while the revelry continues. When the feast is at its height, Death suddenly strikes and the two worlds—the apparently self-sufficient realm of the tyrant and the actual all-enclosing world of God come into collision."

Herod collapses, so also Macbeth. Herod is a killer of innocent children, so is Macbeth. Just as the child, Herod wishes to kill, escapes; the boy, Macbeth plots to get killed, also escapes. In this sense Herod of the Mystery Plays is the prototype of Macbeth.

Shakespeare, in the great tragedies, dramatizes the inner life of men. In Macbeth, he uses a contrast position of fair and foul. He shows an antithesis between the life-giving and the death-giving principles. They exist side by side within the human soul.

Dover Wilson summed up:
"Macbeth is the history of a human soul in its way to Hell, a soul at first noble, humane, innocent, then tempted through ambition to commit an appalling crime, and last passing through the inevitable stages of torment and spiritual corruption that precede damnation." 420

It does not touch the soul, but remorse and repentance are the inner influences affecting the soul. For him what remains of life is no more than a tale, "Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury" (V, v, 27) This is a startling anticipation of the modern philosophy of the absurd.

The play begins with the murder of the King, sacrilegious murder. That one murder starts a chain of murders which drags him to damnation. It is a variant of the theme of Faust. In both the cases, temptation leads to fall. In Macbeth crime and punishment are interrelated. Murder rebounds on the murderer.

Shakespeare is the master of the art of revealing the 'inner man' and conflicts within the character. He unfolds the process of moral and spiritual death which precedes physical death. Fear is
the predominant element in the play. The mental anguish which Macbeth suffers during first murder is, by tragic irony, transferred to Lady Macbeth. It is Macbeth, who after Duncan's murder hears the cry "Macbeth shall sleep no more" — (II, ii.44) but it is Lady Macbeth who suffers from insomnia.

Commenting on the central problem in the play, Theodore Spencer writes:

"We never know whether the Weird Sisters control Macbeth's fate or whether their prophecies are a reflection of Macbeth's own character. The problem of predestination and free will is presented but is left unanswered." 421

Macbeth shares religious implications like the Medieval Morality Plays. The mystical implications are conveyed through an artistic use of the Cabbalistic figure Three. Brissenden has thrown light on this fact. Three is an odd number

"with ancient magical and cabbalistic significance. Three occurs several times in the play apart from being the number of the witches themselves"
Macbeth's titles are three - Glamis, Cawdor and King. The first murder involves three deaths - Duncan's and two grooms. There are three murderers to kill Banquo. Curiously enough, in Act III Sc. iii, three apparitions appear ....... The triad ....... is a recurring idea in the play. 422

The play presents the religious view of man's existence and destiny. Here he has explored the meaning of life in terms of religious symbols and myths of profound meaning. Sleeplessness is a symbol of great potency. He realizes "in Glamis hath murder'd sleep, and therefore Cawdor Shall sleep no more, Macbeth shall sleep no more!" (II, ii, 43-44). He thought he heard a voice cry "Sleep no more!" (II, ii, 36)

"For sleep in Shakespeare, is the privilege of the good and the reward of the innocent. If it has been put to death, there is no goodness left." 423

This sleeplessness is rooted in fear. Fear is the primary emotion of the Macbeth universe. Fear is at the root of his crimes.
Another symbol of equally great potency is blood. The word 'blood' which occurs almost everywhere in the play has scriptural meaning - death by violence. There is reference to blood everywhere. Macbeth and Banquo "bathe in recking wounds" (I, ii, 40) in the war, reported by the 'bloody' sergeant. Macbeth's sword "smok'd with bloody execution." (I, ii, 18)

There is the blood on Macbeth's hands and on Lady Macbeth's after smearing the sleeping grooms with it. Duncan's body is described by Macbeth "his silver skin lac'd with his golden blood." (II, iii, 118) There is blood on the face of the murderer, who comes to inform about Banquo's 'trenched gashes', (III, iv, 27) the gory locks of the blood-bolter'd Banquo; the bloody child Apparition, and the blood-nightmare of Lady Macbeth's sleep walking. "But though blood-imagery is rich, there is no brilliance in it; it is rather a sickly smear". 

