Chapter-2  Tragedy: Meaning and Matter

“Life is a comedy to those who think and a tragedy to those who feel” (Horace Walpole)

Tragedy has gone through alteration in approach and development through ages, but its essence has never been modified. Despite the uniqueness found in each tragedy, all tragedies enjoy a basic resemblance. All of them express the tragic nature of man’s existence and the grandeur of human spirit in facing it, yet each tragedy translates this into the language of its own age. “The question of the nature and significance of tragedy and the tragic hero is answered in each age by the significance attached to them by that age”. (1) Tragedy transcends time and place; in spite of the seeming differences, classical, Elizabethan, and modern tragedies share a common theme.

Man has always been conscious of the limitations he faces in life. The restricting forces, imposed on man, take various shapes and forms; sometimes they appear as providence, and sometimes as natural disasters. In some cases they function as fate or they may appear as the social world. On the other hand, one has man’s aspirations, pride, ambition, thirst for knowledge or power, and the desire to be demigods. The clash between the two conflicting forces, the internal drives and the external forces.

What is tragedy? Many definitions have been offered, but the most influential is the one presented by the philosopher Aristotle (384-322 BC) in his work entitled Poetics. Aristotle was one of the greatest philosophers of Ancient Greece. A philosopher looks for ideal forms, and tries to explain the nature of reality. The search for ideal forms led Aristotle to explore many subjects. His analysis of the ideal form of tragic plays became a guideline for later playwrights in Western civilization. For centuries, European playwrights like William Shakespeare tried to
write plays that would match the ideals of Aristotle’s model. In studying tragedies such as *Oedipus Rex*, to which Aristotle frequently refers, one should take into consideration Aristotle’s definition of tragedy, not because it is the final word on the subject, but because it contains fundamental ideas with which all later definitions and studies of tragedy must come to terms. In the sixth chapter of the *Poetics*, Aristotle presents his definition:

“Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; with incidents arousing pity and fear, wherewith to accomplish its *catharsis* of such emotions. . . . Every Tragedy, therefore, must have six parts, which parts determine its quality—namely, Plot, Characters, Diction, Thought, Spectacle, and Melody.” (2)

Tragedy, then, is a process of imitating an action which has serious implications is complete, and possesses magnitude by means of language which has been made sensuously attractive, with each of its varieties and separately in the parts; enacted by the persons themselves and not presented through narrative; through a course of pity and fear completing the purification of tragic acts which have those emotional characteristics. By “language made sensuously attractive”. (3) It means language that has rhythm and melody, and by “its varieties found separately”. (4) It means the fact that certain parts of the play are carried on through spoken verses alone and others the other way around, through song.

Now first of all, since they perform the imitation through action (by acting it), the adornment of their visual appearance will perforce constitute some part of the making of tragedy; and song composition and verbal expression also, for those are the media in which they perform the
imitation. By “verbal expression” it means the actual composition of the verses and by “song-composition” something whose meaning is entirely clear. Next, since it is an imitation of an action and is enacted by certain people who are performing the action, and since those people must necessarily have certain traits both of character and thought (for it is thanks to these two factors that we speak of people’s actions also as having a defined character, and it is in accordance with their actions that all either succeed or fail); and since the imitation of the action is the plot, for by “plot” it means the structuring of the events, and by the “characters” that in accordance with which we say that the persons who are acting have a defined moral character, and by “thought” all the passages in which they attempt to prove some thesis or set forth an opinion — it follows of necessity, then, that tragedy as a whole has just six constituent elements in relation to the essence that makes it a distinct species and they are plot characters, verbal expression, thought, visual adornment, and song composition.

For the elements by which they imitate are two (verbal expression and song-composition) the manner in which they imitate is one (visual adornment) the things they imitate are three (plot, characters, thought) and there is nothing more beyond these. (5) These then are the constituent forms they use. The greatest of these elements is the structuring of the incidents. For tragedy is an imitation not of men but of a life, an action, and they have moral quality in accordance with their characters but are happy or unhappy in accordance with their actions; hence they are not active in order to imitate their characters, but they include the characters along with the actions for the sake of the latter. Thus the structure of events, the plot, is the goal of tragedy, and the goal is the greatest thing of all. Again a tragedy cannot exist without a plot, but it can without characters. Thus the tragedies of most of our modern poets are devoid of character, and in general many poets are like that; so also with the relationship between Zeuxis and Polygnotus,
among the painters: Polygnotus is a good portrayer of character, while Zeuxis ‘painting has no
dimension of character at all. (6) Again if one strings end to end speeches that are expressive of
character and carefully worked in thought and expression, he still will not achieve the result
which one said was the aim of tragedy; the job will be done much better by a tragedy that is more
deficient in these other respects but has a plot, a structure of events. It is much the same case as
with painting: the most beautiful pigments smeared on at random will not give as much pleasure
as a black-and-white outline picture. Besides, the most powerful means tragedy has for swaying
our feelings, namely the peripeties and recognitions, are elements of plot. An indicative sign is
that those who are beginning a poetic career manage to hit the mark in verbal expression and
character portrayal sooner than they do in plot construction; and the same is true of practically all
the earliest poets. So plot is the basic principle, the heart and soul, as it were, of tragedy, and the
characters come second. It is the imitation of an action and imitates the persons primarily for the
sake of their action. (7)

Third in rank is thought. This is the ability to state the issues and appropriate points pertaining to
a given topic, an ability which springs from the arts of politics and rhetoric; in fact the earlier
poets made their characters talk “politically,” the present-day poets rhetorically. But “character”
is that kind of utterance which clearly reveals the bent of a man’s moral choice (hence there is no
character in that class of utterances in which there is nothing at all that the speaker is choosing or
rejecting), while “thought” is the passages in which they try to prove that something is so or not
so, or state some general principle. Fourth is the verbal expression of the speeches. It means by
this the same thing that was said earlier, that the “verbal expression” is the conveyance of
thought through language: a statement which has the same meaning whether one says “verses” or
“speeches.” The song-composition of the remaining parts is the greatest of the sensuous
attractions, and the visual adornment of the dramatic persons can have a strong emotional effect but is the least artistic element, the least connected with the poetic art; in fact the force of tragedy can be felt even without benefit of public performance and actors, while for the production of the visual effect the property man’s art is even more decisive than that of the poets”. (8)

General Principles of the Tragic Plot with these distinctions out of the way, let us next discuss what the structuring of the events should be like, since this is both the basic and the most important element in the tragic art. As Aristotle has said, then, that tragedy is an imitation of an action which is complete and whole and has some magnitude (for there is also such a thing as a whole that has no magnitude). (9) “Whole” is that which has beginning, middle, and end. “Beginning” is that which does not necessarily follow on something else, but after it something else naturally is or happens; “end,” the other way around, is that which naturally follows on something else, either necessarily or for the most part, but nothing else after it; and “middle” that which naturally follows on something else and something else on it. So, then, well-constructed plots should neither begin nor end at any chance point but follow the guidelines just laid down. Furthermore, since the beautiful, whether a living creature or anything that is composed of parts, should not only have these in a fixed order to one another but also possess a definite size which does not depend on chance — for beauty depends on size and order; hence neither can a very tiny creature turn out to be beautiful (since our perception of it grows blurred as it approaches the period of imperceptibility) nor an excessively huge one (for then it cannot all be perceived at once and so its unity and wholeness are lost), if for example there were a creature a thousand miles long — so, just as in the case of living creatures they must have some size, but one that can be taken in a single view, so with plots: they should have length, the one is determined by the tragic competitions and the ordinary span of attention. But the limit fixed by the very nature of
the case is: the longer the plot, up to the point of still being perspicuous as a whole, the finer it is so far as size is concerned; or to put it in general terms, the length in which, with things happening in unbroken sequence, a shift takes place either probably or necessarily from bad to good fortune or from good to bad — that is an acceptable norm of length. But a plot is not unified, as some people think, simply because it has to do with a single person. A large, indeed an indefinite number of things can happen to a given individual, some of which go to constitute no unified event; and in the same way there can be many acts of a given individual from which no single action emerges.

A poetic imitation, then, ought to be unified in the same way as is a single imitation in any other mimetic field, by having a single object: since the plot is an imitation of an action, the latter ought to be both unified and complete, and the component events ought to be so firmly compacted that if any one of them is shifted to another place, or removed, the whole is loosened up and dislocated; for an element whose addition or subtraction makes no perceptible extra difference is not really a part of the whole. From what has been said it is also clear that the poet’s job is not to report what has happened but what is likely to happen: that is, what is capable of happening according to the rule of probability or necessity. Thus the difference between the historian and the poet is not in their utterances being in verse or prose (it would be quite possible for ‘Herodotus’ work to be translated into verse, and it would not be any the less a history with verse than it is without it) (10) the difference lies in the fact that the historian speaks of what has happened, the poet of the kind of thing that can happen. Hence also poetry is a more philosophical and serious business than history; for poetry speaks more of universals, history of particulars. “Universal” in this case is what kind of person is likely to do or say certain kinds of things, according to probability or necessity; that is what poetry aims at, although it gives its
persons particular names afterward; while the “particular” is what Alcibiades did or what happened to him.

In the field of comedy this point has been grasped: our comic poets construct their plots on the basis of general probabilities and then assign names to the persons quite arbitrarily, instead of dealing with individuals as the old iambic poets did. But in tragedy they still cling to the historically given names. The reason is that what is possible is persuasive; so what has not happened we are not yet ready to believe is possible, while what has happened is, we feel, obviously possible: for it would not have happened if it were impossible. Nevertheless, it is a fact that even in our tragedies, in some cases only one or two of the names are traditional, the rest being invented, and in some others none at all. It is so, for example, in Agathon’s Antheus, the names in it are as fictional as the events and it gives no less pleasure because of that. Hence the poets ought not to cling at all costs to the traditional plots, around which our tragedies are constructed. And in fact it is absurd to go searching for this kind of authentication, since even the familiar names are familiar to only a few in the audience and yet give the same kind of pleasure to all. So from these considerations it is evident that the poet should be a maker of his plots more than of his verses, insofar as he is a poet by virtue of his imitations and what he imitates is actions. (11)

Hence even if it happens that he puts something that has actually taken place into poetry, he is none the less a poet; for there is nothing to prevent some of the things that have happened from being the kind of things that can happen, and that is the sense in which he is their maker. Tragedy examines the conflict between man and his surroundings. Man desire to be great, to attain his goals, and to transgress human limitations, but what is tragic is that in every step taken, he faces obstacles. (12) But the tragic hero is beyond our tears; he is great in his endeavor to
transcend human constrains that cripple common people. He is great in his desire to face any kind of hazard, for in this way he portrays man’s utmost potentiality. The tragic hero is not a miserable or passive creature who accepts everything with submission; his dignity lies in his facing the perils and in his final annihilation.

Although Aristotle has laid down the foundation for writing tragedy, some of his rules are not so comprehensive as to be applicable to all kinds of tragedy. But the fact that his main points can be traced in almost all tragedies. Aristotle’s model of definition is based on Sophocles’ tragedies especially on *Oedipus the King*; Sophocles has followed human nature in writing his tragedy, so *Poetics* in inevitable contains some universal issues which will never lose their validity although they may need redefinition. Measuring any tragedy prejudicially by Aristotle’s definition is to narrow down the scope and to ignore many good works of art. But widening our point of view and reading Poetics with a new outlook, by ignoring the redundant parts and reconsidering the vital points, one can define tragedy with more flexibility, so that the definition can be applicable to all the tragedies written in different ages. In this case one can notice that regardless of some minor differences, all tragedies share the basic tenets of Aristotle’s definition.

In the past centuries, various kinds of tragedy appeared; different techniques were employed to create a fresh outlook, yet the tragedies produced are the same in essence, for tragedy deals with man’s nature which is invariable. As A. C. Bradley says,

“Great tragedy presents an essentially human story, told in human terms, and providing such insights of its own as our common humanity can share”. (13)

Tragedy delves the depth of man’s nature and discovers there the source of human suffering. It traces those events in life which lead to man’s disaster. Beside man’s tragic flaw, destiny may
also be influential. Life is full of the struggles of the human will with the superior law.” A sense of tragic inevitability seems to be common to tragedies from every period and is a part of the haunting spirit of doom which reflects both the courage and the madness of man” (14).

The confrontation with destiny comes about as the result of some deliberate decision of the individual who cannot accept the situation with resignation. He is provoked by his great need or desire, even to the risk of his life, to take action against what oppresses him. Here lies the essential human involvement of tragedy. The effect of tragedy lies in the universality of its subject matter which is related to man’s nature.

It is through the tragic flaws that man can gain dignity and exaltation. So although believing in man’s vulnerability, Sophocles is not a pessimist. As Fry believes,

“He sees man not as ruined and sunk and despair by his suffering but fulfilling by his nature and meeting with spiritual courage the challenge of his vulnerability. The continuous presence of gods, oracles, and fate in general is a reminder of man’s limitations, yet man is responsible for his doom.” (15)

Greek heroes are not toys at the hand of fate; they have their own will or at least their own passions. As tragic heroes, Sophoclean protagonists are finally isolated and exiled by the world. The sense of loneliness is very strong in them. They are human being like us; though appearing as types and symbols, they are humane. So in taking part in their lives on the stage, the purgation of the undesirable feelings of pity and fear is achieved. Greek characters usually undergo change and reach self-awareness hence the feeling of exaltation. Greek belongs to here and now; it has nothing to do with the afterlife and this is what makes suffering meaningful.
GREEK TRAGEDY

In Greek tragedy, the tragic situation, in which the characters find themselves, is always a situation in which man seems to be deprived of all outward help and is forced to rely entirely on himself. It is often a situation of extraordinary tension and utmost conflict. Studying the plots of a number of Greek tragedies, one can find variation of two basic tragic situations; either the case of man’s miscalculation of reality which brings about the fatal outcome or the case of a man facing the necessity of choosing between two duties, both of which claim fulfillment. Furthermore, the result of the hero’s choice or deed affects not only his life but also those around him. This means that his fate may throw a dark shadow on theirs as well. Fate, in Greek tragedy, takes the form of an invisible power, which is personified by the gods. (16) Man’s violation of the divine laws dictated by gods due to his overweening pride often results in suffering. In this conflict, the hero is often confronted with a choice. Choice is at the heart of tragedy. This choice may be taken without much consideration; it may be taken deliberately but in ignorance of the reality of a situation, and it may be taken because it is imperative. The result of this choice is often fatal. This is what makes a Greek tragedy so awe-inspiring to watch. (17)

Greek tragedy has something to say to everyone. Greek tragedy raises questions, and suggests answers, but never insists. (18) What these magnificent plays do is let us look at our deepest fears and continues to live in spite of them. These fears can come from circumstances that are external to us: the threat of war; the threat of Anthrax poisoning; the threat of a crippling or fatal disease; living with poverty, or under an oppressive government. Then there are the internal reasons for fear: that clock ticking inside of us all that tells us that we shall not live forever. The fear of death can be crippling, or, if we believe the existentialists, liberating.
The roots of tragedy lie in the ancient Greek religious festivals for Dionysius in the 5th century. Playwrights competed in those festivals with three tragedies and a satyr play. As Greek tragedies were not public entertainment but rituals, they had a "rigid pattern". This pattern was thoroughly studied by Aristotle, whose *Poetics* is the primary source for all who deal with tragedy, whether Greek or Modern. Ancient tragedy was brought to its climax by the three great tragic playwrights: Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides.

**Aeschylus:** Aeschylus is the father of Greek tragedy. Large issues and the splendor of his choruses characterize his drama. His trilogies show divine justice acting over generations. He utilizes spectacle to advantage, coupling it with equally spectacular poetic words.

Aeschylus lived during the glorious period of the Persian Wars (489-90 BC) when the invading Persians were defeated. He fought at Salamis, as evidenced by his epitaph, which commemorates him as a soldier and not as a playwright. He never had to face the less glorious Peloponnesian War (404-431 BC) which came about as a reaction by Sparta and other former allies against the expansion of the Athenian empire. It is likely that he came from a distinguished family. He was invited by the ruler Hieron to visit Syracuse in Sicily, and he wrote his *Women of Etna* on the occasion of Hieron's founding of the city of Etna.

