

An Analysis of Melancholia and Fatalism in English Drama

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Abstract

The term melancholia is related to tragedy, sadness, sorrow, etc. and fatalism is the part of everyday human life and it is a common saying that theatre and drama are the representation of the incidences etc. going on in the society. But in case of English drama every emotion is presented in its farthest limit and the aftereffects are also shown with same intensity. Even today after 100-120 years researchers and scholars like A.C. Bradley and Marlow given their own version of this fatalism and melancholia. This present study will present a critical view of English drama from the eyes of eminent scholars and researcher and also will try to present a set of his own conclusions. This study will also compare the stature of English drama with that of the other presenter in the same line. The findings and conclusion of the study will present the most discussed stature of the English drama in terms of Fatalism and Melancholia.

Keywords: Fatalism, Melancholia, English drama, comparison.

Introduction

The basic concept of melancholia and fatalism in English literature emerged from the following components:

- One from the work of Aristotle and his own analysis of tragedy, and
- Second from the work of Shakespeare and his nature of tragedy

If the work of Aristotle is evaluated on the parameters of Melancholia it can be found he was having his own version of tragedy, sadness, melancholia, etc. he states that:

“Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions.”

(Aristotle; VI.2)

As per the above given definition, Aristotle states the five basic features for the standard form of tragedy and the same can be listed as follows:

- According to Aristotle, tragedy may not presented by any artificial component i.e. scenery or light effect, rather it should be presented by the body language and acting of the characters,
- He also states that every tragic movement must present a moral sense and should be close to the truth,
- Every tragic ply ends at a tragic fortune, it is not necessary, rather effectiveness and presentation of the same should be thrust upon
- The ideal behavior of the character may not be actually tragic rather incidents and events might present him in the same manner...

- Every tragic character may not be deprived in true sense, rather the relation of the same with the morale of audience is more important.

The tragedy stated in the work of Aristotle was not a single phenomenon rather it was mix of different emotions of pity, fear, deprivation, etc. in case of tragic presentations Aristotle believed that drama should present the tragedy of highest order and effect should be long lasting. Here it is important to mention that in the plays of Aristotle, requisites of tragedy caters to the standard of highest order.

The Aristotle's conception of tragedy was based on the components of imitation and the same can be described as:

He believed that the presentation of the play should be spectacular and the same should be presented by the actions of actors, effect of scenery, speech, songs, etc. according to Aristotle 'action' is an important component of tragedy and this action is presented by the characters of the play, tragedy in a play is effective only when the character is serious, showing reversal of stated fortune, rejection of irrational events and meeting the moral sense of the audience.

Then on the other hand the conception of tragedy as stated by Shakespeare was different. It is a well known fact that the tragedy explained or shown in the plays of Shakespeare was inspired by Latin form of tragedy, as a matter of fact Shakespeare himself never formulated his version of tragedy but as an actor he presented so many forms of tragedy that even the philosophers of present times are trying to get the real meaning of the same. Shakespeare's form of tragedy involved a number of conflicts in the name of love, honor, ambition and even jealousy. His blend of tragedy was complex in nature represented real men and women in the society, his plays included the detailed evolution of each character.

In regard of Shakespeare's tragedy, Bradley concluded that:

"Tragedy as portrayed by Shakespeare is a story of exceptional calamity proceeding mainly from a series of inter connected and characteristic actions of men, leading to the death of a man in high estate (and consequently involving others in his ruin) - calamity always in some measure

caused by the person who perished in the disaster. Bradley points out three characteristics of Shakespeare's tragic hero: (1) he is always a person of exceptional genius, passion, or will, as well as a person of conspicuous social station; (2) he is marked by a tragic intensity or one-sidedness, which is fatal to practical success (3) The flaw, however, must be such as not to make us lose sympathy and admiration for the hero."