The play is drenched in blood and violence. But as Arthur Quiller Couch points out

"Though it is full of blood and images of blood, the important blood-shedding is hidden, removed from the Spectator's sight."
Duncan is murdered off the stage, so is little Macduff; Lady Macbeth dies off the stage. Macbeth makes his final exit fighting, to be killed off the stage.

The atrocities of Macbeth are the result of decisions and compulsions. The Macbeth world is steeped in blood—killers and victims. Blood stains all on hands and face. It is blood which incarnadines and cannot be washed. The play opens and closes in slaughter. Blood floods the stage, everyone walks in it. Death, crime, and murder are made tangible by blood. The necessity of murder, one after the other, is Macbeth's nightmare. Darkness envelops Macbeth deeper and deeper.

As E.K. Chambers explains:

"Temptation begets crime, and crime yet furth r crimes. .... Once the murder of Duncan has been committed, the possibility of regress disappears; the chain of cause and consequence unfolds with remorseless fatality until the end is ruin of the moral sense or even reason itself so that death comes almost as a relief, although it be a miserable death, without hope of repentance."

426
There is a terrible intensity of blood imagery in the murder scene. It explains the consequences of murder. There is no respite from fear for Macbeth after the murder.

"So ye shall not pollute the land wherein you are; for blood it defileth the land and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed therein but by the blood of him that shed it."

This Biblical prophecy aptly describes Scotland under Macbeth. There is a kind of Katharsis as we rejoice at the sinner's fall. It restores our assurance of justice. The play ends in blood in its sacred sense of expiation through death.

Macbeth is aware of the mystic power of Duncan's blood. His famous image of the reddened sea is a convincing proof of his awareness of its sacrificial quality. It is blood everywhere - death through blood, salvation through blood - that is the mystery of sacrificial blood. This image of blood

"rests upon a common alchemical concept, that of the tincture, for the working of which Shakespeare used the very unusual verb 'incarnadine' which means to change into the crimson of flesh. .... After the
murder ..... Duncan's blood has become an alchemical tincture, an enormously strong colouring agent ..... which has the power of transmuting substances, a notion almost commonplace to them. The poet John Donne, at about this time actually used the image of the tincture to describe the power of Christ to save both soul and body. Christ, says Donne, can by his alchemy of the tincture turn even sinful flesh into the everlasting perfection of gold."

Shakespeare drenches the play in blood, which poisons the air with fear, "

"turns feasting to terror
and the innocent sleep to nightmare and employs a terrible irony of destruction in the accomplishment of its barren ends. Evil is alive of itself, a protagonist in its own right." 429

Time is an important dimension in the tragedy of Macbeth. In violating the human bond, he has disturbed the natural rhythm of time.

"Macbeth in his anagnorisis recognizes his tragedy in terms of his exclusion from nature's regeneration and from nature's eternal time." 430
Macbeth who interferes with the process of
time is foiled. Time takes its revenge. Past asserts
itself, Macbeth cannot continue as he pleases with the
seeds of time. The escape of Princes Malcolm and
Donalbain is nature's guarantee that time will be free.

In the mind's of Macbeth, there are
"three kinds of time - the time before
the murder of Duncan, the time of the
murder of Duncan and the time afterwards
- when they reap the fruits of the murder." 431

Time is, in a sense, the process of destruction.
"Her audit, though delayed, answered must be". (Sonnet
CXXVI : 13) Macbeth, in that sense, is a symbol of
time. He destroys, but his destruction destroys him.
That is where Time is triumphant over Macbeth.