His plays were esteemed for their inspirational and educational value. In Aristophanes' *Frogs* (405 BC) the god Dionysus brings Aeschylus back from the dead so that the Athenians can enjoy good drama once more, and Aeschylus claims that his *Seven Against Thebes* is "full of Ares" and whoever sees it is anxious to be a warrior. (19) The plays that survive are: *Persians*, 472 BC; *Seven Against Thebes*, 467 BC; *Suppliant Women*, not earlier than 466 BC; *Agamemnon*.

We are told that Aeschylus won about thirteen victories, compared to the twenty-four of Sophocles, and four of Euripides during his lifetime and one posthumous. Fragments exist of
many of the missing plays. The most substantial fragments come from satyr plays: Diktouolkoi ("Netfishers") and Theoroi, also known as Isthmiastai ("Spectators at the Isthmian Games").

There are few extensive fragments from the tragedies. The most we have are from Myrmidons, Niobe, and Prometheus Luomenos ("Prometheus Released").

Aeschylus' plays have many exchanges between one actor and the chorus. As much as half a play can be choral and his choruses are visually striking. The chorus of Persians appeared in lavish oriental costumes. The Erinyes, or Furies in the Eumenides, were so hideous in appearance that (an ancient biographer claimed) women miscarried upon seeing them, and little boys fainted from fright. By the time that the biographer wrote his account (in the fourth century or later), women were attending the theatre. Of the three great tragedians whose work we have, Aeschylus gets the prize for poetry. He combines abstract usage, invented and rare words coupled with bold metaphors. He is certainly the most difficult, if not impossible, to translate. He often takes an image and carries it throughout the play, or trilogy, as, for instance, in the Oresteia with the related images of net, hunt, blood, fertility, sacrifice, and war: public pursuits which lead to private disaster. This use of a repeated image in a play, or connected trilogy, is not unlike the Wagnerian Leitmotiv in opera.

*The Persians:* Most tragic plots and characters come from mythology. Aristophanes said that Aeschylus wrote "slices from the banquet of Homer."(20) The first tragedy that we know of that had a plot and characters entirely of the author's own making was the Antheus by Agathon, towards the end of the fifth century.

Tragedies rarely dealt with historical subjects. Alone of the three great tragedians, Aeschylus deals with an historical subject in the Persians. The Persians was written and performed in 472
BC, eight years after the defeat of the Persians who had invaded Greece on two occasions (490 BC and 480 BC) intending to make them part of their empire.

Phrynichus had earlier written The Capture of Miletus, and it was said that he was fined because he reminded the Athenians of their recent sufferings. It was produced in (493-94 BC) and told of an Ionian city seized and destroyed by the Persians in 494. An ancient writer claims that Aeschylus based his Persians on Phrynichus' Phoenician Women, which showed the defeat of the Persians in the opening scene. It is unlikely to have been as dramatically effective as Aeschylus' play, which built up suspense by revealing the disaster only later.

In his Persians, Aeschylus extolled the merits of Athenian democracy by comparison with the Persians who were governed by a king. When Atossa, the Persian queen, asks who rules the Greeks and who their master is, she is told the Greeks are slaves to no one. This is a play about overweening pride (hybris), which Aristotle describes as "doing and saying things which bring shame to the sufferer" (21). This is a common theme in Greek tragedy and generally led to crimes, which Aeschylus, as many other Greeks, felt that the gods punished. In the Greek mind, an abusive tyrant was the embodiment of this type of pride, and Xerxes, the Persian King who attacked Greece, fits this model. He tried to bridge the Hellespont, the crossing from Asia to Greece, by boats chained together. Storms destroyed the bridge, and Xerxes had the sea whipped to punish it. He and his army pillaged shrines, and for these and other acts punishment from the gods followed. This play combines history with an important moral lesson. It nevertheless arouses sympathy for the Persians, because we not only see their suffering from their eyes, but we also see the suffering of Atossa, a mother, for her son, Xerxes.

Aeschylus is delivering useful political and philosophical commentary. One might take this as a warning to the Athenians not to overextend themselves, and not to be eager to acquire an empire,
which could be a liability later. It also advises against going too far: “Nothing in Excess” was one of the sayings of the sages affixed on a temple at Delphi. Victors can easily become victims, and this play advocates sympathy for the defeated. It is to the credit of the Athenians that they gave a first prize to this play that showed sympathy for a long-standing enemy.

There are effective dramatic moments, such as the first entry of the Persian chorus in their colorful and exotic costumes. We should remember also that they sing and dance. The Queen mother enters in a chariot. The ghost of Darius, Xerxes' father, is invoked and rises from the dead in hopes that he can save the city. Xerxes himself finally appears in rags, the embodiment of defeat. The incorporation of ghosts and gods in modern stagings can contribute to the overall drama not only visually, but in tapping into an age-old desire for additional explanations and recourse behind phenomena. Religion, and religious awe, even in the most secular age, still seems based in the human psyche.

The staging would have shown a tomb, possibly in the middle of the orchestra. The location was Sousa, the capital of Persia. One of the left and right entries might indicate the palace and home, and the other the direction of Greece or the "foreign" land.

Seven Against Thebs: This play, like the Persians, contains long choral passages of lamentation; in both plays the chorus has half the lines. It seems fitting that our very first tragedies to survive from antiquity transformed human suffering into beautiful poetic song. In the Persians, it was an Asiatic foreigner, the "other," who did the weeping, and in this play it is women, also regarded as "other" by the Greek males. As in the Persians, there is strong sense of the divine in the play, and of the pitilessness of fate. Seven Against Thebes, following Laius and Oedipus (which no longer survive), is the third play in a connected trilogy about the family of Oedipus. The satyr play that followed, The Sphinx, was also connected in theme.
Seven Against Thebes illustrates the tragedy that resulted from Oedipus' curse on his sons, Polyneices and Eteocles. According to most mythical accounts, these two sons were to alternate yearly as rulers of Thebes. Eteocles became the ruler of Thebes and refused to give up his rule when his year ended. Polyneices raised an army in Argos and attacked Thebes.

The play opens with Eteocles explaining that the city is about to be attacked. He probably addresses the audience directly. The women of Thebes weep and call on the gods because of the threatening danger. They speak about the terrible things that happen to women who are made prisoners and slaves.

Eteocles forbids the women on pain of death to continue such disheartening lamentation. Instead of a random battle, it is agreed that seven defenders should confront seven of the enemy at each of the city's seven gates. There is elaborate poetry describing these heroes, including the iconography on the shields. The boastful claims on the attackers' shields were sure to attract the anger of the gods. In addition, Polyneices was attacking his own city, something no one should do. As usual in Greek tragedy, things are not simple. Polyneices had a claim on the throne, and Eteocles should have given up the throne to him when it was his turn to rule.

The women warn Eteocles not to fight when he finds out he must face his own brother at the seventh gate. He remembers his father's curse, but stubbornly insists on fighting and fulfilling his mission as a defender of his city. He concludes by philosophically claiming that no man can escape what the gods have in store for him. Then a messenger comes to tell us of the disaster. Eteocles and Polyneices killed each other, and many others perished, but Thebes is safe. The women now lament the dead. They say of the two "sharp-hearted" brothers that they "divided their property, and each received equal shares." (22) The original play probably ended with this dramatic lament, but the manuscripts include further scenes. First Antigone and Ismene lament
their brothers' deaths. Then a herald enters to tell them that Creon has forbidden burial of Polyneices. Antigone says she will bury him anyway. The chorus divide up and half side with Antigone and go to help her bury the body, and the other half obey the law, and go to bury Eteocles. It is most likely that a later writer added this passage, after seeing or reading Sophocles' *Antigone.*

This is a warning against any civil war, which often is the bloodiest of all wars if the American Civil War (1861-1865), and the Greek Civil War following World War II are any indication. Some say both those wars are still going on. The “troubles” in Ireland have gone far beyond the simple colonial model where the occupied fight against the occupier. When brother fights brother no one can ever win. Wars that oppose one family or family member against each other are as bloody as religious wars.

*Seven Against Thebes* takes place right before and around the city. It is possible that there are statues of the gods at the back of the orchestra. We can assume that one entry, possibly audience left, indicates the area of the conflict, from which the messenger would arrive, and the other entry indicates city-center, either the shrines or the palace. When Eteocles addresses the "citizens of Thebes,"(23) extras could play these citizens. A polarity is established between male and female, between the men who run the city, who make the laws, declare war, and the women (chorus) who are subject to those decisions, and who suffer from them. The chorus of women enters after just having visited the shrines, so probably audience right. These suffering, lamenting women are a key to the drama, which can be taken as a warning to Athens to avoid war and internal strife. One would need particularly good performers (skilled singers and dancers) for the female chorus. Modern productions, unlike the original production, often cast women in these roles. Aeschylus' complex and striking poetry calls for particularly clear delivery.
The Suppliants: In this play, again, the chorus has a substantial role, singing over half the lines. The daughters of Danaus (said to be fifty) come with their father from Egypt to Argos, trying to escape marriage with their cousins, the fifty sons of Aegyptus. Since the original chorus of Greek tragedy may have consisted of fifty (which I doubt), this used to be regarded as the oldest surviving play by Aeschylus. We now know that it is not. The fifty must be represented by a lesser number, perhaps the usual number of twelve, which became fifteen in later plays. The dithyrambic chorus usually consisted of fifty, and on one day of the Greater Dionysian they performed.

Pelasgus, the king of Argos, is confronted with a dilemma: either he accepts these suppliants, and faces the risk of war with the sons of Aegyptus, or he turns them over to the Egyptians and offends Zeus, the guardian of suppliants. The suppliants claim that they are related to the ancient Argives; they also threaten to commit suicide, and thereby pollute the land of Argos. Pelasgus takes the dilemma to his people (an unexpected decision since he is king, and probably alludes to the democratic climate in which Aeschylus wrote), and they vote unanimously in favor of sheltering the suppliants. Backed by an armed force, a herald comes to seize the women and return them to their Egyptian pursuers, but Pelasgus promises to defend them with his army.

The father gives some general precepts to his girls on how to conduct themselves in a foreign land. An Argive chorus, most likely of men (a supplementary escort), urges them to accept marriage, but they violently refuse. They pray to Zeus to preserve their virginity and their freedom. This exchange raises one of the debates between men and women. These young women are adamant that they want to retain their freedom, and not be subjected to the further restraints that marriage puts on a young woman. Euripides’ Medea later will articulate this loss of freedom in her address to the women of Corinth.
We imagine that the other plays of the trilogy continued the mythological story. The women are forced to marry the Egyptians. All but one follows their father's order to kill their husbands on their wedding night. For this they will be punished in Hades, and must carry water in leaky sieves for eternity.

The women's adamant stand against marriage and threats of violence are harbingers of the violent ending of this myth. This play shows a male and female polarity. The women are both attacked and protected by men. This play is also a lesson in a citizen's duty to protect a suppliant. It raises the dilemma which can confront a city, whether to wage a war to defend itself, or be cowardly for the sake of peace. It is obvious that Aeschylus, who himself fought at Marathon and at Salamis, is on the side of an honorable war. He shows this by opposing Pelasgus' democratic defense of freedom and justice against the herald's claim to tyrannical "might makes right."

Pelasgus claims that he has uttered plain words. (Free speech was something that characterized democracy.) He also makes a couple of rather silly but sweet claims, not only of the superiority of the gods of Greece over the gods of Egypt, but the superiority of men who drink fermented grapes over those who drink fermented grain, namely wine instead of beer, a sophisticated snobbery.

The language is as usual richly poetic and metaphorical. Dust is called the "silent messenger of an army."(24) The women compare the soldiers who manhandle them to nightmarish spiders, and serpents.

One can take dramatic advantage of the women threatening to kill themselves, with nooses in hand, made out of the belts that held their clothes together. Then again there is more excitement when the herald (backed by the suitors) arrives to drag the women away, literally kicking and
screaming. His defeat at the hands of the king who arrives with his men just in time to save the women illustrates how right can occasionally overcome might.

An altar is prominent, and probably once again there are statues of the gods. There would be entrances from the city and from the direction of the Argive coast on which the sons of Aegyptus have landed. The contrast of dark-skinned Egyptians in their exotic costumes with pale Argives in plain Greek clothes adds to the visual excitement in a typically Aeschylean way. Once again Aeschylus shows himself sympathetic to the foreigner, a useful lesson for the Athenians, and for any conscientious citizen.

*The Oresteia: Agamemnon:* The Oresteia is the only complete trilogy that survives from antiquity. It is unfortunate that we have lost the satyr play, Proteus, which completed the trilogy. Proteus was the “Old Man of the Sea,” a minor sea-god and prophet. He was captured by Menelaus on his return from the Trojan War, and was forced to answer his questions.

The trilogy form allows the development of a theme, and in the Oresteia the main one is that the person who commits crime will be punished. Aeschylus charts the transition from personal blood feud and murderous vengeance to a public law court which will impose penalties.

Aeschylus’ *Oresteia* shows us about vengeance and its consequences. Clytemnestra murders Agamemnon, because he sacrificed their daughter so that he could be successful in the war Greece waged against Troy. He won the war, but lost his life on his return. Orestes murders his mother to avenge his father and he is tried by the first law court. This is a civilized response to murder where reparations are made instead of killing following killing in an endless cycle. The cycle of vengeance creates a hydra, that ancient monster who grew another head when one was cut off. If Bin Laden is killed, there will always be someone to replace him. One needs to understand the reasons behind events, not simply assassinate leaders.
This trilogy is named after Orestes the son of Agamemnon and Clytemnestra, the king and queen of Mycenae or Argos. The Agamemnon gives the background for Orestes' murder of his mother, which takes place in the second play of the trilogy. The first play is by far the longest that we have of Aeschylus' surviving plays. As usual, the chorus has about half the lines.

The Agamemnon is set in front of the palace in Argos and opens with a watchman, posted by Queen Clytemnestra to look for a beacon which will signal that the Trojan War is over. He sees it and tells her. A chorus of old men relates how the war began and how Agamemnon sacrificed Iphigenia, his daughter, to secure fair winds for his voyage to Troy.

Clytemnestra tells the chorus that the war at Troy is over, but they doubt her information. A messenger comes on foot confirming this and then King Agamemnon himself enters on a chariot, bringing Cassandra, his war trophy and silent captive. What Clytemnestra says is influenced by Cassandra's silent presence. Clytemnestra welcomes him, and entices him into walking on a crimson carpet. After he enters the house, she murders him in the bath, and boasts about the murder to the chorus as she displays his corpse and Cassandra's next to him. Clytemnestra says she killed him because he murdered their daughter, brought a mistress home, and because she is fulfilling an old curse. Aegisthus, Clytemnestra's paramour in Agamemnon's absence, appears and explains how Agamemnon's father had killed his father's other children, and served them up to him at an ungodly banquet. Thyestes (Aegisthus' father) had seduced the wife of Atreus (Agamemnon's father), and this was his vengeance. The old men of the chorus blame both Clytemnestra and Aegisthus, but the latter, with guards at his side, bullies them into silence.

The play and the trilogy shows the working out of a curse in generation after generation. Modern parallels might be found in genetically inherited diseases like hemophilia or alcoholism which haunt families for generations. The chorus of old men propped on staves, who refer to
themselves as "shadows walking in daylight," well convey a sense of futility and helplessness in the face of powerful forces: fate, the hatred of Clytemnestra, and the fulfillment of a curse. (25)

In Greek tragedy, man was subject to fate but at the same time responsible for his actions. A criminal suffers the consequences of his crime. That suffering teaches man to be wise is called a violent grace, accorded by the gods to man (Agamemnon, 176-83). That suffering teaches man to be wise is called a violent grace, accorded by the gods to man. (26)

Aeschylus is an optimist. He thinks that man can learn from his mistakes. In ancient Greek the word hamartia is translated as a mistake; in the New Testament it translates as sin. The ancient Greeks do not have this concept. They feel man could always learn, and there is no such thing as irrevocable as sin, particularly original sin. There can be pollution from crime, but that can be washed away with the proper rituals.