(Bradley, Sec. 3)

Bradley's Evaluation of Melancholia and Fatalism in English Drama

Andrew Cecil Bradley, popularly known as Bradley was born in 1851 in England. He was a literary critic and one of the most eminent scholar from the stream of Shakespeare i.e. by the end of 19th century and start of 20th century. He attended the most eminent universities of the country like Oxford, Liverpool and Glasgow for learning English language and literature. In 1904 he came out as an author with Shakespearean Tragedy, it was special in the sense that the structure of the book was in prose style and considered as a classic record of Shakespeare's criticism. Then he also presented his work in the form of Oxford Lectures on Poetry in 1909, Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra and A Miscellany in 1929.

Bradley refers the tragedy in the work of Shakespeare as the outcome of character recognition and disastrous situations and the respective reason of the same can be the rearrangement of moral order which is so similar to the basic human nature. Then on the other hand he also stated that in the work of Shakespeare death is shown as a glorious moment but the audience may not reconcile this death in its actual form because for a common spectator death is a bad thing. Like in Cleopatra, sufferings of the hero may be a glorious moment as per the play but the audience may not be able to reconcile this death, once he comes out of the theatre. Bradley states that it is actually a matter of body and soul and in terms of Shakespeare reconciliation of soul is easier as compared to the body.

Then on the other hand in the work of Aristotle, main focus was on action of the players i.e. every action has to be simple and understood in its real sense; this was opposite to the struggle of

characters in the work of Shakespeare. As stated by Edmund Gosse in 1873, that the drama groups from Norway got diverted towards the English Drama but gradually they preferred their own literature.

As per Bradley the melancholia shown in the work of Shakespeare is generally a story of suffering and tragedy that conclude to death. Many of the other Shakespeare scholars explained the tragedy and melancholia in accordance with joy, sorrow, smiles, tears, etc. it can be said that tragedy is presented as a bundle of different emotions, but in case of Shakespeare, in most of his plays the story ends with the death of hero and to reach this end the main character goes through a number of traumatic incidences. Bradley states that:

“Tragedy with Shakespeare is concerned always with persons of high degree, often with kings or their kin, if not with leaders in the state like Coriolanus, Brutus, Antony; at the least, as in Romeo and Juliet, with members of great houses, whose quarrels are of public moment.”

(Bradely, 124)

According to Bradley, Shakespeare do not consider the fate of a common man along with the deeds, rather he is having an absurd orientation of feelings and emotion at large i.e. a common man's sorrow and suffering was not present in his plays.

“The exalted personages suffer greatly; thus hamlet's soul is torn within. The suffering is contrasted with their previous happiness.”

(Bradely, P.3)

In English Drama, the melancholia remained a constant oppression and the hero of the drama had remained an important character i.e. his suffering and problem were related to whole country and even at times the welfare of people in a country is related to a character. The sudden fall of the character is linked to the fall of people and groups. It is a common form of drama where the sudden fall of character is highlighted in different terms and mostly in a tragic form. It can be said that there is an universality attached to the tragic life or end of a character in English drama. Talking about the hero in English drama all the main character are highly decorated and an specific nature is presented which any other character do not possess. For example the

passion of the main character is shown with highest force, generally the decision are one sided and tendency is strong in number of respects. Bradley called it as a ‘Tragic Flaw’ present in English Drama. The interest, object, passion and even habits are voluptuous; taking the example of Macbeth who is having a ‘Vaulting Ambition’, Hamlet is having a ‘Noble Inaction’, Othelli is having ‘Credulity and rashness in action’ and finally Lear is having ‘the folly of old age.’

The theme of English drama was based on the character of a player, the character of the player is not standardized in any form i.e. like a normal king, prince or any other standard character, the melancholia and suffering does not leaves the hand of the hero. In general the hero falls from greatness. In many of the cases the mistakes of the hero are glorified in a sense and the suffering follows. It is not so that the audience feels the wrath of fatalism in the English drama, rather it acts like a long journey where all the emotions comes in handy. In English drama ‘Character is Destiny’ i.e. destiny does not follows the character, character opts for a tragic destiny on its own. In the words of Bradley:

“The calamities and catastrophic follow inevitably from the deeds of man, and the main source of these deeds is character.”

