

## *Unit IV - Criticism*

### **1. Notes for A.C Bradley: *The Substance of Shakespearean Tragedy***

The following summarizes the essence of a Shakespearean tragedy and tragic hero according to leading Shakespearean scholar **A.C Bradley** (1905).

Conception of Tragedy:

1. Primarily concerned with one person
2. A tale of suffering and calamity leading to the death of a man in high estate (The Tragic Hero—see below)
3. The suffering and calamity are exceptional. They befall a significant person.
4. They are also, as a rule unexpected, and contrasted with previous happiness and glory
5. Attended by tragic pity
6. When he falls suddenly from the height of early greatness to the dust, his fall produces a sense of contrast, of the powerlessness of man and the omnipotence –perhaps the caprice –of Fortune or Fate
7. The centre of the tragedy may be said with equal truth to lie in action issuing from a major character flaw (Tragic Flaw or **Hamartia**), or a character flaw issue from action (from the common ingredients such as
  - (a) abnormal conditions of mind
  - (b) the supernatural
  - (c) a chance or accident
8. The action can be defined as conflict
  - (a) between two persons,
  - (b) between two passions, tendencies, ideas, principles, forces,
  - (c) there is a conflict in the hero's soul

### **External Conflict**

External conflict plays a vital role in the tragedies of Shakespeare. External conflict causes internal conflict in the mind of the tragic hero. Every tragic hero in a Shakespearean play is confronted with external conflicts that must be addressed. Hamlet, for example, is confronted

with external conflict in the shape of his uncle, Claudius. He has to take revenge, but as a result of his uncle's craftiness and effective security, Hamlet isn't able to translate his ideas into action. This external conflict gives rise to internal conflict, which hinders Hamlet from taking any action.

### **Internal Conflict**

Internal conflict is one of the most essential elements in a Shakespearean tragedy. It refers to the confusion in the mind of the hero. Internal conflict is responsible for the hero's fall, along with fate or destiny. The tragic hero always faces a critical dilemma. Often, he cannot make a decision, which results in his ultimate failure. Again, Hamlet is a perfect example. He is usually a doer, but over the course of the play, his indecision and frequent philosophical hang ups create a barrier to action. Internal conflict is what causes Hamlet to spare the life of Claudius while he is praying.

### **Tragic Hero**

**1.** An exceptional being : one of "high degree –King, Prince, a military commander or leader. They must be "good" or admirable, or at the very least; a person whose "high degree" or greatness (in rank and character) will be recognized by the audience.

Thus, the welfare of others, perhaps a whole nation, is affected by his actions and his downfall. He is a person with whom the audience can identify, or who they understand to represent a general human nature. His nature is also exceptional; however, meaning in his nature there is an intensification of ordinary qualities.

**2.** One-sidedness: a predisposition in some particular direction; a total incapacity, in certain circumstances, of resisting the force which draws in this direction; a fatal tendency to identify the whole self with one interest, object, passion, or habit of mind

**3.** Tragic Flaw: In the circumstances where we see the hero placed, his tragic flaw (*hamartia*) -which is also his greatness-is fatal to him . In most cases the tragic error involves no conscious breach of right; in some, it is accompanied by a full conviction of right

**4.** The Fall: The circumstances in which the hero finds himself as well as his tragic flaw is the cause of his downfall and ultimately his demise.

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## 2. Notes for Edward Dowden's *Growth of Shakespeare's Mind & Art*

Edward Dowden's *A Critical Study of Shakespeare's Mind and Art* published in 1875 approaches Shakespeare from the human side, showing how Shakespeare the man is visible through his art. Moving from Shakespeare's early plays to his late period, and grouping the plays according to key stages in his career, viz 1. In the Workshop, 2. In the World, 3. Out of the Depths and 4. On the Heights, Dowden's work traces the growth of Shakespeare's intellect and character from youth to full maturity.

It is true that Shakespeare's themes and manners do fall under such division it is also true that the four divisions represent the natural stages of most men upon their pilgrim's progress.

1. ***In the Workshop*** : This period is represented by the earlier plays, when Shakespeare, just like any other young and immature poet, was learning his trade. here are plenty of immaturities, such as one associates with youthful efforts, but they are the immaturities of greatness. This marks the bard's exuberance of youthful love and imagination. Among the plays that are typical of these years are *The Comedy of Errors*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Richard II* and *Richard III*. These were probably all composed before 1595.

2. ***In the World***: The period when the touch of the dramatist becomes more sure, his command of metre and his power of characterization develop, and his knowledge of human nature is shown by his handling of the subject. The second period, from 1595 to 1601, shows progress in dramatic art. There is less exaggeration, more real power, and a deeper insight into human nature. There appears in his philosophy a vein of sadness, such as we find in the sayings of Jaques in *As You Like It*, and more appreciation of the growth of character, typified by his treatment of Orlando and Adam in the same play. Among the plays of this period are *The Merchant of Venice*, *Henry IV*, *Henry V*, and *As You Like It*.

3. ***Out of the Depths***: This is the period which produced the Romantic Tragedies. Here Shakespeare turns the searchlight of his powerful intellect into the dark corner's of man's life. He is impressed by the insignificance of man's lot; his impotence against the awful powers of adverse fortune. He shows a realization of ' the oppressor's wrong...the pangs of despised love...the law's delay...the insolence of office...etc. It is because he has judged Shakespeare to be speaking from bitterest personal experience, from the depth of a tortured

soul, that Professor Dowden has termed this period “ Out of the Depths” The great plays of this period are *Julius Caesar*\*, *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *Macbeth*, and *King Lear*.

4. ***On the Heights***: In the concluding period, Shakespeare seems to pass out of the stormy seas into still water; to have conquered the opposing hills of gloom and sadness and to have attained the heights of peace and tranquillity. To Dowden, the art and expression of Shakespeare at every stage have been moulded by life and are, more or less, the outcome of actual mental conditions.

Dowden does not seek to align Shakespeare with any particular single character from his plays, but sees aspects of Shakespeare in many of his dramatic creations, demonstrating how Shakespeare represents many different sides of human life. The reader is provided with an insight into the questions at the forefront of Shakespeare's mind, his most intense moments of inspiration and his discoveries about human life. Outlining the differences between the youthful Shakespeare and Shakespeare as a mature and experienced man, the book enables us to better understand Shakespeare's character and genius.

Dowden depicts Shakespeare’s career as ‘the gradual attainment of sanity and self control.’ This Shakespeare ‘possessed his art and was not possessed by it’...Dowden conceded that ‘to approach real life cautiously and to grapple it cunningly is what the idealist needs and this seems to me what makes Shakespeare great.

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