The lesson one learns from one’s mistakes and the suffering that follows is an important one. Greek tragedy shows the pain of human beings, and lets an audience learns from the suffering that it has seen.

The crimson carpet is a visual dramatic symbol, alluding, among other things, to all the bloodshed at Troy, beginning with the blood that flowed from Agamemnon's own child. This carpet is made up of precious tapestries, which, as Agamemnon admits, are suitable only for the gods. His walking on it is an obvious challenge to the gods, and he will lose.

He is seduced onto the carpet by Clytemnestra who plays on his vanity. By walking on the carpet, Agamemnon shows his lack of restraint and contempt for public opinion. Like an animal victim in ancient sacrifices that nods its head when water is sprinkled on it, just before its throat is cut, Agamemnon, when he walks on the carpet, symbolically consents to his own slaughter.

This carpet has offered directors an opportunity for showing important symbolism.
Cassandra's mad scene before she enters the palace is a coup de theater. It is only topped by Clytemnestra's mad exultation after killing her husband and his concubine. The sexual imagery of her speech builds up to the climax of her saying that she was refreshed by his blood pouring over her as the crops in spring are refreshed by the rain. The denouement when Aegisthus appears, and Clytemnestra calms him, is seen to be merely the lull before the next storm. Agamemnon may have committed the first crime, but Clytemnestra has committed the next. It calls for vengeance.

In the Greek tragedies human beings do not act in a calm and sensible way. Rather, they are in bondage to their passions, and through these passions the gods speak to them. (27) While performing a sacrifice of purification and thanksgiving, Heracles flies into a rage inspired by several of the goddesses and slaughters his own children. In a Dionysian frenzy Agaue and her companions tear apart her own son. Orestes, believing himself to be obeying a command of Apollo, kills his mother, who had committed adultery and murdered her own husband. And above all, the great, genocidal war of Troy did not so much originate in the longing of Paris for Helen, as in a dispute between the gods. In every respect human beings seem to be more the victims of the gods than themselves wicked persons who commit evil deeds—and they are above all the ones who suffer the most. Helen, the "cause" of the massive slaughter of the Trojan War, is exclusively depicted by Euripides in the role of one who suffers greatly, indeed even beyond the bounds of human endurance. Even Medea, who goes so far as to kill her own children, is not depicted by the same poet as a moral monster, but as a woman overwhelmed by boundless grief. (28)

The gods thus appear in a somewhat murky light: they are indispensable to the poets' purpose yet at the same time severely criticized. For Euripides they are often much worse than human beings.
In his Heracles, he goes so far in his irony as to depict the goddess of vengeance herself criticizing Hera, who makes Heracles suffer in order to quench her thirst for revenge which was caused by the unfaithfulness of her husband Zeus. Euripides considers all these stories of gods to be humanly-contrived fables. Nevertheless, he also believes that there can be no drama without the gods. How could the mysterious depths of human passions be understood without the gods? If the poet had no one to indict except other human beings, his works would quickly become nothing but tepid moral tracts. The gods are indispensable and yet they must be criticized: the poetic inspiration in the Greek tragedies thrives on ambiguity. Suffering humanity is confronted with an incomprehensible fate which only the poet's ambiguous parables and images are able to depict.

Portraying the character traits and the psychology of the tragic heroes were not an essential aspect of Greek tragedies. Bently states that: “Character development was not an outstanding element in Greek drama”, (29) and adds that “until the time of Euripides, there is very little soul-searching.” It is in Euripides' plays such as Medea that the audience is given a chance to glimpse at the psyche of the characters.

Despite the fact that psychology was not taken into consideration in Greek Tragedy, there were some characteristics each tragic protagonist had: “The man who is tragically doomed should be neither morally perfect nor depraved; he should be essentially like ourselves, though of some greater stature” (30).

Thus, the tragic heroes were mostly man of high status, such as rulers, noble men or people of eminence in a society. According to Aristotle, "the tragic hero must be such as to induce the audience to identify with his suffering" (31) so that he can arouse pity and the purgation of fear.
No one would feel pity for amorally bad man who faces terrible events and suffers, and people would not accept the fact that a perfectly moral man has to suffer so much.

At this point, the question why such an eminent person faces a tragic event may arise. Frye partly replies to this question when he writes: “The tragedy that happens to the hero does not depend on his moral status. If it is casually related to something he has done, as it is generally is, the tragedy is in the inevitability of the consequences of the act, not in its moral significance as an act”. (32)

The act that usually causes the dire consequences, which is the hero's "fall", is called “hamartia". According to Aristotle, hamartia means "the intellectual failure to grasp what is right, a failure of human insight amidst the confusion of life" (33). Thus through hamartia, the tragic hero is faced with a tragic fall. Even if the tragedy does not happen because of a moral flaw, because the hero is not able to calculate the results of his decisions or actions, this act becomes his hamartia.

Being a tragic hero, the protagonist of Greek tragedy faces his fall with such dignity that he inspires the audience elated feelings despite the pessimism of the play. Greek tragedies assert that "life holds no promise of security or stability, but man should live and die in dignity” (34)

It is believed that the tragic experience of the protagonist begins after he/she commits a tragic mistake. It brings pain, suffering and most important, the courage to fight against his destiny.

The mark of the tragic hero is to achieve an understanding of this agony and learn from it.

The essence of most tragic plays is the pain and suffering undergone by the characters. However, it does not imply that suffering begins only after hamartia. Pain and suffering lie under the cause for action, in the decision to act, and after the tragic error as well. The tragic hero might be in pain when he decides to do something, to act. However, after the decision and the deed itself, some heroes feel even worse pain, which is incorporated into the realization of the consequences of their actions.
Sewall argues that, the mark of the tragic figure is his being caught between the urge to act and the knowledge that his decided course of action will cause suffering and pain. According to him, Clytemnestra and Medea who are both murderers would not be considered as heroic in the romantic and moral sense; however, in the tragic sense they are heroic because they are able to face the consequences and suffer for their crimes. Thus, tragic figures are not only people who suffer for their actions, they also have the courage to proceed and do what they believe is right. Miller describes a tragic figure as a “brave spirit who cannot settle for half but must pursue his dream of himself to the end”. (35) The tragic figure knows the consequences of his actions and is ready to face them to restore his dignity and self-respect. Even the suffering the tragic hero goes through is heroic and dignified. The tragic heroes do not wail like ordinary people, and they show how to suffer mightily in a brave and honorable way. The tragic hero is supposed to gain wisdom through suffering. “The agony of tragic heroes in the Greek plays lead to some kind of understanding, whether of their own actions or of the laws that the gods impose on them” (36). Drama played a central role in the life of Greek people. It is in Greek times that the greatest tragedies were written. Greek tragic vision is reflected through these tragedies. Since they were religious people they saw the great role of fate in making life happy or sorrowful. The divine power was the key force behind the disintegration of man. Those who did not practice moderation and cross the limit of life would be punished by the divine force. The role of characters was also taken into account. However the redemptive power of tragedy provided wisdom through tragedies. A study of Sophocles Oedipus Rex can give us insights into this tragic vision. Every human being has certain limits and he should conduct life within those limits. A person cannot accomplish everything. Arrogance in excess will ultimately bring out the downfall of the
person concerned. Moderation is a virtue that people should practice in order to avoid the possible catastrophe in life. The hubris is a weakness in the character of a protagonist and his fall is made inevitable because fate operates in collaboration with the weakness in the personality to bring about the downfall of that person. These two forces operate in such a way that the catastrophe is made to seem inevitable. Before the final movement comes the protagonist has to pass through a series of testing circumstances that try his power, patience and endurance. The suffering is so great and intense that the people watching cannot help pity and fear. The suffering is not in proportion to the crime committed. Oedipus is a noble character, but his fall is made inevitable because of his arrogance and the fate was operating invisibly.

While in power Oedipus acted bossy rebuking and accusing people who were under his authority as a king. Oedipus should not have acted arrogantly while at the peak of fortune and should have thought about the potential misfortune that could befall him any time in future. This is the lesson imparted by the play. Oedipus’ suffering is so intense and heartrending that we are deeply moved by it. The whole plot of the play is built around irony. Oedipus’s parents had handled him down to a shepherd so that they would be able to avoid the terrible fate, according to which the infant would later kill his father and marries his mother. In keeping with the proverb, “what is looted cannot be blotted”, Oedipus kills his father and marries his mother. The greatest irony is that father thinks he is moving away from the terrible fate. So, Oedipus Rex is rightly called the tragedy of fate. As a king Oedipus could not see his people’s suffering. So he is determined to find out and punish the defiler of the city. Did he really take to have the investigation to its logical conclusion? To find an answer to this question we have to go to the question of fate. The circumstances of the play evolve in such a way that his fall is made inevitable. When Oedipus comes to know that he himself was the murderer of his father, he accepts the reality bravely. He
does not face his face like a coward. He encounters it like a hero. There lies his greatness as a hero. The suffering he has endured now makes him a wise person. He has suffered so much that he has become a saint and no human suffering can touch him now. He has in one way, gained redemption through his suffering.

So Greek tragic vision incorporates the idea of the role or fate and the hubris that exists in the character of the people. Through the final disintegration is too much to bear, one has to accepts one’s moral responsibility, through the tragedy was mostly because of fate. One has to practice moderation in order to avoid any potential tragedy. Suffering is redemptive and the wisdom gained through it makes one mature.

**SHAKESPEAREAN TRAGEDY**

A.C. Bradley In his famous lecture series *Shakespearean Tragedy*, identifies the time frame of 1601 to 1608 as “Shakespeare’s tragic period” (37) the years when Shakespeare produces Julius Caesar, Hamlet, Othello, King Lear, Timon of Athens, Macbeth, Antony and Cleopatra, and Coriolanus. Bradley points out that Shakespeare would have been middle aged—between 27 and 44—and that “the world had come to look dark and terrible to him”. (38) In a span of less than ten years, Shakespeare produced eight landmark plays which continue to prevail as true examples of the tragic genre.

Shakespeare drew upon several sources in his plays, including Ovid’s Metamorphosis for his main source of classical myth, and many of Christopher Marlowe’s plays. In The Sources of Shakespeare’s Plays, Kenneth Muir highlights Marlowe’s influence on Shakespeare: “But, as everyone recognizes, his debt to Marlowe was more profound. His own blank verse was developed from Marlowe’s ‘mighty line’ and his own conception of tragedy was evolved from Marlowe’s” (39). His sources for Hamlet, specifically The Spanish Tragedy and the Ur-Hamlet,
are somewhat untraceable. Whatever his specific sources for tragedy and Hamlet may be, Shakespeare succeeded in creating a highly unique form with its own specific characteristics.

There are technical factors in Shakespearean tragedy, some of which Shakespeare models after Roman playwright Seneca. These include the five act format, technical devices such as soliloquies and asides, and scenes of violence and horror onstage. Steiner remarks: “The Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists ransacked Seneca. They took from him his rhetoric, his ghosts, his sententious morality, his flair for horror and blood-vengeance; but not the austere, artificial practices of the neo-classic stage” (40).

Bradley posits the complex question: “What is Shakespeare’s tragic conception, or conception of tragedy?” (39). He outlines the characteristics of the genre by highlighting some major traits. Bradley goes into detail about the hero of the story, clarifying that “Tragedy with Shakespeare is concerned always with persons of ‘high degree’: often with kings or princes” (18). He suggests that there is a definite sense of nobility in Shakespearean tragedy, whose focus always turns around noble characters such as kings, princes, senators, and politicians. Bradley further states:

His fate affects the welfare of a whole nation or empire; and when he falls suddenly from the height of earthly greatness to the dust, his fall produces a sense of contrast, of the powerlessness of man, and of the omnipotence – perhaps caprice - of Fortune or Fate, which no tale of private life and possibly rival. (40)

Since this fall has to be so great, the victim must be a person of considerable greatness. For this reason, Shakespeare places nobles at the center of his tragic stories for, even though they come from a time and tradition far removed from our own, their plummet from their high thrones is something to which everyone can relate.
Bradley maintains that Shakespeare often represents abnormal conditions of the mind and introduces the idea of the supernatural. Ghosts, fairies, and witches play an important role in the action, as well as add to the moral dilemmas of the story. With the idea of the supernatural and ghosts comes the idea of religion. In ancient tragedy, mortals were subject to the inexplicable will of the gods. Their lot in life was to suffer through whatever injustices the gods could devise and become victims of, and perhaps survive, their divine power. The notion of the supernatural established by the ancients is further developed and present in Shakespeare’s tragic works. In the Elizabethan world, man was still subject to the supernatural — first in the form of Fortune’s Wheel and later with the Christian ideal of God. Kings, Queens, and noblemen were as high as the ranks of man could go, but were still no match for the Divine. Bradley is careful to point out that these supernatural elements do not cause the tragedy; rather it is caused by the consequence of the actions of the tragic hero. Tragedy then is the search for meaning in a world controlled and dominated by a super-human force. In Hamlet, Shakespeare gives us a god-centered world and a hero who tries to make sense of that world. Bradley focuses on the central character in the story: the tragic hero. He is clear when he states: “The story, next, leads up to, and includes, the death of the hero”. While Greek tragic stories do not necessarily end with the death of the main character (as in the cases of Oedipus or Orestes), Shakespearean tragedy ends with the hero’s death. Bradley also harkens back to Aristotle when he specifies that Shakespearean tragedy invokes in the audience tragic emotions, especially that of pity. We recognize the former glory of the noble hero, witness his great calamity on stage, and experience a catharsis in understanding his journey and ultimate death.

In an attempt to simplify his earlier question of “What is Shakespeare’s tragic conception or conception of tragedy”, Bradley very neatly summarizes:
“We may now alter our first statement, ‘A tragedy is a story of exceptional calamity leading to the death of a man in high estate,’ and we may say instead (what in its turn is one-sided, though less so), that the story is one of human actions producing exceptional calamity and ending in the death of such a man”. (41)

Here then is our model for judging and assessing Shakespearean tragedy, as well as a point of reference from which to base the way that tragedy has changed and how it has stayed the same. The characteristics of Shakespearean tragedy are complex and varied. They have become a formula which Shakespeare unknowingly created, paving the way for later playwrights to honor and uphold. In modern times, however, this genre has been re-examined and modified. Some purist scholars, such as Steiner and Krutch, believe that modern works of tragedy cannot exist and that Shakespeare (or Racine) was the last writer of true tragedy. This does not negate the fact that modern works of tragedy do in fact exist.

According to critics such as Steiner and Krutch, the elements of God and faith are essential to tragedy. They claim that truly tragic works contain a sense of faith and a situation where man’s actions are controlled, at least in part, by an element of the supernatural. Steiner emphasizes that this supernatural element must be an unforgiving and perhaps unjust god, while Krutch emphasizes that “A tragic writer does not have to believe in God, but he must believe in man”. The important thing to note is that with the idea of a spiritual or religious order, man becomes a victim of its power.” (42)

There was a time approximately between 1599 and 1606 when William Shakespeare, at the height of his dramatic power, produced in rather quick succession four tragedies which are, to speak metaphorically, the “rump” of his tragic work, the pillars of his hall of falling down, or as
the Cambridge History of English and American Literature puts it, “the four wheels of his chariot, the four wings of his spirit, in the tragic and tragicomic division” (43). These four works are commonly known as Shakespeare’s Great Tragedies, being *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear* and *Macbeth*.