(Bradely, P.3)

Although fatalism follows in many of the English dramas, like in case of Shakespeare ‘tragedies of character and destiny’ remained the tag line, this shows that fatalism is followed in there somehow. As far as the point of fatalism is concerned there is a tragic relationship between the hero and his environment. Then on the other hand situation and how a hero deals with the same is the part of extreme fatalism like in case of Hamlet, some of the rapid actions might have saved the day but the main character of the play proved by his actions that fate will not leave his side and in any of the circumstances his incapability is presented. It can also be stated that there is some flaw in the characters and because of the same all the major character proved to be suffering the present situation. Obviously there are some major instance that compel the hero of the play to act in a particular manner, but still the author presents a dark web around him and all the instances revolve around the same, i.e. the conditions are generally

abnormal and might be any given king or prince may face the same kind of issues in his life. Mental instability, absurd likings, cruel imaginations, hallucinations, etc. frame the character of a hero. Like in case of Macbeth, the lady Macbeth comes in the dreams of the king, this is something that may not be considered as normal for a king, rather in many of the cases kings behave in a formal manner and lead their lives to a meaningful end. English drama presents an abnormality in characters and the dramatic importance of the same fades in due time, rather a number of actions got distorted in the stride but still fall of a hero is substantial.

Secondly, a supernatural element is present in English drama, at times the audience correlate with the same and sometimes not. This has also been observed that the same character of a hero is gets observed in another version of the same. Use of ghosts, witches and other supernatural elements hold hands to present the illusion of a hero. At times the scenery, structures, lighting and even models solve the purpose. Like in case of Macbeth, witches were present to show the mental state of hero, and then in case of Hamlet ghosts were shown, may be these elements were used to hint the audience that what is expected to happen in future or may be these has remained the part of a character.

Another important factor that is liable to influence the event of chance or accident, in many of the English Drama tragedies this chance or incident plays an important role and it is similar to those in real life. But in case of English drama such events occur specifically with the main male character of the play. As a matter of fact these events are so fast and random that at one instance audience got relaxed that this is the limit of miss happening with the hero and in the next scene another more severe event occurs and this dilemma continues throughout the play. For example in case of Romeo and Juliet, Romeo never gets the message about the potion and also that Juliet will not get up from her sleep any sooner, also that Desdemona dropped her handkerchief; that the ship of Hamlet may not return as the pirate attacked the ship. In this regard a Victorian novelist Thomas Hardy also explained the scenario in a different manner and focused on the tragic moments in English drama. He stated that in English Drama, major characters ought to suffer major life crisis and effect of the same can

be seen in the form of death at the end of the play. He also stated that comedy and emotion are the integral part of English Drama but then again Melancholia and Fatalism remained main components of the English drama.

The melancholia and fatalism in English drama, do not confer with the source defined by Aristotle and is not in confirmation with that of Greek philosophers who do not agree with the blend of tragedy in recreational activity like theatre. It was the main feature of English drama that till the intermission there are a number of character in the play but gradually the audience comes to know that the overall story belongs to a single character and by the end of the play the same character loses his life in unavoidable circumstance. Especially in English drama environment plays an important role this environment is related to the major incidents and props that are used in the drama, effect of this environment is negative in nature and have concluding effect on the life of the character. Like in case of *Hamlet* if some rapid action was taken then the situation might have remained in control and any of the noble action by the hero have been saved. The researcher wants to state that in the last hero of the play proves to be suffering from inevitable suffering and finally death of the major character. The main characters of English drama were found to be suffering from insanity of thoughts and effect of the same on their characters i.e. in most of the cases external environment is found to exert negative effect on the character of the artist, he or she is representing.