Macbeth sees all life from the death-
aspect of time. And he is now himself
reconciled to the 'nothing', the negation
of evil and death. He finds peace in the
profundities of his own nihilistic death-
experience; death and 'nothing' are
reality's life has no meaning. The evil
has worked its way with him and left him
with no hope in life. Even so, there is
yet death." 432
Every measure that he takes to free himself from time, binds him into it. In Macbeth and Banquo, Shakespeare has contrasted two ways of serving time and eternity.

The retribution against the Macbeths may be interpreted as time's revenge. Explaining nemesis, McAlinden writes

"Nemesis affirms that there is an indestructible relationship between past, present and future which man will ignore to his cost; it is impossible to 'overleap' today and take tomorrow, as it is impossible to trammel up the consequence of what was done yesterday or today. ... The past persistently intrudes upon the present until the moment arrives when life 'on this bank and shoal of time' seems unbearable or pointless. Nothing remains then but the life to come, which, being timeless cannot be 'jumped!'"

Macbeth and Lady Macbeth attempt to drag the future forcibly into the present moment, and there lies their tragedy. Lady Macbeth not only longs for future, but she goes ahead of time into the future and experiences its sensation
"The letters have transported me beyond
This ignorant present, and I feel now
The future in the instant."

(I, v, 57-59)

Not only Lady Macbeth desires the future in the instant,
but also Macbeth commits the most sacrilegious murder to
jump the life to come.

"The whole play is future minded. Unlike
'Hamlet' and 'Othello', there are in it no
temporal flashbacks, no protracted memories
of earlier generations, no narrations of
past events, but it purely and avidly pursues
a future." 434

Macbeth's initial sin arises from this unruly pushing the
times forward. It jostles the present to catch the
future - this very act is an impossibility and therefore
involves the violation of the sacred bond of nature.

"Time and the hour runs through the roughest
day" (I, iii, 146)

Says Macbeth, but he wilfully attempts to arrest the
motion of time so that the future - consequent punishments,
may be abolished, but time like nature reasserts at the end.
Time then is free. Time is in motion, it cannot be
Before Duncan's murder, Lady Macbeth is confident that she is transported "beyond the ignorant present." (I, v, 58). But it is an illusion. Time cannot be bound. Its beginning has been prospective, and attempt to "look into the seeds of time and say which grain will grow and which will not." (I, iii, 56). As the beginning is prospective, the middle and the end become retrospective. He is in the end, aware of the present, of old age. As John Lawlor remarks about Macbeth: "Now he knows too well that time is successive.*

The Macbeths have failed to realize the nature of time and have become victims of hallucinations. Their attempt to bind the future fails. Time shakes them off into oblivion and it gains its natural rhythm.

Macbeth himself is the architect of his own downfall. He himself is infected by that disease which is best diagnosed as impatience with time. He does not wait till the time is ripe. This lack of ripeness proves fatal, both for him and his partner in the sin, as also for all who surround him. Both the sinners suffer and make others suffer. The crown brings no joy because life itself is a burden for them. As John Lawlor says: "time itself" (on p 337)
"... time itself holds no absolute mystery; they young grow up, the guilty grow old." 436

The play is dramatically more mature than Richard III and Macbeth as protagonist rivals the introspection and anguish of Hamlet.

The poet W.H. Auden explains the tragedy of Greek Oedipus:

"The parricide and incest committed by Oedipus are not his acts, but things that happen to him without his knowledge and against his desire, presumably as a divine punishment for his hubris." 437

But Macbeth's acts are his own. They are the outcome of his ambition and pride. He believes that he can do what he pleases irrespective of God's will. W.H. Auden comments on the difference between Greek Oedipus and Shakespeare's Macbeth:

"If he had listened to them as a Greek would have listened to the Oracle, then he would wait until it came to pass. But he takes it as a promise with which he has to co-operate and which, in consequence, brings about his downfall." 438
The play treats death on all levels - death on physical plane, political plane, moral plane, spiritual plane and human plane - but it is always conditioned by lust of power, ambition and fear. In the final analysis, we find that the wages of sin are death. *Macbeth* is one play in which we have not merely the horror of death but also metaphysics of death.
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