*Othello* considered as one of the greatest Shakespearean tragedies. Unlike the other supreme three (*Macbeth*, *King Lear*, and *Hamlet*), *Othello* focuses on the private lives of specific characters; the role they play in each other’s lives and, in turn, the destruction they cause, and exposes their passions and insecurities which result in the tragic end of individuals, not state or kingdom as in Shakespeare's other tragedies. What Shakespeare did was to take a man who was the epitome of the “other” and display how though the “othering” was not his fault, (44) was the cause of his downfall. The fourth century Greek philosopher Aristotle defines tragedy in his *Poetics*, and laid forth a blueprint for what he saw to work as the perfect, successful tragedy. What is to follow is an examination of how Shakespeare meddled with the form tragedy in composing *Othello*, as opposed to the traditional form that Aristotle defined in his *Poetics*, and how it adds to the story of *Othello*, allowing it in the category of classic tragedy. The first and foremost important piece of the puzzle would be to understand what the great philosopher defines as a tragedy, and more importantly, a tragic hero. In focusing on character, Shakespeare exposes an unconscious, yet powerful, human flaw which is seen, as in *Othello*, to have the power to ruin an marriage, to be haunting enough to kill and likewise how the structure of *Othello* displays not only the fall of a man, but of a man uncharacteristic of nobility in the first place. In his definition, Aristotle includes the participation of something called *hamartia*, an error of wrong act. In ancient Greek tragedy, there lives a word *hubris*, which the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “hubris” as: “Presumption, orig. towards the gods; pride, excessive self-confidence.”(45) Meanwhile, it
defines “hamartia” as, “The fault or error which entails the destruction of the tragic hero (with particular reference to Aristotle's Poetics).” Aristotle suggests Oedipus Rex, perhaps the greatest tragedy of all time, as the epitome of tragedy, contingent with all of the ideals and factors. The tragedy of Oedipus Rex is a direct result of his hamartia, his excessive pride, but his pride is his hubris. Thus, it is essential to the understanding of how Othello strays from the path of the Aristotelian tragedy, to understand and know how Oedipus is the ideal tragedy.

Tragically, tragedy imitates life; both Aristotle and Shakespeare knew this fact. Aristotle begins his theory on tragedy as “an imitation of action,” a mimesis, and should arouse some sort of “pity and fear” from the audience. Pity and fear represent the sense that one will pity the character, and fear that the situation be relative enough that it could happen to them. In addition, plot, “the arrangement of the incidents” is primary to Aristotle. As The Compact Bedford Introduction to Drama states, “most older tragedies take the name of the tragic hero or heroine as their title” the plot is still primary. Naming the play for the hero, though, indicates the importance of the character. In one case, Oedipus Rex signifies the name of the king, a noble man, who leads himself and his entire family line to demise. Oedipus is the “Rex,” the Latin term for “king.” Therefore, Oedipus Rex is the tragedy of Oedipus the King, who takes down his entire line. On the other hand, Othello the Moor of Venice implies an ordinary man, and not only an ordinary man, it specifies him as a “moor,” prescribing his role as someone of importance, but still an outsider. It specifies him as a sort of sub-ordinary man, who, without the honor of being slightly noble and a general, would serve no place as a tragic figure because his fall would not be all that significant to the masses. Quite to the contrary, Othello's fall happens to be one of the most significant falls of man because of is his status as a moor, the catalyst to incidents that arise and occur that lead to his utter destruction. After identifying the significance of the title, narrowing
down the structure of the plot will help identify important moments and events in tragedy. Traditionally, the plot will have five parts: the exposition, rising action, climax, falling action, and the denouement. It was to Aristotle's argument that a tragedy has one plot, not two, and certainly not three. According to the Bedford, Shakespeare was criticized for breaking this “rule” (46) Playwrights who observed the description that Aristotle laid down paid special attention to hamartia and peripeteia. Peripeteia is the reversal of fortune, for better or for worse. In Aristotelian tragedies with a successful plot structure, because of this reversal “they get what they want, but what they want turns out to be destructive” (47), and this of course happens simultaneously with the recognition of the reality. Coincidentally, the perfect example of this occurrence is in Sophocles' Oedipus Rex. The shift from ignorance to awareness for Oedipus happens within moments of each other.

Jean-Pierr Vernant “On the Enigmatic Structure of Oedipus Rex”, states that it is Oedipus, and Oedipus alone, who drives the plot. His determination for knowledge leads to the recognition of the truth: “Thus in the moment when he knows himself responsible for making his unhappiness, he will be able to accuse the gods of having prepared all, done all” (48). Therefore the recognition, what Aristotle defines as anagnoresis, and the reversal of fortune, peripeteia are most beautifully portrayed in Oedipus Rex because they happen at the same time. As far as the role of his fate goes into play, Oedipus blames the gods. Vernant believes otherwise, “The recognition which Oedipus brings about in fact bears on no one but Oedipus” (49). Examine, then, the plot of Othello, and one will notice that recognition and reversal do not happen simultaneously. Shakespeare knowingly constructed the plot exactly the way he saw fit, and in this way makes the fall of Othello much more tragic. To the common person, the fall of a moor is tragic in its own right. Nevertheless, Shakespeare was writing for a much larger and different
audience. Specific people went to and paid to see plays. In constructing the plot and character of Othello, he created a man just noble enough to be the ideal tragic hero, but sub-human enough to be recognized and pitied by many men. Charles and Elaine Hallett break down the recognition and reversal fortune to sequences. In the first sequence, act IV, scene ii, Othello kills Desdemona. “Shakespeare's next task,” they say, “is to make him realize the magnitude of his error. He builds this scene in four stages” (50). Following the murder, there is a scene with Emilia and Othello where she discovers that Othello strangled Desdemona and that he did so because of Iago's lie. Shortly after, Othello learns of Iago's 'story' and finds it to be untrue. The final sequence is Othello committing suicide. Emilia is the pressing point that the Hallett says “supplies the revelation that affects recognition in Othello”. He named the play after Othello, calling it *Othello, the Moor of Venice*. Had Shakespeare named the play by any other name, it would not have been as tragic. He prefaces the play with the main character, a brief description of the character (a moor), and unbeknownst to the audience, gives the reason for his downfall. To the reader, then, Othello begins and remains a moor, not any other name. Similarly, several times he is referred to as the “noble moor.” The title is not *Othello, the Soldier of Venice*, as it may have been had the story been about a true and noble Venetian general, brave and valiant in war and state. Shakespeare gave the play its title to tell the reader something more than just the name. As in naming his other great tragedies, the name represented a fall. In *Othello*, the protagonist is clearly stated, a Moor. He is the “other”, an outsider. He is noble, but an outsider. Othello is black, a converted Christian, and from an older generation. Clearly noting that he is the age of Desdemona's father, there is a clearly visible age difference between the two. Othello's place outside the norm places him in a position to be ready and available to basically believe anything he's told, or forced, to believe. With a soldier's mentality, he has been trained to think quickly, so
there explains his tendency for quick judgment. This very trait that makes him such a fantastic soldier makes him a lousy husband. A loving and doting husband, sure of his marriage and self would not be so sure to believe a heinous rumor that his wife cheated on him days after they made their vows. Othello does love Desdemona, and places his worth in her love. If Desdemona’s response was lackadaisical in nature, Othello may have had reason to be suspicious of her loyalty to him later on, yet her reply is anything but cold. According to Thorell Tsonondo, “Othello represents the sum of Elizabethan images of the Moor as "everything" from the noble to the monstrous, and that in creating him Shakespeare explores the inherent contradictions.”(51) Although Othello is a moor, and as stated earlier, he is just noble enough for his fall to still qualify as a tragedy. However, to Venetian Elizabethan's, he is still the “other.” Tsonondo also describes a unique way of determining the unbalanced place in social and political society that Othello holds, and it happens to be in the very beginning, through gossip between Iago and Roderigo. Without Othello even being present, we are given an introduction of his character. It is through some of these “narrative strategies that Shakespeare employs,” Tsonondo says, that Othello is unjustly revealed to the audience. The dialogue is likened to that of third person narrative point of view, which “voyeuristically creates the character it describes” (Tsonondo). While in previous tragedies Shakespeare exhibits the fall of a household, he has clearly manipulated tragic form laid down by Aristotle to present a scenario where a man's character is victimized by his own society, who distinctly labels him as the “other” and eventually of his own self in falling for Iago's lies and acting on them as well. Aristotle also stated that “the tragic hero or heroine should be of noble birth”. (52)
In Oedipus Rex, Oedipus is a King, and thereby of noble birth. The tragedy then is that he falls into misfortune through some sort of internal flaw. His flaw (hamartia) could be viewed as a
weakness, such as an Achilles heel type of situation or a fault in his character, rather than something he can be held personally responsible for. He unknowingly fulfills a prophecy that the son of Laius would kill him and marry his wife. Upon meeting the oracle of Apollo at Delphi, Oedipus learns this fate and attempts to outwit the oracle, as well as the fate of the gods. Thus begins the tragic turn of events. What he fails to realize is that his true parents are Laius, the man he has already killed, and Jocasta, the mother he has already married. Critics have argued that Oedipus' *hubris*, his excessive pride, causes this fault to be his downfall. Oedipus believed he could outwit the Sphinx, and did so in solving the riddle, as well as the gods. However, he fulfills what the oracle says in his quest for knowledge, and again, causes his own demise. His pride is what makes him the ideal tragic hero, for having a character too virtuous would be unlikely, as every human being is fallible.

The “thread of the tragic action,” as Vernant and duBois call it, is woven with the riddle, and Oedipus begins to play out the recognition of his identity. The play opens with Oedipus, King of Thebes, on a platform in front of a crowd of suppliants. He announces to catch the supposed criminal at any cost, “Then once more I must bring what is dark to light”. (53) What was dark, Oedipus' actual identity is brought to light by his undying determination to find the 'criminal' who murdered the king before him, Laius. Ironically, it turns out that Oedipus brings to light an incestuous marriage to his own mother, and the knowledge that he murdered his father. In the Exodus of the play, the Choragos, which functions as the voice of society, states the condition of Oedipus' recognition and reversal.

Oedipus reveals the horror of the memory that will never escape him, perhaps more of a punishment than death could be. He gouged out his eyes, and prohibited him from visual sight forever as a result of his quest for continuous mental sight and intelligence. Subsequently, the
Choragos repeats his fear that he will never forget the pain of discovering the truth to his identity, “This is not strange. You suffer it all twice over, remorse in pain.” Two situations are at play, though. Oedipus is noble and wise, as he has solved the riddle of the Sphinx. He is honored by his supplicants, and therefore must be a good leader. The gods, though, had other things in store for him. The tragedy, then, is that although he is wise in riddles, he is metaphorically blind to the riddle of his own life. He is completely helpless to the destructive turn his life takes at the play's end, leaving his life in utter ruin, mentally and physically. His pain is a spectacle. As a mortal, he is subject to human flaws, regardless of his wisdom. *Hamartia* sets Oedipus on the wrong path, and though it may have been decided by the gods, Oedipus was absolutely determined to figure it out. This determination, his pride, his hubris, is a classic of Aristotelian tragedy. This hubris allows for the pity and fear that Aristotle so called for in tragedy because it makes Oedipus less than perfect. With such fixed pride, critics argue that his actions are his fault, but some argue against that though. Being a mortal, he could not have had full knowledge of the events to follow, so therefore, Oedipus’ actions are not his fault. Though we cannot blame him, Oedipus clearly is the 'poster-child' for hubris. His tragic flaw, his error in judgment, is that he is fantastic at solving riddles, but it ends up being the quality that leads him to his misfortune. It became too much of a good thing.

One wonders then what Othello's tragic flaw is and where it surfaces enough to cause his tragic downfall. To conclude that jealousy was the one and obvious cause for Othello's fall would be to echo the countless critics and readers alike that say his tragic flaw is his jealous behavior. The problem with completing the argument with jealousy alone is that Othello does not become jealous until Iago plants the seed. In the ideal tragedy, claims Aristotle, the protagonist will mistakenly bring about his own downfall—not because he is sinful or morally weak, but because
he does not know enough. If the tragic hero brings his downfall himself, as in Oedipus and his flat out disregard for what the blind seer Tiresias tells him to do, the problem cannot be solely jealousy. So perhaps Othello's tragic flaw is that he thinks too much in binary mode, or that he is obviously insecure about his place as an “outsider” in his society. His assurance in himself comes from the fact that Desdemona loves him.

Joan Rees states “Othello as a Key Play,” Othello's image “of himself is unusually explicit and he has the confidence born of knowing that the picture he sees of himself and his life is accepted by the state, as it has been accepted and loved by Desdemona” (54). As previously mentioned, a possible catalyst for Othello's quick judgment and his tendency to be easily swayed by Iago's cunning is in fact that he is a military man. As a soldier, and a great one at that, Othello was trained to think in binary mode, to act and react quickly. Military training would have taught Othello to fight to preserve country and self, so after years of being a good soldier; Othello continues this binary mode of thought: black or white, right or wrong, loved or not loved, happened or did not happen. Therefore, when Iago plants the seed of doubt in Othello's head, he cannot imagine it to be untrue, because his place in society was already questionable, military standing not considering. Even though he is 'noble', he is still a “noble Moor.” Perhaps even more interesting than what critics will argue about binary thinking and military training with men, one critic emphasizes the bond between Iago and Othello and implores readers to see their bond as a precursor to Othello's belief in what Iago tells him about Desdemona. This critic, Jane Adamson, states, the two men are “bound together only by Iago's insinuations about Desdemona, and it is the facts about her that Othello's attention and emotions concentrate on” (55). She also argues that Iago believes himself to be “supremely important” in causing the passionate emotions that Othello produces, but also that “Othello's being is subdued not by Iago's power, but by
Desdemona's, and his own power to be hurt by her” (56). This is the crux of the play. Othello only justifies his legitimacy in their society in the knowledge that Desdemona loves him regardless of him being a moor, not like them, and that is what Shakespeare accomplishes in focusing on the fall of a singular man. Shakespeare, living in a time of humanism, penned a tragedy knowing that the tragedy was not simply the jealousy of Othello, but the tragedy of Othello, a moor in Venetian times. “Othello is not only hero of the play but initially his sterling reputation and his endearing tenderness with Desdemona bespeak the playwright's attempt to paint the other in humanistic strokes”. (57)

It is certain that through plot in *Oedipus Rex*, Sophocles constructed a hallmark tragedy complete with: exposition and rising action, the peripetia leading to a climax as well as the simultaneous anagnoresis, and finally leading down to the denouement. Shakespeare, years later put a twist in Aristotelian structure of tragedy and created in *Othello* a tragedy of character. He created an ideal tragedy, though it exhibited the fall of a man rather than a household. In his depiction of Othello, he revealed and exposed dominant racial attitudes of his time.

In choosing to focus on Othello as a “noble Moor,” it is clear he fits the description of a tragic hero, though not neatly. Using Oedipus as a background, and criticism relating to the subject, we can make the judgment that Othello's fall was not simply a product of a tragic flaw; he was flawed before the play began. Plagued with insecurities and self-doubt, Othello’s hamartia acted as a catalyst to his destruction. However large his role, Iago fueled the flame that was Othello's insecurity of self. Contrary to Oedipus recognizing his wrongdoings and reacting on them almost immediately, Othello's tragedy happened over a longer span of plot. As well as differences in plot, Sophocles' play exhibits the fall of a house, while Shakespeare's tragedy is the fall of a man. Shakespeare purposely strayed from the Aristotelian form of tragedy for a reason: to create a
situation that revealed the tragic sensibility that human beings are flawed; and, to exhibit in a singular man, not only what happens when someone is the “other,” but what happens when someone is “othered.” For critics, readers, and audiences alike, if Othello had not been a “noble Moor”, the story would not have been as captivatingly tragic.