General Trivial of English Dram

Melancholia and fatalism define the medieval period of English drama, where the fall of a hero is inevitable i.e. he falls from a great stature and grace as his fortune compels him to do so. After getting initial success, the English drama started to underline the didactic form of human follies; this continued to the Elizabethan period of drama and then two major changes occurred in the same i.e. the act of death was started to be used to present the tragic end and on the other hand adversity was used to question the sin and components like ethics, morals, etc. from the period of Elizabeth tragedy took a new form i.e. barrier of time and space were jumped i.e. location (scenery) and pause of time were taken

into account but then again the form of tragedy was not changed rather the intensity increased. The concept of melancholia and fatalism remained consistent from of English drama and Shakespeare gave historical epics like King Lear, Hamlet and Macbeth. The impact of these plays was so strong that still today a number of movies and plays are made, a number of creative people adopted the screenplay and presented them as their own version, but they kept the tragedy intact as this was the main focal point and USP of the same.

The poetic form of tragedy as presented by Aristotle is believed to be the best plots and the description of these plots remained the heart and soul of drama for a long time. The origin of tragedy, continuation of the same and end of it were the integral part of the plays. In poetic plays tragedy was never the starting point rather it starts somewhere in the middle of the drama and portrays as the major character of the hero of the play. Development of the play goes in a logical manner i.e. tragic moments imperative and emerge in portions.

Then prior to this Aristotle's poetic presentations also presented a different form of tragedy, this form of tragedy goes in a linear form i.e. without any form change in time and place. Then on the other hand the hero of the play remained a common man and keep on following the stipulated fatalism of the same. This was shift from great fortune of a hero to tragic situations that a common man deals with in his routine life. Even after Shakespeare many of the modern tragedies were staged but melancholia remained an integral part of the same, like in case of Arthur Miller's Death of a Salesman.

Comparison with Other Countries

In case of Greek tragedies the main focus was on presenting differentiated forms of god and consist four major plays that were staged a number of times i.e. Aeschylus's Oresteia trilogy, Sophocles' Oedipus Rex and Trojan Women by Euripides. These forms of tragedy were staged to present the sovereignty of god as a super natural power and dependency of human being on god as a compulsory condition. As a matter of fact people found themselves connected with the same at a larger extent but in long term repetition of such trivia was not

supported by the audience and even by the critics.

Then Roman drama again carried the differentiated forms of tragedy but this was not the only emotion i.e. humor, revenge, artistry, etc. were also presented with the same intensity. Like in case of Christopher Marlowe's Tamburlaine in 1587, Thomas Kyd's The Spanish Tragedy in 1594, which was the first staged revenge tragedy in English. Then the plays like Tamburlaine in 1587 and The Spanish Tragedy were the model plays, this also includes the Marlow's Dr. Faustus, Shakespeare's Othello, Macbeth, Hamlet and King Lear from 1600 to 1607 and also the John Webster's The Duchess of Malfi in 1614.

Then in case of Judeo-Christian tradition, tragedy is a reflection of life. This included the mixed form of mystery, morality, tragedy, etc. in wider terms and presented a vivid form of human life in different forms rather it was not overwhelmed with tragedy but then again tragedy remained the integral part of the plays. Fight against evil, greed, negative temptation all revolve around the lives of ordinary people. In these plays there was some similarity with old Greek tragedies. The Drama scholars will never forget the play Everyman that remained best play of that time. In this period major thrust was given to both the male and female characters without any discrimination. Some other noted works are George Lillo's London Merchant in 1731 which was a domestic tragedy in real sense, then Georg Buchner Danton's Death in 1835, which was a great political tragedy. Henrik Ibsen's Doll's House in 1879 was again a domestic tragedy and An enemy of the people was a political tragedy.

So as per the above discussion it can be stated that the English drama was far away different from rest of the world in many related form, for rest of the countries drama was the representation of the life of ordinary people and holds the structure in the same format, not many of the plays were presented in extremist form of a single emotion rather it was a mix of different emotions. Then on the other hand in case of English drama tragedy remained the bottom line of most of the plays and also the tragedy was also not presented as a emotion rather it was presented as a character that gradually engulfed the protagonist or the main character of the play. In many of the countries tragic-comedy was the

new form of emotion and became popular in no time, many of the performers took this into stride and created a number of plays in this direction. Rather one play of Shakespeare *The Winter's Tale* in 1611 has a tragic climax but presented a happy ending. As a matter of fact the audience did not accept the same in real terms.

Fatalism in English Drama

Fate is considered as an unexplained power of the universe and a number of people tried to explain the same in a number of terms, it is arbitrary and random. In English drama fate is explained and reason of tragedy suffered by the main actors. Then on the other hand the emotions of love, care, humor, etc. were presented as the outcome of human activities. *Paolo and Francesca* was the true representation of the same. It seems that in the play the occurrence of tragedy was not shown as probable event of routine life but as a result of absurd fate of the character. In due course of the play a blind woman used to predict the mis-happening of life and conversion of the same into prolonged tragedy. The respective prediction were believed to be true by the audience even in the case where the old woman predicts the disaster in the life of new bride, provided she never met the bride. Going through the screenplay the reader duly believes that it is the result of poor fate of the character and it is the determining force in the universe.

In the shadow of presumed fatalism many of the incidents cross the limits of moral order, as stated by D'Ooge:

"In tragedy the hero either contends against the right, or thereby comes to destruction without accomplishing his purpose, or he champions the right, and directly or indirectly secures its triumph, at the cost, it may be, of suffering, and even of his own death."

(*Antigone*, P. 6)

Moral distinctions and permanent tragic events are generally linked to the fate of the protagonist, though not in all the plays but then again it succeeded in the eyes of the audience and today all over the world consider them as all time classics. The theory of fatalism, linked to the moral distinctions and the control of the

same is given to some supernatural power; it was not all time favorite of the audience and the critics but still there were no other options to compare so very clear line of distinction is not available. *Sappho and Phaon* can be understood as the existence of authority and moral power but still the feel of tragedy was still there. Though the interpretation may not be in real sense but then again the characters of the play presented the same in tragic form of drama, it will be correct to state that this drama form was the byproduct of Shakespearean form of tragedy.

After this expression became popular among the critics, again a question was raised against the dimensions of moral system of values and effect of the same in the fate of characters shown in the drama. 'is subjective morality is the cause of tragedy or bad fate?' for a long time this question was not answered and finally some of the protagonist from the team of Shakespeare himself published journals to answer them and stated that the real consciousness of a person and recognition of the same to maintain order may result in suffering. Fatalism was shown to have a long lasting effect on the efficiency of a person i.e. bad fate or the tragic moments can move the life of people in negative direction and the same is portrayed in English drama for a number of times. Self-doubt and self-contempt leaves the life of a character in the hand of fate and finally the end of the character results in a tragic one.

In English drama, elements related to the personality of a character are destroyed one by one and the events are so interlinked that the audience has a strong belief that this is the result of bad fate of the person. Then there were questions regarding the initial lavish life of the character i.e. in most of the cases the main characters were either king or prince and they were presented as invincible form; but in due course of the play event and incidents started to occur and prove that everything was right but fate has played its part and devastated the life of the said character. Sometimes the wrong and immoral deeds of the character were presented as reasons of the same but then again in most of the cases fate is said to have played the main role. It can also be stated that even the smallest negative events were exaggerated in words and dialogue; this was done to attain the

concentration of the audience and critics or else they might start to find the reasoning and logic in the events occurring over the stage, after all the plays were mere stories but decorated with screenplay, scenery, locations and time gap people still believed that those were the plays staged on real people. Some of such example can be stated as follows:

a. *Sappho and Phaon,*

The selfish conception of love by the protagonist trailed in poor consequences; when the Phaon's children were dead then also she convince the lover that love is a duty against the loved once and family; it is not just the name of joy of a single individual.