Most people are familiar with Shakespeare’s Othello. Many critics praise the complexity of Iago in Othello, despair over the bloodbath in Macbeth, and claim that Hamlet is one of the best characters ever written. However, King Lear is Shakespeare’s greatest tragedy because of an often disregarded factor: the significance of old age in the play. The old age of the character of King Lear is remarkable and noteworthy for three reasons: the rarity of elderly protagonists in drama, the challenges presented by dramatizing an elderly protagonist—which Shakespeare successfully handles—and the added element of tragedy that only an elderly character can possess and portray, known as “the tragedy of old age. Additionally, the six parts of Aristotle’s Tragedy according to his Poetics will be analyzed and examined in reference to how they function in the play. King Lear was the only play that focused on a character as old as King Lear. Centralizing a play around an elderly man or woman is a rare artistic choice. Even today, after thousands of years of plays being written, few concentrate so fundamentally on a character as old as King Lear. This one aspect of the play alone classifies the work as singularly extraordinary. After all, considering how much art has been created in the world throughout history, crafting a unique piece is certainly an outstanding accomplishment. What makes King Lear an exceptional dramatic and literary achievement, however, is not only its individuality—for a unique piece of work can still possess poor quality—but the fact that the play’s portrayal of such an old character is done with such expert skill, making this tragedy truly brilliant.
The reason that depicting elderly protagonists in drama requires great skill is that several challenges exist in accomplishing such a feat. One of the reasons that writing an old protagonist is daunting is that most audience members are not able to sympathize with elderly people. Asking audience members to relate to a stage of life that they have not yet experienced is a tall request, and playwrights generally want people to sympathize with their main character, or else the success of play might diminish substantially. Furthermore, those audience members who can relate to the old age of King Lear because they are experiencing that stage of life themselves probably do not want to dwell on their increasingly older age, and they cannot be blamed, for many reasons. In Western culture, elderliness is unappealing and could even be considered a taboo subject. The “experience of aging and the resulting emotional difficulties” including “the dread of being abandoned to a state of utter helplessness,” as well as “the catastrophes of old age, such as stroke and dementia” are all unattractive and unpleasant ideas on which to meditate (58). Shakespeare portrays all of these aspects of old age quite unapologetically in this play, through Lear’s fear of losing his status and power, dependency on the affections of his daughters, and his mental decline into madness in the wilderness, which critics speculate is caused by a stroke. In fact, Lear’s physicality is so lifelike that psychiatrists have even written medical pieces analyzing Lear’s health. Alexander M. Truskinovsky, M.D. summarizes professor’s analysis of Lear, saying that, “Colman established for Lear a diagnosis of brief reactive psychosis with a background of organic mental disorder, perhaps of a vascular origin, exemplified by the king’s visual hallucinations and an intimation of a stroke just before Lear's death, since he asks for help to undo one of his buttons”. (59) The obvious, uncomfortably realistic depiction of old age is perhaps the reason that King Lear is often “the least popular of the famous four tragedies” and “the least often presented on the stage” (60). Given that most people go to see plays to escape
from reality, experiencing an ultimately unsatisfying feeling after watching a dreary and depressing show is not exactly characteristic of entertainment. In conjunction with this idea, A.C. Bradley reiterates a “curious fact” (61). He says that, “Some twenty years after the Restoration, Nahum Tate altered King Lear for the stage, giving it a happy ending, and putting Edgar in the place of the King of France as Cordelia’s lover. From that time, Shakespeare’s tragedy in its original form was never seen on the stage for a century and a half” (62). This play has a history of people wanting to avoid producing it, probably much in part due to its somber content. Yet conversely, Hamlet and Othello are very popular productions to stage, and they are also dark tragedies. But what differentiates King Lear from Shakespeare’s other tragedies is that the play concentrates so specifically on the troubles of an old man, instead of the younger or middle-aged men of Hamlet, Othello, and Macbeth. Ultimately, the aspect of aging in King Lear is its defining feature.

Besides the unpopularity of centralizing a play’s plot around an older protagonist, many people might claim that the lives of the elderly are simply not interesting enough to be dramatized, because nothing happens when a person gets old, except getting old. Shakespeare, however, illuminates the true drama of this seemingly dull natural process in King Lear. He proffers valuable insight into the mind of a man whose world is decaying around him with every passing moment. The audience is taken on a journey from Lear’s majestic position as king, to his aimless, crazed wandering in the wasteland, to his redeeming death with Cordelia in his arms. The story of King Lear is far from lackluster, and unquestionably dramatic. Regrettably, these riveting qualities are easily unobserved by the average audience member. John W. Draper’s states that those “who saw the play purely through the eyes of their own age, found it a mere panorama of stark emotion with little or no integrated intellectual significance” (63). Though
Draper was particularly referring to Charles Lamb and William Hazlitt, Romantic critics of the early 19th century, this ignorance permeates the general population, as Bradley declares that, “The general reader’ reads *King Lear* less often than the other tragedies, and, though he acknowledges its greatness, he will sometimes speak of it with a certain distaste” (64). Unfortunately, the reasons that people do not like or appreciate reading or seeing King Lear is also why the play is so epically heartrending. *King Lear* is ultimately the most tragic of Shakespeare’s works because the play does not just conform to the poetics of Aristotle’s ideal Tragedy, but also adds a whole new level of calamity in the form of “old age tragedy”. Before explaining and analyzing old age tragedy however, the original tragic aspects of *King Lear* must be examined. According to Aristotle’s famous *Poetics*, upon which all tragedies are compared, he declares that “Every Tragedy…must have six parts, which parts determine its quality—namely, Plot, Characters, Thought, Diction, Melody, Spectacle” ordered these parts in order of importance, these qualifications will be discussed in the order of least essential to most imperative, from Spectacle to Plot.

To begin with, Spectacle, the least vital of the six parts of tragedy, was considered “More on the art of the stage machinist than on that of the poet,” according to Aristotle, who believed that, “Superior poets rely on the inner structure of the play rather than spectacle.” Aristotle certainly recognized “the emotional attraction of Spectacle,” but he meant Spectacle to be a reflection of what was already in the content of the play. True to Shakespeare’s infamous lack of stage directions, he follows Aristotle’s advice and left nearly all of the Spectacle aspects to those who stage his productions. As far as possessing Spectacle qualities within the text, *King Lear* certainly does arouse pity and fear through the narrative, an idea further clarified and examined under the qualifications for Plot. Melody, the fifth most significant part of tragedy, is conveyed
through the character of the Fool. Aristotle said that, “The Chorus should be fully integrated into the play like an actor” and Shakespeare transforms the idea of the classic Greek Chorus into the singular character of the Fool, who is an integral part of the play. The songs that the Fool sings are portions of wisdom that reveal insight into the themes of the play. Shakespeare’s use of music in all his plays is fundamental to the core themes of the piece, but the Fool is particularly famous for his extraordinary witty commentary on the action of *King Lear*.

Besides the character of the Fool, Shakespeare is probably most famous for his use of Diction, as defined by Aristotle, not only in *King Lear*, but in all his plays. Diction is “The expression of the meaning in words,” in the stylistic sense, and Aristotle was particularly fixed on the use of metaphors. He proclaimed that, “The greatest thing by far is to have a command of metaphor…it is the mark of genius, for to make good metaphors implies an eye for resemblances”. (65) When Shakespeare is satirized, the eloquent passages of descriptive language and imagery are always exaggerated, reflecting their ubiquity in his works. On a more critical level, however, Shakespeare’s language is one of the most visible and obvious reasons he is so renowned. Similes and metaphors can be found on nearly every page of his plays, and *King Lear* is no exception. For example, when Lear is silencing Kent’s plea in favor of Cordelia, Lear rebukes him by saying, “Come not between the dragon and his wrath” (Act I, scene i). Later on during the storm on the heath, Lear personifies the gale, saying, “Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks! Rage! Blow!” (Act III, scene ii). In the last, most emotionally climatic part of the play, Kent advises Edgar to leave Lear in peace, advising to “Vex not his ghost: O let him pass! He hates him much that would upon the rack of this tough world stretch him out longer” (Act V, scene iii). These three succinct paradigms are only a small portion of the amount of elegant Diction in *King Lear*. While Diction is easily enough understood, Thought, the third most important part of
Tragedy, is a concept that requires some explanation. Unfortunately, Aristotle does not discuss Thought much, saying only that this element is something “proved to be or not to be,” or where “a general maxim is enunciated”. What critics deduce from his writing is that that Thought has to do with how speeches should reveal character as well as portraying the themes of the play, specifically through dialogue. This asset is prominently featured in *King Lear*.

The lyrics to this tune allude to the idea that just because a man is great in power, purse, and prestige, does not necessarily mean that he will always be wise, possess wit, and have fair manners. Apart from the delightful acumen of the Fool, Shakespeare reveals the traits of his characters, as well as all the themes in the play, solely through the dialogue, since he does not include any character biographies or paragraphs of analysis outside of the actual text.

Character, the second most key part of tragedy, is the crux on which much of the brilliance of *King Lear* balances. Since the play is entitled with his name, and the story is about his downfall, he must have the specific traits that follow Aristotle’s writings about the protagonist. The protagonist should be renowned and prosperous, so his change of fortune can be from good to bad. This change “should come about as the result, not of vice, but of some great error or frailty in a character.” Such a plot is most likely to generate pity and fear in the audience, for “pity is aroused by unmerited misfortune, fear by the misfortune of a man like ourselves.” Moreover, “in the ideal tragedy, claims Aristotle, the protagonist will mistakenly bring about his own downfall—not because he is sinful or morally weak, but because he does not know enough”.

Although from a literal point of view age may not seem to be a facet of a person’s nature—that is, a choice or mistake made—the manner in which Lear handles his aging is his ultimate downfall. Instead of relinquishing his kingdom fully to the rightful heir who would rule justly (Cordelia), Lear creates a contest of best-professed-love, because he is insecure in his elderliness
and demands proclamations of affection to stroke his aging ego. He does not even back down when Kent pleads for Cordelia, though the king knows that he is in the wrong, exemplified by how he cannot bear to hear Kent’s rational explanations of the situation because Lear is so irrationally upset. As for arousing feelings of “pity and fear” in the audience through the Character, Lear’s absurd and despicable anger at his daughter, the only one who truly loved him, does evoke pity, both for his loss, and hers. Fear is also present because Lear, although a king, is “a man like ourselves” and in being a man who has lived a life in the same reality as we experience, echoes the potential in us for the same fate. On a side note, why people do not enjoy King Lear is possibly because they see themselves in King Lear, and considering his end, such a mirror image is a frightening prospect. We all have elderly people in our lives and when we see reflections of them in us, we are startled deep within due to the fear of what the future could hold for us. King Lear certainly matches the principles of Aristotle’s Character, but Plot is by far the most crucial of the six parts of Tragedy. McCanus summarizes the criteria of a first-class Plot with four musts: first, “The plot must be a whole, “with a beginning, middle, and end”. (65)The beginning of King Lear, or the inciting incident, is the division of his kingdom among his daughters. The middle, or the climax, is when Lear leaves Gloucester’s house to venture out into the storm, and the end, or the resolution, is when the characters fall to their respective deaths. McCanus also translates that, “The plot must be complete,” having unity of action”, the plot must be structurally self-contained, with the incidents bound together by internal necessity, each action leading inevitably to the next with no outside intervention. Every event within the play follows this unity, complete with foreshadowing and messengers that bring news of outside events. Fourthly, “The plot must be of a certain magnitude,” both quantitatively (length, complexity) and qualitatively. McCanus also affirms that Aristotle believed that, “The plot may
be either simple or complex, although complex is better”. As far as “magnitude” goes in the form of length and complexity, the five act play is standard in length with enough time for all the convolutions of the plot to be depicted effectively. The various interactions between the characters serve as the complexities of the play. Besides Lear’s relationship with his three daughters, the tension between Edmund and Edgar, the plotting against Gloucester by Edmund, and the martial dynamic between Albany and Goneril are just a few examples of psychologically intricate relationships. As for the second part of the equation, the need for “seriousness” and “universal significance,” King Lear also reflects the standards. The topic matter is certainly grave, dealing with death, betrayal, insanity, lies, and lust, and in fact, the only comic relief comes in the form of the fool’s antics. But even his words have a solemn edge to them. As for “universalism,” while people may not be able to relate consciously to King Lear’s character or the downfall of a king in general, every person has an elderly figure in their lives, and most everyone experiences the aging process. Also, the play’s focus on the downfall of Lear is such a simple concept—for everyone has made mistakes that lead to catastrophe—that the main action of the play is also relevant. Clearly, King Lear meets all the aforementioned objectives towards a successful tragic Plot. A final aspect of Plot is the catharsis that must occur in the protagonist. The Greek word translates most aptly to “mistake,” alluding to the idea of a realization occurring. Lear’s redemption at the end of the play is perhaps the only positive aspect of the denouement. Throughout the play, Lear undergoes a journey from power, to humility, to madness, to helplessness, to sorrow and regret, to the final release of death. His final moments of emotion over Cordelia’s demise illustrate how far he has come from his initial wrath and pride, unmistakably experiencing catharsis. Thus, King Lear artfully exhibits all the aspects of Aristotle’s classic Tragedy to their fullest extent. Furthermore, the play manages to magnify the
six parts to their full dramatic potential through the lens of “the old age tragedy,” an element that if missing, would not make the play as tragic. The inciting incident of his dividing his kingdom occurs because he is getting old and must relinquish his kingdom to his heirs. Also, his descent into lunacy has been analyzed as being due to dementia, a common effect of growing old, as stated by A.C. Bradley. All these factors, stemming from Lear’s aging, combine to form “the tragedy of old age,” which is the most crucial facet of the story. Arguably, none of the high drama that happens in the play would have happened if Lear was not as old as he was.

The fact that Shakespeare included all of these levels of Aristotle’s *Poetics*, plus adjoining a whole new side of tragedy into one play, and accomplishing all of the above with uttermost adroitness, makes *King Lear* a masterpiece of masterpieces, admittedly “Shakespeare’s greatest work, the best of his plays, the tragedy in which he exhibits most fully his multitudinous powers”. Shakespeare showed remarkable versatility in daring to portray an old character by mastering the depiction of the elderly. His attempt to rectify and illuminate the process of aging in the form of the character of King Lear is also exemplary, because so few writers and artists have chosen to take on this challenge. In the end, however, a painting, a poem, or a play is only as valuable as far as the audience can appreciate it. As a result, the tragedy of *King Lear* will only be realized to its true magnificence if readers take the time to understand the significance of old age, not only on the page, but also in their own lives.

It is a common belief among William Shakespeare’s audience that *Macbeth* is a tragedy that simply concerns itself with ambition and free will. Between *Macbeth’s* supernatural and political order, Shakespeare’s alarming caricature of women is visible, struggling within the narrow but accepted edict of patriarchy. While most readers have their hands full in trying to decipher the actions of the play’s title character, as Shakespeare tosses up antagonistic figures in the form of
the Three Witches and Lady Macbeth, *Macbeth* reemphasizes the Western Civilization’s patriarchal belief that women are the origin of sin and the ones who are more prone to darkness. The witches’ ties to the supernatural world and Lady Macbeth’s manipulation present a problematic situation for Macbeth. Macbeth finds himself hovering between believing the witches’ prophecy that he will be king of Scotland and overcoming the dangerous nature it brings. But instead of finding an ethical solution to his moral dilemma, Macbeth, living with uncertainty and fear, is defiled by Lady Macbeth’s whisperings and becomes a victim of female dominance. When Macbeth shows hesitation to kill Duncan, Lady Macbeth retaliates through means of emasculation: “To be more than what you were, you would be so much more than a man”. (66) Here, Shakespeare begins to highlight the female aggression through Lady Macbeth, who after finding Macbeth too full of innocence, pushes him through extremities in proving his manhood, knowing that he will never be able to commit himself fully and confidently in their plan to assume the throne if she does not provoke him.

When paralleled with the play’s dedication to infinite evil, the writing of *Macbeth* certainly characterizes women in the darkest sense that seems misogynistic for Shakespeare. Whereas the Three Witches are offensively described as bearded and “withered so wild in their attire”, (67) Shakespeare, meanwhile, depicts Lady Macbeth as a Machiavellian woman, fearlessly delving into her husband’s ambition and providing the adamant confidence Macbeth himself could not conjure to remedy his anxieties. The witches’ questionable androgynous characteristics illustrate that even for supernatural beings who live on the periphery of society; patriarchy still dictates a large of sense of evil that is beyond the means of reality. The representation of Lady Macbeth, who is willing to dash the “brains out” of an infant, on the other hand, leave no room for natural female and maternal qualities, which epitomizes strength for many women at the time period.
Though others may argue that Lady Macbeth’s unconventional strength and character give women power and a voice in a patriarchal society, her fate in the play proves otherwise. Despite Lady Macbeth’s initial introduction as a symbol of unspeakable feminine strength, her role diminishes from an iron-willed woman to a guilt-ridden wife driven to insanity as the play reaches its climax. Lady Macbeth’s fate becomes a tragic symbol that women are unable to handle masculine characteristics – distant, unremorseful, and domineering – in a male dominated world. In doing so, not only does Shakespeare dichotomizes his portrayal of the key female player in *Macbeth* as both strong and inadequate, but he also highlights that the female gender is unequal to the opposite sex in terms of emotional willpower, an ironic fact considering Macbeth treats his lady throughout the play as his “dearest partner of greatness”.(68)

Much of *Macbeth* dedicates itself in infuriating its feminist readers by highlighting the importance of masculinity. Earlier in the play, Lady Macbeth wishes to be “unsexed” of the qualities of womanhood to keep her from feeling remorse for the murders committed throughout the story, desiring to be filled “from the crown to the toe top-full of direst cruelty” (69). Lady Macbeth’s unconventional yearning presents an upsetting Western idea that masculine traits are more acceptable in contrast to feminine traits, which are often perceived to be lesser in society in contrast to the masculine counterpart. Thus, patriarchal beliefs provide a foundation in *Macbeth*, which quietly asserts the play’s frightening notion that it is not only degrading to possess feminine characteristics but also inadequately dangerous, as such qualities become gateways to evil. Such definition of masculinity in Shakespeare’s time not only marginalizes the female presence and show men’s perception of women, but it deeply foreshadows the maleness of the contemporary Western civilization, where it is more acceptable for women to act like men, while for a man to act like a woman is considered sinfully offensive. The misogynistic reality of
Shakespeare’s historical tragedy transcends the physical and personal representations of women, as the witches’ prophecy alone, that “none of woman born”, (70) can harm Macbeth, symbolically implies a philosophical view that only through a severed connection with women will any of the male characters be strong enough to withstand the forces of darkness. Macduff’s wife, Lady Macduff, becomes a victim of murder, giving the play the capacity it needs to point the startling belief that severing a man’s connection with a woman allows him to outmaneuver the deceptive nature of evil. By the play’s end, the Thane of Fife Macduff, now a widower successfully kills Macbeth and fulfills the witches’ prophecy since Macduff was “from his mother’s womb untimely ripped” (5.8.15-16). With this, the play does not provide any room for female redemption. Female figures of virtuousness are completely omitted or eradicated in the play, with Lady Macduff, the only plausible antithesis to Lady Macbeth and a symbol of maternal figure, killed prematurely along with her children.

Through the calculating eyes of Lady Macbeth and the persuasiveness of the Three Witches, Shakespeare allows the force of darkness to work itself in Macbeth, altering his will to choose a path of unspeakable corruption. Macbeth, with his trust embedded on the supernatural and Lady Macbeth, therefore succumbs deeply to his own ambition and willingly embraces tyranny to usurp the throne of Scotland. Shakespeare’s terrifying, haunting caricature of women as catalysts that incite man’s own inclination to evil disjoints the play from a tragedy about a twisted ambition, into a play about Machiavellian women and their role in corruption. Under the guise of the supernatural and the dictating world of patriarchy, Shakespeare channels his inner misogyny in Macbeth, where the true tragedy lies not in the tragic hero, but in the female sex.

The essence of tragedy, be it Greek or Shakespearean is the rendering of human suffering and the contemplation of the nature of man’s destiny relation to the universe. It is here that all
tragedy is one. But an in depth analysis of the features of tragic drama as was in vogue in ancient Greece reveals that in structure and conceptualization. Classical Greek drama has some difference with the tragedy as practiced in the Elizabethan times, especially by Shakespeare. A study of the tragedies written by Sophocles, Euripides and Aeschylus, shows that ancient Greek tragedy is basically modeled upon an essentially religious. Accordingly, Greek tragedy represents the philosophy of man’s puny insignificance in the face of a colossal divine power that controls and mostly destroys human life. The emphasis here is laid of bringing about havoc and ruin to human life. The utter helplessness of man in his struggle against such a malevolent and uncontrollable divine power is the substance of classical Greek tragedy. The most obvious example is that of Oedipus. In Oedipus, Tyrannous who commits a sin in such ignorance that the impression of overwhelming sinister destiny that rules and destroys his life as paramount. Similar examples are Sophocles ‘Antigone’ or Aeschylus’ Agamemnon. The most striking contrast in this fatalistic world view of the Greek’s is found in Shakespearean tragedy where the entire emphasis is laid upon the responsibility of the individual in bringing about his ruin. Though Aristotle has pointed out that the Greek tragedies also portrayed the mistaken actions of the hero and therefore the Greek Also showed an element of awareness of tragedy resulting from human flaws, the error of judgment of the hero or his hamartia is always conditioned by destiny. (45) That is, however much the hero makes mistakes, the overall impression is that he is led to committing those errors under the snares and pitfalls of destiny. In Shakespearean tragedy the emphasis, however, is upon human action independent of destiny where, however the impression of fate working upon man is also not totally negated. For instance, there is no doubt that Macbeth’s ambition leads to his sacrilegious murder of Duncan which results is his doom, but
there is also the impression of the witches that precipitate his murder. Similarly, Othello’s tragic destiny is brought about entirely by his misjudgments resulting in his overwhelming jealousy, but there is also the impression that Othello is so pitted against certain evil forces over which he has no control. Actually the Greek had a theocentric vision while the Elizabethans motivated by the Renaissance laid stress on the vision of an anthropocentric universe. Hence crux of tragic action lay with a divine power in Greek tragedies while the individual hero and his actions were of prime importance in a Shakespearean tragedy.

In matters of structure the Greeks were much more fastidious about the unity of action. The unity of action implies that the action represented in a play should be just one single whole without any digressions what so ever. As a natural corollary the unity of action stood the unities of time and place. The unity of time implies that the time represented in the play should be limited to the two or three hours it takes to act the play or at most to a single day of either twelve or twenty four hours. The unity of place implied that the tragic action portrayed in the action should be limited to a single location. These three unities observed for the sake of verisimilitude, that is, for the achievement of an illusion of reality in the audience. Shakespearean tragedy completely dispenses of these three unities. A Shakespearean tragedy takes place often in two or three places, and the time taken is much more than twenty four hours often spurning a month or even more. Moreover, often in plays like King Lear or Hamlet there are sub plots which run counter to the Greek notion of the unity of action.

The Greeks employed the chorus as a dramatic device. The chorus as stated by Aristotle was often a group of characters who remained aloof from the action and commented upon it by singing or chanting verses and performing dance like maneuvers on the stage. They represent traditional, moral religious and social attitudes and often took part in the action. In
Shakespearean tragedy there is complete absence of the chorus. Shakespeare needs no chorus for commentary while the action is what constitutes the play. But where as in Greek drama the chorus offered time gaps between two sets of tragic actions; in a Shakespeare play this is achieved by comic relief. An ideal example is the Porter scene in Macbeth. In a classical play there were no room or comic elements in a tragic actions but Shakespeare so artistically manipulates characters like Fool in King Lear that they become integral to the tragic action. (71) Finally, the introduction of ghosts, witches, strange vision and fearful phenomena or the supernatural apparatus, which is so rampant in Shakespeare, is never made use of in Greek tragedies. The witches in Macbeth or Banquo’s Ghost in the same play, or the ghost of Hamlet’s father in Hamlet or Caesar’s spirit in Julius Caesar are all instruments of horror which the Greeks avoided.

It should, however, kept in mind that these differences in convention and style should never blind us from the truth that both Shakespeare and Greeks tragedies fulfill the same purpose of presenting before us the enormous vision of human grandeur that issues from the struggle of man with in transient forces either at work within him or outside and that both these two types of tragedies show that heroism lies not in victory or defeat but in courageous endurance of pain and hostility.
MODERN TRAGEDY

The idea of modern tragedy has been supported as much as contested, and no writer is more famous for penning and paving the way for the genre than Henrik Ibsen. In the late nineteenth century, the Norwegian playwright sought a different type of drama, one that challenged the ideals of his society and offered audiences an alternative to the stock mindset of melodrama and the well made play. In The Playwright as Thinker, Eric Bentley discusses the genre of *tragédie bourgeoise*, or “bourgeois tragedy,” in relation to both older and more contemporary forms of tragedy. The genre developed in eighteenth century Europe and featured ordinary citizens from the bourgeois class as its heroes. Bentley goes on to describe the “four great men of the German theatre”—Richard Wagner, Georg Buchner, Friedrich Hebbel, and Otto Ludwig—and their influence on Ibsen, highlighting Herman Hettner’s *Das Modern Drama* as an especially important source for the dramatist. Bentley writes: It would be foolish to make of Ibsen a purely Hebbelian, a purely German dramatist, though of the three springs from which Ibsen drank—the Scandinavian, the French, and the German—the last had been the most overlooked in non-German countries. He drank equally deeply of all three, and his synthesis of Norwegian romance, French realism, and the spirit of Hebbel is the first fully realized “bourgeois” tragedy. (72)

Ibsen was influenced by and borrowed from many different writers and philosophers to create something new and unique. Bentley states: “Ibsen used many current modes and methods as every artist does; but he twisted them out of shape, imposed his own different meaning upon them” (73). It is because of this that he has come to be known as the Father of Modern Drama.
Ibsen subtitles his play *A Doll’s House* “the modern tragedy” and, by doing so, simultaneously creates a new genre of drama and opens his works up to criticism. Despite the debate, the modern tragedies of Ibsen (and others) have been performed, studied, and challenged. Perhaps the most striking area of debate revolves around the notion of the modern tragic hero. Since we no longer live in the world of kings and princes, modern man (and woman) has become the focal point of the tragic story.

Henrik Ibsen is one of the famous Norwegian playwrights who is known for his nationalistic spirit and also known for exploring Europe’s social problems in 1800’s. He is quite well known for creating strong female characters. Ibsen is universally regarded as one of the creators of the modern drama. His contribution to the theatre was manifold; he has broken the social barriers which had previously bounded it. In fact he is the first one to show that the tragedies could also be written about the ordinary people and in everyday prose or language. His second contribution was that he has thrown away the artificialities of the plot, (Shakespearean dramas). His greatness was not due to his technical achievements in his plays but due to his deep study of depth and subtlety of the human character. His early plays were wild and epic, utilizing an open form and concentrating on mystical, romantic, poetic visions of the rebel figures in search of an ultimate truth which is just out of reach. His first four plays are *The Pillars of Society* (1877), *A Doll’s House* (1879), *Ghosts* (1881), *An Enemy of the People* (1882), *Hedda Gabler* (1890). These plays are generally described as sociological dramas. These plays deal with social problems even though Ibsen announced that his plays deal with individuals and human relationships. Ibsen has called this play a modern tragedy; it is a tragedy because it has a sad ending. Unlike other tragedies which deal with the fall of kings and queens this tragedy deals with the bourgeois class of people, with middle class people. His plays are rebellion in nature, his play *Brand* (1865), it is
a revolt against God. In *Peer Gynt* (1867), a young man rebels against society by choosing to live life of waste. In all of the plays this period, Ibsen’s deals directly or indirectly with the theme of the individual attempting to realize himself in the face of established conventions. This is as true of Nora in A Doll’s House as it is a Hedda Gabler

Much ink has been spilt on the issue whether *A Doll’s House* is a tragedy or a feminist play. If by tragedy means what the classical writers have said, then a lot of plays will cease to be tragedies which are now known as tragedies. A great writer does not follow the tradition rather he is not bound by tradition. Henrik Ibsen did not write his play *A Doll’s House* according to Aristotelian tradition therefore it would be unfair to judge his play on the basis of the Aristotelian model. Ibsen gives new conception of tragedy. In *A Doll’s House* he employs the “analytic” and “retrospective” technique in which all the events have occurred before the play opens, but they are exposed at the present moment. This technique is not new and is used by Sophocles and some other modern writers, Ibsen also used this technique in his early plays, but it was not until A Doll’s House that the exposure of the past became as important as in certain Greek Tragedies. No doubt, this play is modern not only in content but also in technique. The language, symbols, stage setting and music all are examples of Ibsen’s realistic technique. As for as feminism is concerned Ibsen himself rejects this charge on the play. In a speech to the Norwegian Society for the Woman’s Cause at 26 May 1889, he explains that, “I thank you for drinking my health, but I must reject the honor of having consciously worked for the woman’s cause. I am not even clear what the woman’s cause really is. For me it has been an affair of humanity” (73).

According to Adams, Ibsen was not of the intention to write about the woman’s issue but he wanted to write something more than this. “Its real theme has nothing to do with the sexes”. (74)
The whole story of the play “A Doll’s House” revolves around Nora. Nora is devoted and loyal wife of Helmer, who is an excellent and fortunate husband. Helmer is devoted to his children and wife and is a man of high moral ideas. Nora adores her husband like an idle and thinks herself an auspicious woman. When a lady adores her husband as Nora adores, she cares for none including moral and social considerations. Consequently, when the life of her husband is in danger, she cares for not any rule and forges the name of her father in order to save the life of her beloved husband; she borrows 800 Cronen by forgery and takes her ailing husband to Italy. She does not give the act of forgery much attention rather she was anxious about her husband that in any case of disclosure of her this act he might do any wonder on the behalf of his beloved wife Nora. The sole purpose of Nora’s life was to keep her husband and children happy. When Nora meets her childhood friend Linde she tells her, about the illness of Helmer and how she saved his life in very critical and crucial conditions. She tells her that she has paid back money, by saving every penny and by doing very hard work of copying, in spite of so much hard work and efforts Nora was happy because she was doing this for the man whom she loved even more than her own life. She thinks he loves her in return more than she does. She had borrowed 800 Cronen from Nile Krogstad, who was the employee in the same bank in which Helmer was appointed as a director. Krogstad is the man with blemish past in the eyes of the moralist Helmer and society. Krogstad does not harass Nora due to her act of forgery, until her husband is appointed as a director in the same bank in which he is employed, and threatens him with dismissal. He explains to Nora that he shall fight for my job as for his life; he further says to her “ask your husband’s favor for me, otherwise I will disclose your act of forgery which is same as I have done is the past.” Even when she comes across with this dreadful threat, she does not feel terror for herself but for her devoted husband that he will take the whole responsibility of act of forgery upon himself for the
sake of his beloved wife Nora. When Nora asks for favour for Krogstad to her husband, he explains the factual reason of his dismissal and says to Nora, that Krogstad was intimate friend of him in the college, therefore he would call him in the bank by Christian name and would talk to him intimately in front of others which he could not bear, so he wanted to get rid of him. When the concluding blow comes and she realizes that now she can’t prevent the news of her forgery from her husband then she even thinks of suicide because she could not see her husband in any trouble and taking whole responsibility upon himself. But when he reads the letter of Krogstad and reality dawns upon him, he proves himself intimidate and coward. He gets angry and scolds Nora severely because of her crime of forgery until he gets the assurance from Krogstad that he will not publish Nora’s crime of forgery. When the danger of publicity of Nora’s crime is over Helmer says to Nora that he has forgiven her and their relationship will remain the same as was before this incident. But now Nora’s doll’s house falls down and she throws out her doll dress. She decides to leave the home, Helmer tries to persuade her but she does not agree with him and leaves the house. This thumbnail sketch of “A Doll’s House” describes the tragedy of Nora. Thus, A Doll’s House shows the under action between individual and the society. Nora is the tragic heroine of the play and she wants to save the life of her husband without having regard for human values. She loves her husband more than anything else even more than her own life but in the return her husband does not give her due respect and rights. He could not understand her love and regard for himself. When he gets the news of Nora’s forgery through the letter of Krogstad he says to her, “your entire father’s want of principle be silent! all your father’s want of principle has come out in you”. Then further says to her, “But I shall not allow you to bring up the children; I dare not trust them to you”. (75) After listening, these remarks now Nora’s doll’s house falls down and she throws out her doll dress.
Before this incident she had had an illusion but now reality had dawned upon her and now the real face of Helmer was exposed to her. She decides to leave the home and when Helmer tries to convince her for not leaving the home, she replies to him, “No, that is just it. You don’t understand me, and I have never understood you either before tonight”. (76)

Almost in the every tragedy by Ibsen there is a character which plays the role of idealist and becomes the reason of tragedy. These characters in the tragic plays of Ibsen are for certain moral purpose; actually they are truth bringer, like Gregers in *The Wild Duck* and Linde in *A Doll’s House*. Gregers becomes the reason of Hedvig’s death and Linde plays an important role in the tragedy of Nora. She comes into the life of Nora and Helmer and when hears from Nora about her forgery and Helmer’s strong belief against it, she tries to remove the false setup of their married life, for this purpose she prevents Krogstad from taking back the letter which he has written to Helmer about the forgery of Nora. But, she could not get success in her purpose of removing false setup from their lives, because after reading the letter of Krogstad, Helmer gets angry and snubs Nora in a severe manner, and she leaves the home after the exposure of Helmer. Linde could save the tragedy of Nora by hiding the whole matter from Helmer, but she did not do so because her purpose of reforming their married life was also right. And, the tragedy is that both Linde and Nora are right.