b. *The Winter Fest*

Here the lie was stated over the love and the moral order of the character resulted in tragic ends. The lie spoken by the character of Thorkel causes Herdiaa a great pain and even anger against Bjorn, to whom she love and depends upon. Finally to save her pride and honor she was forced to enter a marriage that carried no love or belongingness. Then at a later stage when the lie was detected again Herdiaa faced a number of tragic consequences. Though it was an exaggeration, presented in the form:

"You took her heart, but for a whom, All other folk. Their homes so many ant-bills! All the world A show for you, a cheaper show than yours; - A pageant wagon, -with the people here, And overhead their angels and their God, - Another show! And you to laugh at all! "

(Martin; P.9)

The attitude of protagonist for all the common people lead to the tragic love conditions and the same has been related to fate of the characters. As stated above all the characteristics of a good person i.e. goodness, gentleness and even fidelity became vain just for the sake of mere lie and the same has destroyed the lives of a number of people. It is not so that such conditions do not appear in the lives of common people but then

again intensity of the same is not so fierce that the lives of the correlated people is destroyed.

c. *On Baile's Strand*

This play presents a character that is similar to that of Marlow (presenter) here the fate of the character was linked to the egoistic individualism of Cuohulain, then on the other hand the treatment with the character was so ruthless and careless that real hate was generated in the hearts of the audience. As a matter of fact this is never a easy task, making people laugh or smile by a comic deed is fine and even easy but then again to convert a positive character into negative just with the help of bad fate is a complex task. There is no guarantee that it will work and audience will feel the same way, but then again the presenters took the risk and the play was a success.

d. *The Arrow Maker*

This was the story of a war lord and this character always followed his own wish and ambition and in stride of the same he calls for his own suffering and death. The characteristics of selfishness, duplicity of character and desire of personal revenge betrayed the common good and at the end he died. This was a justified death and stated that a person of wrong doing is going to suffer in the end.

The conception of character held by these dramatists makes it impossible for them to attach great importance to the question of moral guilt. Before an act can be judged finally, one must know, not only the motive in the agent's consciousness, but also the complex of causes from which that motive arose. In the agent's consciousness an act is considered wrong in so far as it violates a standard that he holds. But for this standard the individual is not entirely responsible. In these plays character is not conceived as entirely 'the product of will, a special power by which men can be the makers of their own destinies.

Character is conceived as a complex. Innate powers and interests limit possibilities of character, and these are beyond the control of the individual. External causes modify the individual consciousness; many of these are not

under the person's control. Without a belief in an infallible moral monitor and an omnipotent will, moral appraisal becomes delicate and difficult. And the causes of an individual's tragedy cannot be placed largely in his moral guilt.

Conclusion

The melancholia and fatalism in English drama has always remained a point of discussion and studies. Tragedy has been considered as the greatest outcome of this fatalism and melancholia is also presented in the same form. The torch bearer of the tragedy and fatalism were Aristotle and Shakespeare, there were other presenters as well but these two have remained the center of interest of scholar and researchers like Bradley etc. there were different presenter from different countries who have staged their plays in English language along with other languages but specifically in English drama the dose of fatalism and melancholia is high enough to disturb the audience. There were a number of critics in the past who that raised their voices to question the degradation of moral values and ethics in English drama but then again the popularity of the same was so high that nobody gave a second thought on the same and accepted everything that was presented to them in one or the other way.

Under the head of English drama, all the character were conceived in real form and presented in the same manner but then again the spiritual entity was missing somewhere i.e. the complex inherited power and undesired impulses destroyed the life of the character and the same was linked to fate and external sources. As far as the moral content of the drama was concerned it was left to the better understanding of the audience without presenting any clues for the same, this was the reason that even the critics were not able to give their true responses. Because of the good or bad psychology of the character, when the emphasis shifted to fate and tragedy, even the audience and critics did not noticed.

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