The society in the plays of Ibsen is not only seemed as a system of downfall but it is an active force which plays a vital role in the destruction of the individuals. The play *A Doll’s House* portrays an under action between individual and the society. The society appears comfortable and delightful for those who confirm its values and customs. Victorian society is depicted in the play as putting a repressive effect on the individual, and it appears as an opposing force for Nora and performs an active role in the destruction of her whole life for only a single youthful
mistake, which she did in order to save the life of her loving husband. Torvald Helmer on the other hand confirms all the values and customs of the society and as a result leads a life totally admirable and acceptable in the society. He is more worried about the attractiveness of his wife and home than the happiness of his wife. When Nora tries to persuade her husband in order to keep Krogstad in the job, at this plea of Nora, his more concern is that the employees in the bank will think that he is under the influence of his wife. Towards the end of the play when Helmer comes to know about her forgery says to her “Very likely people will think I was behind it all that it was I who prompted you! And I have to thank you for all this”. (76)

The life of Krogstad’s has also been influenced by the moral standards of the society. When he receives the threat of dismissal from the bank by Helmer, due to his forgery he wanted to continue his job in the bank as a mark of respectability, to achieve his purpose he blackmails Nora, and says to her “Now I am turned out, and I am not going to be satisfied with merely being taken into favor again. I want to get on, I tell you. I want to get into the Bank again, in a higher position”. (77)

If nobody worried about society then no one would be harmed by the declaration of forgery by Krogstad. From the very beginning of the play Nora performs the role which is acceptable in the society; she is an obedient wife and mother. Her role is limited to the activities, like to make the house beautiful and to fulfill the needs of her husband and children. Ibsen does not say that anything is wrong with such activities but he is of the view that by doing such activities which are totally according to the social acceptance there is a danger of losing one’s personal identity. At the end of the play, Nora rejects the social norms and customs and leaves her husband and children for self-fulfillment, which is worst price that she has to pay in order to gain personal identity.
The structure of the play *A Doll’s House* is also very significant. It combines important incidents from the past with the present incidents. This technique of writing is not simple flashback technique but a complex relationship between the past and the present. This complex structure of the play is an excellent example of Ibsen’s dramatic art. Due to this flashback technique Ibsen’s plays are notable for their lack of action, because all the important events of the play have occurred in the past before the play opens, like Nora’s secret loan, Linde’s marriage, Dr. Rank’s inherited illness and Krogstad’s forgery all have happened in the past and all the present events are the outcome of the past events. These past events are also helpful in exposing the personality of corresponding character. Ibsen took this dramatic technique from the French literature. Dancing is an excellent type of expression and it is helpful in exposing the inner self of a person. A person who dances in the novel or play he generally exposes some kind of hidden meaning about himself through the movements and actions of dance. In *A Doll’s House* the dance of Nora sums up the whole plot of the play. In the play Helmer plays piano for Nora but gets irritated by her dance, at last he leaves the piano and tries to re-teach her tarantella, which is a type of Italian dance. This action of Helmer explains the main plot of the play, he is the one who plays music for Nora and instructed her, how to dance, in the same way he is the one who provides Nora with home and mold her into an ideal wife. She cannot perform rhythmically over the song of Helmer because of her lie and her husband’s strong faith over appearance both disturb the balance of their married life. She dances on the tone played by Helmer irregularly because she is thinking subconsciously about suicide in order to save the reputation of her husband. The inability of Helmer to re-teach dance to Nora represents both Nora’s unwillingness to listen Helmer towards the end of the play and Helmer’s inability to perform on the level of Nora.
Language of the any piece of literature like other dramatic elements plays prominent role. It indirectly probes into the psyche of the character and helps in bringing out the concealed feelings and sentiments of the character. In the Greek tragedies the writers were obliged to use the sublime and refined language which was compatible to the status of character and theme of the tragedy. In the modern tragedies the themes and characters are not only changed, the language of the tragedy has also changed and the modern writers of the tragedy use common day to day language in order to give the tragedy a realistic touch. The personal qualities of the characters are exposed through the language they use. In the play A Doll’s House the language of the characters is according to their styles and behaviors, they expose their inner self by using the type of language. The conversation of Nora and Helmer exposes their relationship.

All these elements of drama make Henrik Ibsen a modern tragedy writer and *A Doll’s House* a modern tragedy. But if we analyze this play in the light of Aristotelian concept of tragedy, then it will cease to be tragedy. Because, while defining tragedy only the instances from Greek tragedy were in his mind, therefore it will be unjust to judge this modern play on the basis of classical conception. It is not only Ibsen who said this play as tragedy, there are other critics who are of the same view about this play. *A Doll’s House* is a modern tragedy of our times and we cannot say that the play is foreign to us. As we think about Oedipus Rex and Hamlet because we are not Athenian or Elizabethan. We are Ibsen’s contemporary and can reject his assumptions and deny his conclusion.

It is true that *Hedda Gabbler* is a tragedy not only in content but also in form and structure. Ibsen, in this play has used his own structure and did not follow the structure of modern or classical plays. Because, he was interested in social realism and wanted to show what the characters were thinking in the possible realistic way. Therefore, he has violated the rules of both
classical and modern plays and has formulated his own unique structure for this play. This play exhibits extraordinary skills of the dramatist in using the dramatic form and makes him a modern tragedian. The language, symbols, stage setting and music all are examples of Ibsen’s realistic technique.

The most unusual thing about the play is that Ibsen wrote this play after his meeting with Emilie Bardach, a girl of eighteen years, in Gosseness. At this time Ibsen was sixty-two years old, but his passions of love once again were at the extreme. Before the meeting of Ibsen with the young girl he was successful and uninterrupted writer, but after this incident he was unable to concentrate on his work. Whenever he tries to write something, his imaginations go back to the mountain valley in which they were met. After one year of his meeting with the girl, he took the first step and wrote the play *Hedda Gabbler*. He wrote this play with full objectivity and detachment that it is upon the readers to call this play tragedy or comedy.

This play is about the Hedda’s inability to adjust herself in the Victorian bourgeois class and her tragic death. Hedda is the daughter of General Gabbler and belongs to the upper class and marries Tesman who belongs to lower class. She does not love him and marries him just for gaining economic security because he is going to be a professor. When the play opens they have just returned from their six month honeymoon. She is not happy when she came back from honeymoon because the honeymoon was boring for her. Although her husband tries his level best to provide Hedda with comfortable life but her life was not as happy and comfortable as it was in her father’s house. She remains in the state of perpetual boredom and only her deceased father’s pistols provide her amusement. Judge Brack, who is the common friend of both Hedda and Tesman, visits them and tells them about the new book of Lovborg. Lovborg is the academic rival and competitor of Tesman, Judge Brack also warns Tesman that now he has to compete
with Lovborg in order to get professorship. Mrs. Elvsted, wife of a magistrate and childhood friend of Hedda, falls in love with Lovborg who was the tutor of their children and formerly was an alcoholic. She has inspired him to return towards writing. When Hedda learns about the relationship of Lovborg and Mrs. Elvsted, she becomes cruel to Mrs. Elvsted but tries to be friendly in order to learn her secrets. Before her marriage with Tasman she had an affair with Lovborg, which was ended by Hedda. But, when she came to know about their relationship she became jealous of Mrs. Elvsted. When Lovborg meets Hedda, he again shows love for her but Hedda is not willing to reciprocate the attraction because of her fear of scandal. Due to Hedda’s negative response Lovborg turns again towards drinking and in the drunken state he loses the only copy of his manuscript. That manuscript is recovered by Tesman and he gives it to Hedda for safe keeping. After the departure of Tesman she burns the manuscript and calls it the child of Mrs. Elvsted and Lovborg. On the other hand Lovborg tries hard to find out the manuscript but he fails in it and in the disappointment he commits suicide. Later, she tells her husband about the burning of manuscript and claims that she did it only for the sake of her career. After the death of Lovborg, Tesman and Mrs. Elvsted make decision to commemorate their friend by organizing his book. But, on the other side Judge Brack has shocking news for Hedda that the death of Lovborg was not suicide rather it was an accident. He further tells her that Lovborg died of the pistol of Hedda and if she wants to keep herself away from the public scandal then she has to remain under his control. When she realizes that now she has to live under the control of Judge Brack, without the free will of her own. She shoots herself. This thumbnail sketch of “Hedda Gabbler” describes the tragedy of Hedda

The conflict in the play starts with the grouping of characters and the real tragedy begins with the confrontation of Hedda with society. Hedda belongs to upper class and has become associated
with the lower class through marriage. Her ideas against approaching motherhood, her dislike of her husband and her financial crisis all are the beginning of tragedy. The real tragedy of the play is the character of Hedda. She belongs to the upper class and gets married in the lower class; her tragedy is her inability to adjust herself in the lower class. She remains in the state of permanent boredom throughout the course of the play and the only thing in which she was interested in the play were the pistols of her father as she says, “Ah, well. I still have one thing left to amuse myself with”. (78)

Her pistols symbolize her concealed rebellion against the society and she wants to destroy all the forces of society with the help of her pistols.

Hedda loves the beauty and before sending Lovborg off for committing suicide she gives her one of his pistols and says to her, “Do it beautifully, Eilert Lovborg. Only promise me that. And her actual tragedy is that she is not capable of adjusting herself in the real world—a world that is ordinary and ugly”. (79) Hedda belongs to the upper class and the whole Tesman family was fascinated by her status as the Bertha and Miss Tesman explain her status, “Bertha: She’s the real lady, wants everything just so. Miss Tesman: But of course she does! General Gabbler’s daughter! Think of what she accustomed to when the general was alive” (80). But her tragedy is that she gets married in the lower class whose values and customs were totally alien for her and she could not adjust herself in the lower class. As the last words of Judge Brack indicate, which he utters for a world which is not capable of understanding a creature greater than itself.

*Hedda Gabbler* is the last play of Ibsen in which he presents a complex woman. The character of Hedda is not easy to understand and it requires a deep study about the psychology of human. In her character there are a lot of contradictions which make the character complex and it is a
difficult task to form a balanced view about her personality. Hedda Gabbler is tragic play, which is modern in content and form and still capable of arousing the tragic feelings of pity and fear. When Oscar Wild came across the play first time he said “I felt pity and terror, as though the play had been Greek”. (81)

Hedda remains in the state of boredom throughout the course of the play and she wants liberation from the conventions of the society. She likes suicide of Lovborg because he rebels against the forces of society. She was only attracted towards Lovborg in the play but she was not in love with him. The nature of their relationship was that she just wanted to satisfy her curiosity about the forbidden side of life. She idealized him but could not form a real relation with him, because she was coward slave of convention. She likes her freedom from the customs of society. But after sending Lovborg in the party of she snatched his freedom. When she hears about the suicide of Lovborg from Brack she says, “At least a deed worth doing”. (82) Hedda during the whole course of the play lives in the state of permanent boredom because she cannot fight with customs and rules of the society. Therefore, she finds it easy to practice hypocrisy instead of rejecting the values and customs of the society. As a result, she rejects Lovborg, the only man in the play who attracts Hedda, and marries Tesman who is going to be a professor. The society which is depicted in the play is custom-ridden; therefore she has to select the person for marriage that is suitable to the daughter of General. She is not happy with this marriage and considers Tesman and his research boring, but she marries him just because of attaining economic security. Hedda is rude towards Aunt Julia not just because she belongs to lower class and Hedda belongs to upper class but also because she represents a type of woman who is reprehensible to Hedda. Judge Brack represents hypocrisy in the society, when Hedda makes a relation with him in order to remove her boredom he exploits that position to his own advantages. Tesman also represents
male authority in the society. He considers Hedda as a part of household and treats her as if her only desire is to have luxuries. Lovborg is the only person in the play that openly rejects the conventions of the society and rebels against it. But, he has to repress his true self like Hedda in order to get financial help from the society. He needs financial help from the society because he wants to write his book in which he can reveal his unorthodox views. Hedda on the other hand, due to her fear of scandal was bound to confirm the rules of the society. The pistols of Hedda also represent her concealed rebellion against the societal forces. She wants to destroy with the help of these pistols all these societal forces which are hurdles in the way of in her freedom. When, she fails in fighting with the forces of society which are against her freedom. She commits suicide because of her fear of scandal and her inability to adjust herself in the society and her suicide becomes rebellion against the society. At the end of the play, after her suicide when Brack says “Good God! People don’t do such things!”(83)

For this play Ibsen did not completely follow the structure of modern or classical plays. He added the characteristics from both the structures. In the play Hedda Gabbler, Ibsen has used his own structure, because he was interested in social realism and wanted to show what the characters were thinking in the possible realistic way. Therefore, he violated the rules of both structures and formulated his own structure. In the modern plays the ending of the play is happy but the ending of this play is tragic. Elements of the Greek theater are not present in the modern plays but he included such elements like “vine leaves” in the hair of Lovborg is a reference towards the Greek god Dionysus. He has also violated the rules of classical structure of the play. In the classical plays the plot based on the religion but the plot of this play is not religious. Thus, Ibsen violated the rules of both and formulated his own unique structure for the play Hedda Gabbler.
Ibsen’s emphasis on the different symbols like General Gabler’s pistols, manuscript and Thea’s hair indicates that he wants to create a link between these symbols and theme of the play. Manuscript symbolizes relationship between Thea and Lovborg. It is also like a child of Thea and Lovborg because it was the product of their union. When Hedda burns this manuscript in a revengeful manner she believes that she is burning the child of Thea and Lovborg along with Thea’s hair. As she says, “I’m burning your child, Thea! You with your beautiful’ wavy hair! The child Eilert Lovborg gave you. I’m burning it! I’m burning your child!”(84).

The symbolic use of pistols by Ibsen is also very significant. These pistols link Hedda with certain values in the background which she loves. Hedda’s constant use of pistols reminds us that she is her father’s daughter more than her husband’s wife. Thea’s hair symbolizes her power and influence, which she has on Lovborg and after his death on Tesmen. The scenes in which hair plays a role not only show Hedda’s limitation but also her reaction to her apprehension of them. It shows that the symbols are mean of association between the actions of the characters.

Role of the language use in any piece of literature cannot be denied. Language is a subtle tool not only in bringing out the hidden emotions and feelings of the characters but it is also helpful in indicating their status in the society. Writers of the modern age use simple language because according to their point of view not only sublime and elevated language but the simple language also can fulfill the requirements of literature and can create the same effect. In the play Hedda Gabbler Ibsen uses the simple and naturalistic language which is appropriate to the role, status and the period of the characters. For example in the play Hedda uses polite and civilized language and Berta uses simple language which is compatible with their role, status and expectation of the time.
All these elements of *Hedda Gabbler* make it modern tragedy and Ibsen the writer of modern tragedy. The play is modern not only in content but also in form. The technique of the play is not according to the technique of classical or modern play but Ibsen has used the technique of his own in order to give it a realistic touch. The play is a modern tragedy in which Ibsen presents a woman who rejects the role of mother and woman. The play is all about the curse of class difference in the Victorian age and discusses the tragedy of Hedda’s inability, which belongs to upper class, to adjust her in the lower class.

Tragedy in the modern times has undergone many changes yet; it is still capable of arousing the tragic feelings of pity and fear, because, these feelings of pity and fear are no longer affiliated with outward form like rank or status but with the intensity of struggle. The concept of modern tragedy is totally different from the classical conception of tragedy. Modern tragedy is different from classical tragedy both in form and subject matter. Modern tragedy cannot be associated to the Aristotelian tragedy because there is clear difference between them. In the Greek tragedies there is more stress on the plot than on characters. The Greek tragedians were of the view that tragedy can be without characters but not without plot. The Greek tragedies were basically the tragedies of fate and fate played an important role in the downfall of the tragic hero. The characters had no freewill of their own and they were helpless puppets in the hands of fate. The characters in the Greek tragedies were flat therefore they were supposed less significant than plot. In the Greek tragedies the characters were flat and were not marked by evolution while in the latter tragedies of Renaissance and Reformation the emphasis was on the destiny and the personal energy of the tragic hero. Modern drama introduces a more varied and richer life of the tragic characters which is opened before the eyes of the audience.
In the Greek tragedies the tragic heroes were from the upper class, they were kings or princes and the whole nation was affected by their downfall from prosperity to adversity. But, in the modern tragedies the stress on the rank or status of the tragic hero is not strictly followed. According to the modern tragedians, common man is as fit a subject for tragedy as kings or princes. In the modern tragedies the tragic feelings of pity and fear do not depend on outward forms and manifestations such as status or rank. These feelings, according to the modern tragedians arise out of the intensity and dignity of the struggle on the part of the tragic hero. The modern dramatists are of the view that the dealing of classical tragedy with kings and princes is not suitable to our age because the tragic passion can no longer be as a sole right of these figures who belong to the upper strata of the society while the remaining only toil to sustain their grandeur.

In Greek tragedies there was emphasis on the use of elevated and refined language. The classical writers were compelled to use the refined language, because the classical writers were of the view that there should be difference between the common language and the language of the literature. The modern writers do not strictly follow their rule of using elevated and refined language; they use common day-to-day language in their writings. The modern writers are of the view that the common language is as suitable for tragedy as the elevated one. According to modern dramatists the tragic effect can also be created with the help of common language.

Ibsen in, A Doll’s house and Hedda Gabler has tried to present the characters that belong to the common run of mankind. Because the tragic feelings of pity and fear are no longer affiliated with outward forms like rank or status and there is also equally important as the death of kings or princes and is capable of arousing the tragic feelings. Therefore, the play is modern tragedy.
Nora and Hedda are innately Norwegians but thoroughly they are universal and full of weaknesses and faults like us. They are representative of modern man trying to establish their sense of dignity through a sense of self-discovery. Nora’s tragedy is the result or her confrontation with the values and customs of society. Her act of forgery for saving the life of her sick husband, which she was thinking as the most valuable action of her life, becomes the reason of her tragedy. She tries her level best to save the life of her husband and for this she does not care for anything including her life and the values of the society, even she thinks of suicide in order to save the reputation of her husband. But, at the end she gets nothing in the return rather falls a prey to the false values of the system.

The technique of *A Doll’s House* and *Hedda Gabbler* is also different from the technique of classical tragedies. In order to give depth to the play the classical writers used complex structure. But, in *A Doll’s House*, Ibsen has used a flashback technique in which all the important events have occurred before the play opens. The technique of *Hedda Gabbler* is also different from the classical plays. For the technique of *Hedda Gabbler* Ibsen does not follow the technique of modern plays or classical plays but he has used his own technique in order to present the characters and the events in a realistic manner.

It is safe to conclude, in the light of above discussion that *A Doll’s House* and *Hedda Gabbler* are modern tragedies not only in technique but also in subject matter. The parameters of the tragedy, with the passage of time have changed and it cannot be judged according to the classical rules of tragedy. These plays portray an unpleasant situation of modern man in order to offer an explanation of life. *A Doll’s House* and *Hedda Gabbler* are successful not only in dealing with universal theme of human suffering but also in highlighting the modern social issues. In these plays the dramatist portrays the characters that are raised to the tragic height not by their higher
status in the society but by the intensity of struggle put up by them in the face of all opposition. Thus, it proves that a common man can be as fit subject for tragedy as a king or prince.

**Arthur Miller:**

The history of American civilization is the story of the rise and fall of the great American Dream. ‘The Progressive Era’ and ‘The Great Depression’ were the two prominent phases of American civilization. The progress era witnessed the ideals of harmonious human community largely operative to bring the Dream of prosperity to core reality. The poverty, stagnation, pessimism, and imperfection were considered un-American words. Whereas the depression decades shook the ‘greatest society on the earth.’ The ‘chosen few’ of ‘promised land’ realized poverty stagnation, pessimism and imperfection which were inbuilt in its structure. Obviously, the transformation diversely affecting the American society has to be reflected in American literature. The playwrights like, Odets, Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller belonged to the ‘Depression’ phase of American civilization practiced their literary craftsmanship with the backdrop of socio-economical milieu of the Depression age.

The names of Tennesse Williams and Arthur Miller have linked together very often as “the twin stars of Gemini in the theatrical business” (85). Both shone with equal brilliance in the limelight of theatre.

Arthur Miller was born in the Harlem section of Manhattan on October 17, 1915; the second child of Augusta and Isidore Miller, both emigrated from Poland. Even if there were indifferences in his family Miller was provided strong moral and ethical atmosphere evident in his literary works. Right from the childhood Miller was influenced by his mother’s artistry and inquiring mind.
Miller’s father was a successful businessman proved his mettle as manufacturer of women’s clothing. But the economic downfall of the Great Depression ruined his business. Miller simultaneously hated and admired his father. He annoyed at his incapacity to fully recuperate from the Depression and admired his ability to recognize man’s inner goodness. The character of Willy Loman (*Death of a Salesman*) is based on his father.

Before 1920s, Miller family was enough wealthy to have their own chauffeur and attractive household. With the Great Depression they caught in financial tightness forced them to move to smaller house. Miller, attending Abraham Lincoln High school, Brooklyn, enjoyed his athletic inclination than academic one, graduated in 1932, with the dream of reputed footballer. He started to do with short-term jobs to save up the money which he required to attend the University of Michigan.

By the end of the year 1932, Miller started to work as a clerk in the auto parts warehouse where he got an experience of American Semitism. In the year 1934, he could save enough money to enroll his name to University of Michigan. During the vacation of the year 1936, Miller wrote his first play *No Villain*, to take part in the contest of Avery Hopwood Writing Awards.

The award proved fruitful for Miller, it sufficed his financial needs and strengthened his morale to choose the dramatist career. As a recipient of an award Miller reacted that “it helped me with the belief that ability to write plays is born into one, and that is a kind of sport of the mind”. (86)

During his Michigan days, he joined Prof. Kenneth Rowe’s playwriting class where he wrote the rewrite of the play of *No Villain* as *They Too Arise*, won the award from Bureau of New Plays. Moreover, his drama *Honours at Dawn* added one more Hopwood Award to his credit.

In the year 1938, graduating from University of Michigan, Miller moved back to New York to join the Federal Theatre Project as a scriptwriter. But the agency soon shut down with an
allegation of communist connections. In the following years, he searched other avenues of work, particularly, the popular radio shows, Columbia Workshop and Cavakade of America. He wrote scripts and radio plays for these institutions. Despite his uncertain career, in 1940, he married his college sweet heart, Mary Slattery, a Catholic girl. His belonging to the Jew origin stirred this relationship with suspect. But somehow he could manage to win the trust.

In the year 1944, Miller’s first play *The Man Who Had All the Luck* saw the light of the stage and deservedly won the Theatre Guild National Award. *The Man Who Had All the Luck* is all about an impact of materialism on family relationships. It is a tragic story of prosperous business man, David Beeves who despite his material success could not maintain harmony in family relations and eventually led to a suicide.

Throughout Miller’s literary career, disintegration of American dream of material prosperity was close to his sensibility. Almost his every work underlined the impact of material quest weakening the bonds of family relationship. *The Man Who Had All the Luck* did not get expected reception from the audience and critics as well. Discouraged Miller almost decided to give up the playwriting career. It compelled him to check his hand in writing the novel.

In the year 1945, he wrote a controversial novel *Focus* based on the theme of American Semitism and exploitation of immigrant Jews by orthodox nativists. Even if, the novel got the moderate success, the playwright within him could not be silenced. In 1947, he wrote *All My Son* which gave him professional recognition and an identity as promising playwright.

*All My Sons* is the play about realization of success, guilt and responsibility in the course of material greed. Joe Keller, the father in *All My Sons*, for the well-being of his family commits the crime of selling defective aircraft parts, causes the death of several pilots. Joe Keller for the quest of material success involved in malicious business ethics eventually loses his sons. Joe
cherishing wrong dreams fails to attain humanistic values and finally pays the severe price. Miller in the play tries to emphasize the fact that devoid of humanitarian values, the attainment of American Dream is meaningless.

With this regard, the play *All My Sons* is extensively analyzed further. In fact, Miller was largely interested in commenting on “contradictory forces all around, operating on people are creating tension between past and present, society and individual and greed and ethics”. (87)

*Death of a Salesman* (1949) is Miller’s most successful play. It relates the story of Willy Loman, a salesman in his early sixties, who dreams to become a successful businessman and to be “well liked by people”. But Willy’s dream is an illusion, and his precarious social and economic condition is compounded by his entanglement with his own son Biff. At the end of the play, Willy realizes that he can never fulfill his dream. But when he receives insurance that Biff loves him, Willy commits suicide so that his family would benefit from the insurance money.

The portrait of Willy Loman is at odds with that of his classical counterparts. His very name suggests his humble origin (low man). But in spite of his low social status, Willy succeeds to impress the reader. The reason is that even though he fails to materialize his dreams of respectability and success, he still keeps his dignity. For in the play, Miller is careful to stress his character’s struggle to retain his dignity as much as he engages the issues of material success and popular esteem.

Willy Loman’s struggle to preserve his own image of himself, i.e. his dignity, may be illustrated in his arguments with the other characters around him. They include his argument with Howard that he can still sell, his arguments with Charley over the card game and the job and his argument with his own son Biff about not being a “dime a dozen” i.e. worthless. “I am not a dime a dozen”, says he, “I am Willy Loman, and you are Biff Loman”. (88) All these examples show
that Willy is eager to take action rather to remain passive in front of what challenges the ‘image of his rightful status’.

Behind Willy’s continuous struggle to keep his personal dignity, Miller probes the essence of the American Dream and depicts the shortcoming of the capitalistic society during the years of depression. In fact, Willy drifts in and out of a dream. In spite of his old age, the ideals of success in business and respectability in society still stir his emotions and hearken his passions. Through all the play, his credo remains “someday I’ll have my own business, and I’ll never have to leave home anymore bigger than uncle Charley! Because Charley is not liked – He’s liked but he’s not well liked”. (89)

In Death of a Salesman, Willy Loman stands more like the scapegoat of the capitalist society and the bitter illusions of the American dream than the victim of any of his personal shortcomings. Like all tragic heroes, he remains faithful to his vision, and his ‘struggle upward’ remains firmly established in his character and hopes. And if he has chosen to commit suicide, it is not because he has failed to accommodate the new order and has given up his efforts at social enhancement. He himself refutes this alternative when he says: “you can’t eat the orange and throw away the peel! A man is not a piece of fruit”. (90) Instead, Wily has consciously chosen to invest his last asset, i.e. his life, for the price of the insurance money. His ultimate vision is that the hopes he placed in the American dream were misguided, and that his dream of success can be achieved only through and after death.

The Crucible (1953) is another play that sustains analysis with Miller’s idea of the tragic. It is an allegory that re-writes the Salem Witch Hunt of 1962. Its plot is articulated around questions of politics, land ownership, power struggles, and personal vengeance. It describes the tumult wrought upon early Salem when the village was overtaken by accusations of witchcraft. At the
end of the story, many persons are convicted and unjustly sentenced to death. Among these convexits, there is John Proctor who has been unrightfully involved by a young girl who managed to take revenge against his wife Elizabeth. John Proctor seems the main character of *The Crucible*. Arthur Miller describes him as an “even tempered” and a “not easily led” individual, who does not support any faction in the town. He alludes to his modest status when he writes that Proctor “is a sinner, not only against the moral fashion of the time, but against his own vision of decent conduct” (93). Decoded through Miller’s standards of heroism, this statement informs us that Proctor does not belong to Salem’s clerical institution, and that he is not an exceptionally virtuous character, nor even a famous landowner.

If Proctor seems to be the hero of *The Crucible*, it is because he makes a clear stand against the court and because he is the character that shows the strongest opposition to the established order*. In addition, among all the other characters of the play, he is the one that struggles the most fiercely to retain his dignity. Bravery is thus a trait of character that suits him well. For instance, he confesses honestly to his wife his flirtations with Abigail and asks her forgiveness. He also self-denounces his love affair to the court in order to spare his wife’s life. Proctor exhibits dignity even when he signs the false confession of witchcraft. After he knew that Judge Danforth will post it on the church door and will use him as an example to get other people confess, Proctor tears the paper into pieces and shouts: “Because I cannot have another life! Because I lie and sign myself to lies! Because I am not worth the dust on the feet of them that hang! How may I live without my name?

Proctor’s tragic fate may be read against the backdrop intricacies of the plot. But a close reading of *The Crucible* reveals that the play is an allegory whose main issue is tightly linked to the McCarthy Hearings between 1950 and 1954. At that time, many American intellectuals
suspected of sympathy for communism, just as those characters suspected of witchcraft in the
play, were arrested, interviewed, and blacklisted. As a consequence, a mass hysteria and a
mindless persecution swept the United States of America and brought the individual liberties to a
severe test.

The witch-hunt mechanization of *The Crucible* allows Miller to make a covert but intelligent
stand against the insanity of the McCarthy Hearings. The intolerance of Salem’s clergy and
Judge Danforth’s inquisitive procedures are the means through which he warns against the
paranoia and the superstition that may result out of a group’s desire to make all the people
conform their own code of behavior. Behind Proctor’s stoic resistance and his tragic end,
Miller also makes a high claim for the American “founding principles”, such as the freedom of
speech and the freedom of worship, and reminds that history repeats itself, and that if people
would not take care, America would again fall in the same havoc that was wrought upon early
Salem.

Finally, our discussion of Miller’s plays as embodied respectively in the theories of Aristotle and
Arthur Miller; we can say that before all tragedy is a quest for literary form. And whatever form
it may take, it arouses aesthetic pleasure on condition it remain faithful to the values of the
community it represents. Accordingly, Miller can be said to be successful in his departure from
Aristotelian conception of tragedy, because he has adapted his literary medium both to
America’s social reality and to its literary tradition. He has thus drawn the portrait of his main
characters in the same lineage with their literary ancestors, such as Huck Finn, Jay Gatsby, and
the popular heroes of Horatio Alger’s fictions, and has made a high claim for the thematic issue
in order to align his plays with the didactic propensity inherent in the American fiction.
Moreover, from the time of Aristotle, tragedy has achieved importance primarily as a medium of
self-discovery- the discovery of man’s place in the universe and society. That is the main concern of Aristotle in his statement about reversal, recognition, and catharsis. However, tragedy is the most revealing comment upon humanity. It seems to show us that the downfall of the human individual is perhaps inescapable. The individual inevitably has some flaw or makes some error in judgment. The tragic hero, like any man, is a human being. He deviates from normality, or from a full knowledge of his situation, and this deviation destroys him.
Works Cited:

2. Ibid. p.58
3. Ibid. p.61
4. Ibid. p.65
9. Ibid. p.68.
10. Ibid. p.57.
11. Ibid. p.46.
13. Ibid. p.74
14. Ibid. p.76
15. Ibid. p.81
17. Ibid. p.58
18. Ibid. p.64
19. Ibid. p.74
23. Ibid. p.63
24. Ibid. p.67
25. Ibid. p.74
27. Ibid.p.37
28. Ibid.p.48
30. Ibid.p.56
31. Ibid.p.59
33. Ibid.p.84
34. Ibid.p.92
38. Ibid.p.12
39. Ibid.p.17
40. Ibid.p.21.
44. Ibid.p.29.
45. Ibid.p.35.
47. Ibid.p.71
48. Ibid.p.74.
51. Ibid. p.124
52. Ibid. p.129
57. Ibid. p.37.
58. Ibid. p.42
59. Ibid. p.47.
62. Ibid. p.124
65. Ibid. p.94.
67. Ibid. p.124.
70. Ibid. p.71.
76. Ibid. p.213
77. Ibid. p.221
82. Ibid. p.94.
83. Ibid. p.105.